

ABCs for Christian Growth

Laying the Foundation

Fourth Edition

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**Part One:
The Assured Life**

Preface

The material in these lessons consists of a series of doctrinal studies designed to communicate basic doctrines that are so vital for new Christians to help them get up and running in their new life in Christ.

Many new (as well as older) believers flounder in their Christian growth because they do not know these basic truths for walking with Christ through the Spirit of God and in the light of God's Word. The goal is to lay the foundation for a walk by faith that will help believers in Christ begin to experience the glorious transforming power of the saving life of Christ through the Spirit of God. These studies focus on what believers have in Christ, their new identity or position, and how this must form the foundation for faith, growth, and spiritual transformation through Christ's life being reproduced in their lives.

The lessons in *Part One: The Assured Life*, are designed to lay the foundation for spiritual growth in Christ, with the truths covered in *Part Two* and *Part Three* building on this foundation.

The lessons in *Part Two: The Transformed Life*, cover those biblical truths that are specifically related to the transformed or Christ-exchanged life. This is accomplished by the work of God in believers' lives as they gain an understanding of these fundamental truths of Scripture and appropriate them by faith.

The lessons in *Part Three: The Multiplied Life*, are devoted to multiplying a believer's life as a good steward of the grace of God in four key areas of stewardship—talents, truth, treasures and time. It is too easy in our society to view Christianity selfishly, as simply a means of personal peace and prosperity. Though God is the God of all comfort and He does promise us peace, joy, and comfort, the ultimate goal is to turn us into ministers who, like the Savior, are here not to be ministered to, but to minister and help others know the sufficiency of Christ.

This series may be used by an individual for his own personal growth, but it is particularly designed to be used as a framework for discipling others. While this is much more than an outline, it is not intended to be a full discussion of all the subjects presented here.

The verses quoted are not intended to be used as proof texts, but as a foundation for expounding on the truth being taught in context with the passages quoted.

These studies are not presented as a last word on these subjects nor do I claim originality, for my life has been touched by the lives of many others who have taught me. It is my prayer that the LORD, by His matchless grace, will use these studies to His glory and honor, and for the building up of the saints for a deeper walk by faith in our loving and sovereign God. I entrust this study to God and to the Word of His grace which is able to build us up.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile
and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,
like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word,
that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.
1 Peter 2:1-2

Why We All Need the ABCs

We live in an anti-intellectual, anti-authority society, especially when it comes to religious matters. Ours is an existential (based on human experience, empirical) society devoted to the 'warm fuzzy' feel good, self-centered mentality that is so characteristic of the New Age movement which has bombarded the country—including much of the church. As a consequence, the terms *doctrine* or *theology* are not very popular in Christian circles. In fact, they are often denigrated or belittled. We hear statements like, "We don't need to know all that theological or doctrinal stuff. We just need to know Jesus." Or, "Well, I am not a theologian and never expect to be. I just love Jesus." But knowing and loving Jesus in truth is dependent on the teachings of the Bible. *Doctrine* is simply another name for teaching and *theology* means "the knowledge of God." Often the term *theology* is used in a general way to refer to other areas of study that relate to the knowledge of God. Biblical theology is simply the truths of God's Word that give us the knowledge of God, of man, salvation, sanctification, the church, or life and life abundantly.

Jesus Himself said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32), and when praying His great high-priestly prayer to the Father He said, "Sanctify them through Your truth, Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). Besides being an attitude of ignorance, such an attitude toward doctrine and theology ignores the Bible as God's inspired and authoritative Word. It treats God's Word as simply a lot of superfluous and outdated information—stuff we really don't need. This elevates man's wisdom above God's wisdom when the opposite is really the case.

Isaiah 55:6-11 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

There is only one way to experience God's salvation and sanctification and that is through Jesus Christ and the life God gives us in Him. We can only experience this, however, as we listen to the teachings (doctrines) of the Bible, which is our index for faith and practice.

Through his false teachers, who often appear as angels or messengers of light (actually messengers of darkness, cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Jam. 3:5; 1 Tim. 4:1), Satan not only denies Christ as the sole answer but offers many other roads and substitutes to life, but they are all false and lead to destruction.

In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

To those who had already entered by faith into relation with Christ (as well as others who were listening; v. 28), our Lord describes the comparative unpopularity of their new position. The order of **gate** and **way** suggests the gate as the entrance to the way, symbolic of a believer's initial experience with Christ, which introduces him to the

life of godliness. The first Christians were called those of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Though the mass of mankind is upon the **broad way** that leads to **destruction** (eternal ruin), the other **gate** and **way** are so small as to need **finding**. Yet the same God who provided Christ, who is both gate and way (Jn 14:6), also causes men to find the portal (Jn 6:44). **Life**. Here a contrasting parallel to **destruction** and thus a reference to the blessed state in heaven, though this eternal life begins at regeneration.¹

The Lord goes on to warn against the many false teachers who would arise to lead people through the wrong gate and down the path of destruction.

Matthew 7:15-20 “Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. 7:16 You will recognize them by their fruit. People don’t gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, do they? 7:17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 7:18 A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 7:20 So then, you will recognize them by their fruit (NET Bible).

In the context, please note the fruit by which these false prophets are known—it is their teaching, not necessarily their behavior. For how do these wolves appear? They appear in sheep’s clothing. In other words, they look like sheep and talk like sheep. They are often kind and even moral. They use religious terminology and act concerned for people and society, but in reality, they are wolves preaching a false way either in relation to salvation or sanctification or both.

Those who enter upon the narrow way must beware of **false prophets**, who claim to guide believers but really practice deception. **Sheep’s clothing** is not to be regarded as prophets’ garb, but is an evident contrast to vicious **wolves**. God’s people in all ages have needed to beware of deceptive leaders (Deut 13:1; Acts 20:29; I Jn 4:1; Rev 13:11-14). **By their fruits**. The doctrines produced by these false prophets, rather than the works they perform, since outward appearances may not cause suspicion. The test of the prophet is his conformity to Scripture (I Cor 14:37; Deut 13:1-5). **Corrupt tree**. One that is decayed, worthless, unusable. The worthlessness of such a tree calls for its swift removal from the orchard lest it infect the others.²

As mentioned, we live in an anti-intellectual, existential, emotional, self-centered, and Satan-inspired environment that seeks to bring people into religious experiences. But this environment either denies Christ and the Bible as God’s final Word, or it seeks to subtract from or add to Christ as God’s solution.

Recently, we heard a prominent daytime talk show host talk about how bad television is becoming and its negative influence on society. In a genuine desire to combat ‘bad’ television, she wants her shows to be a force for transformation, designed to help people turn their lives around. Now this sounds good, right? But it is so deceptive! Unless people know God’s Word even Christians will easily be misled. New Age terms were used such as “center yourself,” “meditate,” “get in touch with your spirit,” “empty your-

¹ Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1962, electronic media.

² Harrison, electronic media.

self,” and invite the great source (or whatever you want to call it) to “come into your heart.” One show was devoted to showing how you can have all the money and success you want simply by thinking positively.

God’s Holy Word teaches us that to combat such false teaching, we need to know and be trained in the Scripture. This is a very strong thrust of the Bible, especially, the New Testament.

Ephesians 4:11-14 It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 4:12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature. 4:14 **The purpose of this is to no longer be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who with craftiness carry out their deceitful schemes** (NET Bible, emphasis mine).

Colossians 2:1-5 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not met me face to face. 2:2 My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches of full assurance in their understanding of the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 2:4 **I say this so that no one will deceive you through arguments that sound reasonable.** 2:5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing to see the order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. (emphasis mine)

2 Pet. 2:1-3 But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These false teachers will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies, even to the point of denying the Master who bought them. As a result, they will bring swift destruction on themselves. 2:2 And many will follow their debauched lifestyles. Because of these false teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. 2:3 And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation pronounced long ago is not sitting idly by; their destruction is not asleep (NET Bible).

So how do we protect ourselves and other believers from this onslaught? And where do we begin so we can also truly experience the grace of God in Christ? In other words, where does this process begin? It should begin with the basics—with a study like the *ABCs For Christian Growth, Laying the Foundation*. The key terms used in this title (‘ABCs,’ ‘Christian Growth,’ and ‘Foundation’) were carefully chosen because they each express biblical ideas and objectives God has for the Christian. So many Christians today are biblically illiterate. The sad fact is, this is true even in churches that claim to be Bible-centered. Because of this, and as an incentive for the study of the *ABCs*, I believe it is important and helpful that we see the emphasis the Bible has on the key terms used in the title for this series of studies.

If you are a new Christian, you may not be aware that very little time today, in contrast to the past, is devoted to indepth Bible study and expository preaching. In times past, solid Bible teaching occurred both Sunday morning and evening as well as on Wednesday night. This was the minimum for most evangelical Bible churches, but that is not the case today. Some churches are seeking to maintain a strong Bible teaching emphasis through small groups, and this has replaced Sunday and Wednesday evenings.

But too often these small groups are more fellowship and sharing oriented, than Bible centered. The fellowship, the sharing and caring play an important role, but never to the exclusion of the Word.

Thus, since the terms used in the title of this series are not only biblical, but have a strong focus in the Bible, I believe a brief look at these terms is needed to grasp their *significance*, their *need* in the church of today, and *the objectives* of this series of studies.

The Concept of Growth

One of the clear teachings and objectives of the New Testament for believers is that of spiritual growth. When we are saved, no matter how old we are physically, we are born into the family of God as babes (little children) in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1f; 1 John 2:13 [children, *paidia*, babes]). Obviously, one of the fundamental needs of a child is proper nourishment and training to promote healthy growth. Thus, there is the strong emphasis in Scripture on spiritual growth for believers in all stages of maturity (see also 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; Phil. 3:12f). The plain fact is, a failure to grow up spiritually is considered abnormal and deserving of rebuke or censure since growth is also a matter of choice.

Who is responsible for our spiritual growth? The Bible teaches us that a failure to grow is a matter of neglect for which two parties are responsible—the spiritual parents (church leaders and those who lead people to the Lord) and the individual believer himself. The following passages demonstrate this:

(1) Spiritual growth is a prime responsibility for church leaders and other mature believers. The New Testament emphasis in the epistles on teaching and sound doctrine and caring for believers (see verses below) illustrates this along with the very idea of the role and function of elders who are to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 John 2:12f; 1 Tim. 4:6, 11, 13; 1 Pet. 5:1f).

(2) Spiritual growth is also a responsibility for the individual himself. The following verses teach us that God holds us all responsible for our own spiritual growth to some degree. This includes the responsibility to follow the teaching and example of sound and godly leadership (cf. Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Thess. 5:12f; 1 Cor. 3:1f; Heb. 5:11-6:1f).

The Concept of the ABCs

Since we all begin as babes in Christ, we must begin with the basics, the ABCs of the Word. This idea is solidly brought out in Hebrews 5:11-6:1. The author of Hebrew had advanced truth that he wanted to communicate to his readers about the Lord Jesus, but he knew they could not grasp it because of their spiritual sluggishness and indifference. This sluggishness and indifference had also contributed to the continuation of their spiritual immaturity, the other reason for their inability to go on in growth.

They had evidently been taught the basics (note the word “again” in verse 12), but they had failed, for whatever reason, to properly learn and go beyond what the author calls the “elementary principles” (NASB), “beginning elements” (NET Bible), “elementary truths” (NIV) of the oracles of God or God’s Word. “Elementary principles, truths,” is a translation of the Greek *stoicheion*, “one of a row, hence a letter (of the alphabet),” and so by extension, “the basics of knowledge, the ABCs of any subject.” Just as in first grade, the ABCs are the building blocks, the foundation on which other knowledge is grasped and related to, so all Christians need to know the basics of the Word if they are going to be able to move on to spiritual maturity and productive Christian lives as those who can also teach others (vs. 12a).

In Hebrews 6:1, the author continues his exhortation. Once the basic principles concerning Christ are grasped, the author wanted these believers to grow toward greater and greater *spiritual maturity* through steady spiritual growth. They were to continue to discern between living truths of what we have in Christ and lifeless forms, the shadows of the Old Testament such as were found in Judaism in the washings, baptisms, and rituals. Note that in verse 3 the writer identifies himself with his readers and expresses his own need to continue to grow. None of us ever arrive, so to speak. We all need to continue to grow.

In the context of this passage, several ABCs are mentioned (6:1-2). Among these are “repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” One of the fundamental problems in the church today, as always, is legalism or the problem of dead works—man working in his own steam to be accepted or to gain favor with God, and even to experience his own sense of significance.

People need and desire three basic things, which we can also identify with the letters, ABC: (1) **Acceptance** (we have been accepted by God by grace through faith in Christ), (2) **Belongingness** (as regenerated members of the family of God, we belong to God and to one another), and (3) **Competence** (through God’s enablement, we can do whatever God calls us to do—He gives us the Holy Spirit, our enabler, and spiritual abilities). But man’s bent and Satan’s delusion is to get people to seek these either apart from God’s answer in Christ, or just partially through Christ and partially by adding something (works).

The point is, if our understanding of God’s grace and faith in the work of God for us in Christ (grace) is lacking, we will miss the abundant life that is ours to experience in Christ. Christians must have their lives founded firmly on the truth of *faith alone in Christ alone*, and this is true not only for salvation from sin’s penalty, but also for sanctification, spiritual change and the experience of the Christ-exchanged life—a work of the Spirit in which we cooperate by faith.

The Concept of the Foundation

No superstructure can be built, spiritually speaking, so that it can withstand the spiritual torrents it will face without a proper foundation. The ABCs form the solid foundation we need. But this is just another of those word pictures used in the New Testament to teach us how vital it is that we lay a sound doctrinal foundation. A couple of passages illustrate this:

Matthew 7:24-27 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. 25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. 27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.

In conclusion to his teaching in this passage, Jesus presented the two options open to His listeners. They were now responsible for what they had heard and must make a choice. Note the element of personal responsibility here—they could build on one of two foundations.

One **foundation** was likened to a big **rock** and the other to **sand**. The point is that a foundation determines a structure’s ability to withstand the storms we all face in life as illustrated by the words **rain**, **floods**, and **winds**. The **rock** foundation not only represented the Lord Himself but also the truths He

had been teaching, especially the truth concerning a righteousness through faith which also produces an inner transformation through spiritual growth.

The **sand**, by contrast, spoke of pharisaic righteousness, an external and hypocritical righteousness of human works. The people were well acquainted with the so called righteousness of the Pharisees and many were basing their hopes on this kind of righteousness.

In the storms of life (the winds and the torrents of rain) the first foundation, the rock would give stability; the sand would result in destruction or ruin.

Thus, those who hear and heed words of Jesus are **wise**; those who do not are **foolish**. Only two courses of action are possible—two kinds of roads and gates (Matt. 7:13-14), two kinds of trees and fruit (vv. 15-20), two kinds of foundations and builders (vv. 24-27).

Once the foundation has been laid, we need to continue to grow and go on to greater maturity. When we fail to do this, we will regress and become hardened in our hearts (cf. 3:7f). Other passages that use the foundation metaphor are 1 Corinthians 3:10-12; Ephesians 2:20. Hebrews 6:1.

The Concept of Sound Doctrine

In keeping with the importance of having a solid foundation are the terms ‘sound’ or ‘healthy’ doctrine. To show our need not only of doctrine, but healthy, accurate teaching, we have another strong emphasis which exhorts us to not only train and bring believers to maturity, but to also guard the great truths of Scripture. The following passages and their sheer number demonstrate just how important sound doctrine is to the purposes and plan of God and to the people of God that they might not be led astray.

2 Tim. 1:13-14 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.

1 Timothy 6:3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

Titus 1:9 ... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

1 Timothy 4:6-7 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. 7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

1 Timothy 1:10-11 ... and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is **contrary to sound teaching**, 11 **according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God**, with which I have been entrusted.

Paul concluded this inventory of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:10-11 with an all-inclusive reference to any behavior which is **contrary to sound doctrine** (lit., to “healthy teaching”; cf. 2 Tim. 1:13), including no doubt the very behavior of the false teachers themselves. “Doctrine” here is *didaskalia*, “teaching” or “the content taught,” used seven times in this epistle (1 Timothy 1:10; 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1).

It is through the Bible and its revelation of Jesus Christ that people can know God and experience God’s provision of righteousness for salvation, deliverance from sin’s penalty (Rom. 1-4) and sanctification, deliverance from the power and reign of sin (Rom. 5-8). Thus, in Romans 6:17 Paul wrote, “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form (*tupos*, “form, figure, pattern,”)³ of teaching (or doctrine) to which you were committed.” Paul had just declared, “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.” Though the Law pointed forward to the coming Messiah as God’s solution for sin, one of the Law’s primary purposes was to show man to be a sinner and in great need of the coming Savior (see 1 Tim. 1:8-10; Rom. 7:7). The point is, the Law could command, but not enable. It did not give justification nor sanctification righteousness. These can only come by knowing and responding in faith to the glorious message of the gospel of Christ.

Knowing God and experiencing Him in all aspects of life is both **factual**, involving an intellectual comprehension of the truth, and **personal**, involving a personal response to that truth by faith. And we cannot bypass this order. Faith is ultimately worthless unless it is based on truth, on that which is able, willing, and available to deliver.

... Healthy relationships must be based upon both a *factual* and a *personal* knowledge of the one loved. Thus it is with knowing God. A healthy relationship with God must begin with an intellectual knowledge of who He is, which then matures into a deeper personal experience of knowing God in life. God manifests Himself to us on the mountain peaks, in the valleys, in the swamps—in all aspects of our lives.⁴

Knowing God and experiencing Him in the salvation He offers us in Christ is not void of experience and the work of God in the heart or on the emotions, but it never excludes knowing and understanding the truth of Scripture.

³ “Form of teaching” refers to Christian teaching that is in keeping with the revelation of God in Christ; see also 1 Timothy 1:11.

⁴ Gary E. Vincelette, *Basic Theology Applied*, editors, Wesley & Elaine Willis, John & Janet Master, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1995, p. 15.

Introduction to the Truth of Assurance

A Definition

Without a doubt, everyone needs, wants, and seeks assurance in all realms of life—in matters of human relationships, finances, job security, retirement, government, and especially in our beliefs about God, man, salvation, and spirituality as it is described for us in the New Testament. In his thought-provoking book, *No Condemnation, a New Theology of Assurance*, Michael Eaton writes about the absence of assurance in Asahel Nettleton. Nettleton was a powerful evangelical preacher in 19th century America who said of himself, “The most that I have ventured to say respecting myself is, that I think it possible I may get to heaven.”¹ A few pages later, in describing his quest for an encouraging theology, Eaton wrote:

On one occasion the mistake of a British Museum librarian meant that instead of the words of Tobias Crisp I found myself reading about the death-bed experiences of 17th century Puritans. I was shattered to discover that their assurance of salvation at such a time was not what I would have expected. Then I came across the remark of Asahel Nettleton, quoted above, which expressed the very essence of everything I felt was wrong with the approach to grace that I had grown up with.... Surely, I thought to myself, there is more joy and assurance in the New Testament than that...²

But what is assurance? Basically, assurance is freedom from doubt; a sense of certainty that something is true, will occur, or that all is okay. Synonyms for assurance consist of words like *certainty*, *certitude*, *conviction*. All these nouns ultimately mean freedom from doubt.

Assurance is not a foreign concept of the New Testament. In Acts 2:36, Peter said, “Therefore let all Israel be **assured** of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (NIV) The word *assured* is the Greek *asphalōs*, “sure, certain, secure.” It is used of the concept of guarding something or someone securely (cf. Acts 16:23; Mark 14:44). It comes from a verb (*asphalīzō*) which means “to guard.” From that it developed the meaning of “that which is sure, certain,” or “assurance.”

The noun form of this word, *asphaleia*, means, depending on the context, “firmness, securely locked” (Acts 5:23), “safety, security” (1 Thess. 5:3), or “certainty, truth,” (Luke 1:4).

Writing to Theophilus in the first of his two-volume treatise on the person and work of Jesus Christ, Luke wrote,

Luke 1:1-4. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated (Lit. “to follow after, investigate, like a physician or even a lawyer in search of evidence”) everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you might

¹ Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation, A New Theology of Assurance*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1995, p. 3.

² Eaton, p. 8.

know the exact truth (i.e., the certainty, have assurance, [ἀσφάλεια]) about the things you have been taught.

From the meaning and use of the Greek word *asphaleia*, we can clearly see some of the issues involved with the concept of assurance. We want and need a sense of certainty, based on the evidence of Scripture, regarding the truth because such a sense of certainty or assurance also gives a sense of security.

Furthermore, this is something which God wants us to have and which church leaders, using the truth of God in Christ as revealed in the Bible, ought to be diligent to provide through the study of the Word. With this in mind, note what Paul wrote to the church at Colosse when they were facing false teaching (Col. 2:1-5). These false teachings were on the verge of undermining the assurance of the Colossian believers with regard to what they had believed about the person and work of the Savior. Note the development of Paul's argument here:

1. Verse 1 expresses Paul's concern and effort expended on their behalf: "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,"
2. Verses 2-3 express his first and fundamental purpose—to give the full assurance which comes from understanding what is theirs through Christ: "that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from **the full assurance of understanding**, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
3. Verses 4-5 express his second purpose, which is also the result of the first. He says "I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ."

In Galatians 1:20, to assure his readers of the truth of what he was writing, Paul wrote, "I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie" (NIV). Literally, "behold" or "take note, before God ...". Here the apostle was setting forth historical evidence and calling God as his witness as well. The fact is people need and should have assurance, but it should, of course, be based on credible evidence that what they are asked to believe or have believed is the truth.

Two Types of Evidence

1. **Scientific**, that which can be repeated in a laboratory or under scientific controls.
2. **The legal-historical**, that which is based on showing something is beyond a reasonable doubt based on *oral* and *written* testimony and *exhibits* or other forms of evidence like a gun, a bullet, archaeological findings, manuscripts, etc.

Sometimes people try to argue against the Bible or Christ with the statement, "You can't prove that by scientific method," with the implication that believing in the Bible and in Christ is therefore unreliable and unbelievable. Such a claim is false.

Historical events and issues cannot be proven by the scientific method because they cannot be repeated. That's true. But it is not true that this makes the claims of the Bible and its testimony to Jesus Christ false. Why? Because the scientific approach is totally inadequate to prove things about a person or

an event in history. It cannot prove whether or not George Washington lived or if John Kennedy was assassinated or if Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose from the dead. However, there are other forms of evidence that can be brought forth that are used every day in courts all over this country to give evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that certain things either happened or did not happen, or are true even though they cannot be repeated.

Thus, the Savior said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." He said, "You shall know," and not just *hope* or *feel* it's true. Through the resurrection and many other infallible proofs, God has given us credible evidence for the genuineness of the claims of the Bible as being God's Word and for the certainty of the claims of Christ.

Acts 17:30-31 Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, he now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, ***having provided proof to all by raising him from the dead*** (emphasis mine).

With this in mind, compare Romans 4:13-21 and note the element of firm assurance that Abraham had. God wants us to have assurance and to know the peace that comes from assurance, but we must be sure that our assurance is based on the truth of Scripture or our assurance will be empty.

New Christians, and even many older believers for that matter, need assurance concerning the very message of the gospel they have believed and of the new life they have in Christ as believers. With the many winds of strange doctrine blowing across the landscape, people are often assailed by all kinds of doubts and fears about their decision to trust in Christ.

Is what I believed **really** the gospel? Just what does my decision to believe in Jesus Christ mean in my life? What are the ramifications and consequences? Can salvation be lost? If I commit this sin or that sin, does it mean I was never saved? Some evangelists or preachers give the impression that once you accept Christ all your problems will be over, when in reality a whole new set of problems begin with hostile forces on the attack. The Christian has moved from Satan's kingdom into the kingdom of Christ, which Satan hates. This also tends to unsettle a person's assurance (see 1 Thess. 3:1-8).

Our Objectives

1. To give personal assurance concerning what the gospel message is.
2. To give personal assurance concerning the results of personally believing in Jesus Christ.
3. To cover biblical promises essential to gaining assurance of what believers have in Christ.
4. To provide ability to deal with any doubts regarding God's provision for all areas of life.

Areas of Assurance

Assurance deals with the confident realization of what the Christian has in Christ and who he or she is in Christ. It covers a number of aspects of the salvation God gives to those who trust in Jesus Christ. For our purposes, these lessons on assurance will consider the following areas:

1. Assurance Regarding the Gospel—Is what I believe the true gospel?
2. Assurance of Salvation—On what do I base my assurance?
3. Assurance of Eternal Security—Is there some sin that can cause me to lose my salvation?
4. Assurance of God's Daily Provision—Will God really care for me?
5. Assurance of God's Provision for Sin—How do I deal with my sin problem?
6. Assurance of God's Guidance—Can I count on God's guidance in the many decisions I face daily?
7. Assurance of Eternal Rewards—Since my salvation is secure, are there no ramifications if I fail to walk with the Lord?

Lesson 1: Assurance Regarding the Gospel

Introduction

Since all believers are responsible to share their faith with others, every Christian needs a clear understanding of the plan of salvation. This is especially true for new babes in Christ.

The following short presentation of the gospel is designed to reinforce the key issues and provide a tool for presenting the gospel to others as new Christians begin their walk down the road of life as Christians.

God's Plan of Salvation

1 John 5:11-12 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

While 1 John 5:11-12 is written to Christians to give them assurance of their salvation based on the testimony of God's Word, this passage also highlights the key issue in salvation.

God's Declaration to Man: "And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." (verse 11).

The Important Issue: "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." (verse 12).

This passage teaches:

- God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son, Jesus Christ.
- The way to possess eternal life is to possess God's Son.

Two important questions must be asked and answered:

- Why is possession of God's Son necessary to have eternal life?
- How can a person possess or have the Son of God?

The Problem of Man's Separation From God

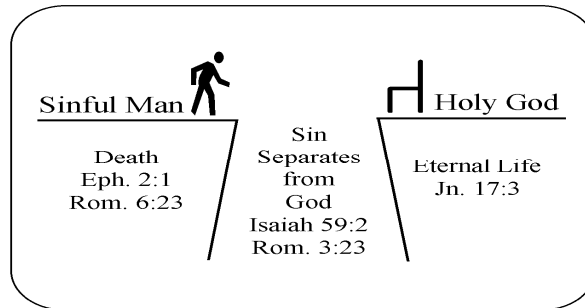
According to Romans 5:8, God demonstrated His love for us through the death of His Son. Why did Christ have to die for us? Because Scripture declares all men to be sinful. We are all sinners. To "sin" means to miss the mark. The Bible declares we have all sinned and fall short of the glory (the perfect holiness) of God. In other words, our sin separates us from God who is perfect holiness (righteousness and justice) and God must therefore judge sinful man.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...

Habakkuk 1:13a Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, And Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor.

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.



The Problem of the Futility of Man's Works

Scripture also teaches that no amount of human goodness, human works, human morality, or religious activity can gain acceptance with God or get anyone into heaven. The moral man, the religious man, and the immoral and non-religious are all in the same boat. They all fall short of the glory of God (God's perfect righteousness). After discussing the immoral man, the moral man, and the religious man in Romans 1:18-3:8, the apostle Paul declares that both Jews and Greeks are under sin, that "there is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:9-10), and that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

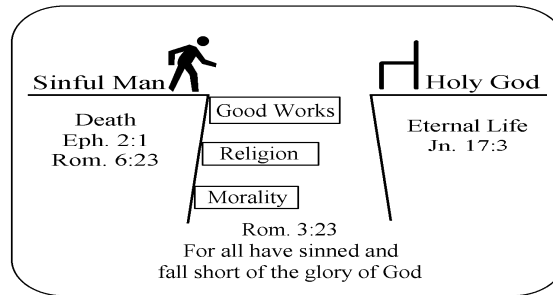
Added to this are the declarations of the following verses of Scripture:

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Titus 3:5-7 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Romans 4:1-5 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham

believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,



No amount of human goodness is as good as God. God is infinite or perfect righteousness. Because of this, Habakkuk 1:13 tells us He cannot have fellowship with anyone who does not have perfect righteousness. In order to be accepted by God, we must be as good as God is. Before God, we all stand naked, helpless, and hopeless in ourselves. No amount of good living will get us to heaven or give us eternal life. What then is the solution?

God's Solution for Man's Problem

God is not only perfect holiness (whose holy character we can never attain to on our own or by our works of righteousness) but He is also perfect love and full of grace and mercy. Because of His love and grace, He has not left us without hope and a solution.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

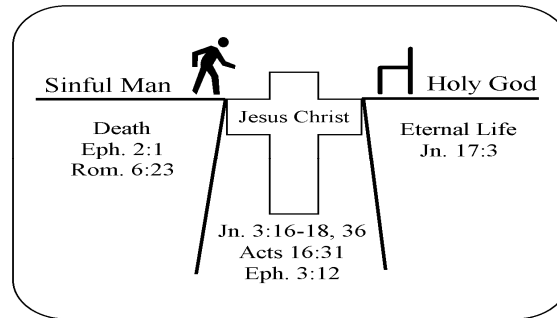
This is the Good News of the Bible—the message of the gospel. It's the message of the gift of God's own Son who became man (the God-man), lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sin, and was raised from the grave proving both the fact He is God's Son and the value of His death for us as our substitute.

Romans 1:4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Romans 4:25 He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;



The All-Important Question

How then do we receive God's Son that we may cross the gulf and have the eternal life God has promised us? What becomes the issue for us today?

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, {even} to those who believe in His name.

John 3:16-18 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross, the Bible states "He that has the Son has life." We can receive the Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior by personal faith, by trusting in the person of Christ and His death for our sins.

This means we must each come to God the same way—as a sinner who recognizes his sinfulness, repudiates any form of human works for salvation, and relies totally on Christ alone by faith alone for our salvation.

If you would like to receive and trust Christ as your personal Savior, you may want to express your faith in Christ by a simple prayer such as this:

Dear God, I know I'm a sinner and that nothing I do can gain heaven or eternal life. I believe Jesus Christ died for me and rose from the grave. Right now I receive Him as my personal Savior by trusting in Him alone as my only way to heaven. Thank you for giving me eternal life through faith in your Son. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Lesson 2: Assurance of Salvation

Assurance Versus Security

Security

When we trust in Jesus Christ, our eternal security in Christ becomes a spiritual **reality** whether we understand it or believe it. One's *belief* in security in Christ does not make it true or false. If we have trusted in the person and work of Christ for personal salvation, security is a **fact**.

Assurance

Assurance is the confident **realization** of that security. It is the realization of what we have in Christ such as eternal life, forgiveness of sin, and being the object of God's personal care as his children. Assurance has to do with our **comprehension** of the facts and provisions of salvation through faith in Christ. This is a crucial doctrine because, properly understood, it will touch the believer's life in several areas. Not only does it give assurance of salvation, but with that also comes a greater assurance of God's provision in all areas of life.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,
how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

When people do not have assurance, we should always begin by sharing the gospel to be sure they have truly trusted in Christ. Once this is confirmed, then move on to the matters of assurance.

Reasons Why People Lack Assurance

(1) People often lack assurance because they cannot remember or point to a specific time when they received Christ. Some doubt or wonder if they were ever really saved. There is a specific point in time when salvation occurs—the point when regeneration takes place. The issue for people is to know if they **now** really trust in the person and work of Christ.

(2) People often lack assurance because they question the procedure they went through when they accepted Christ. Many evangelists and preachers emphasize the need for some form of public confession of faith like going forward at the end of a service or raising your hand. If people receive Christ privately, they may wonder if they should have made a public confession or prayed a different prayer.

(3) People often lack assurance because of struggles they have with certain sins. They wonder if a true believer would have these kinds of problems. The real problem is ignorance of man's sinful nature, the spiritual warfare we are in, God's means of deliverance, and the need to grow and mature in Christ.

(4) The primary reason behind a lack of assurance is doctrinal misunderstanding and the consequent lack of faith in the finished work of Christ. This means a failure to understand the Word and its teaching regarding mankind, his sin and inability to work for or maintain his salvation, God's perfect holiness, and the finished nature and sufficiency of the work of Christ.

(5) Finally, people often lack assurance because they have erroneously been taught that they should look to themselves and their works as the primary proof of their salvation. This is a major issue today. Robert Lightner writes:

Those who think the sinner must make Christ Lord of his life, or at least promise to do so, before he can be saved make assurance rest on the evidence of a surrendered walk. MacArthur cites this as the only way a believer can be assured of his or her salvation. 'Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit's transforming work in one's life, not from clinging to the memory of some experience.'¹

So what is the proper basis for assurance? Should we look to some experience or our works?

Foundations for Assurance

The Word of God

The Word of God is God's witness to the believer (1 John 5:11-13). The Greek text includes the article with the word "life." Salvation in Christ is not just the gift of life, but of "the life," the one which comes only through faith in God's unique Son. The clear declaration of Scripture is that the one who believes in Christ's person and work on the cross as God's provision for his sins has:

(1) Eternal life.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

1 John 5:11-13 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

(2) Forgiveness of all sin.

Acts 10:43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 2:13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

(3) Freedom from condemnation.

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

¹ Robert Lightner, *Sin, The Savior, and Salvation*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1991, p. 246 quoting John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 23.

(4) Justification (declared righteous by God).

Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 4:1-6 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

Romans 4:25 He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

(5) Salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

(6) A child of God by faith.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

Romans 8:14-17 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

John Calvin emphatically warned against looking to ourselves, that is, to our works or the fruit of the Spirit, for certainty of our salvation. He taught that we should look to Christ as the objective basis for assurance. To look to ourselves produces doubt and detracts from the saving work of Christ. He rejected the exhortation to self-examination as a dangerous dogma.²

Contrary to MacArthur's comment quoted above, this is not a matter of clinging to some experience, but the sure witness of the Word of God. Earl Radmacher writes:

Many wise pastors have insisted that the basis for knowing that I am a Christian is not what I do but what God's Word says about what Christ has done and continues to do for those who have believed (John 1:12; 1 John 5:13). I know I belong to Christ because I have believed in Jesus Christ as my only Savior and Redeemer from eternal destruction. It's not the evidences of my life that are my basis for knowing that. It's the Word of God. God said it. That settles it. I am fearful of those today, who be-

² Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance*, Handsel, Edinburg, 1985, p. 28.

cause of a genuine, valid concern about the lack of growth and the lack of evident Christian lifestyle, are willing to try to prop up the Gospel by adding to it.³

The Work of Christ

To properly understand the work of Christ (Christ's substitutionary death, dying in our place and bearing our sins on the cross) is another vital need tremendously important to assurance. This too, of course, is based on the statements of Scripture, but the emphasis is on understanding the sufficiency, finished nature, and accomplishments of the death of Christ. There are two prominent aspects here which Scripture emphatically teaches:

(1) Salvation is not by our works or merit (cf. Rom. 4:1-7 above).

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Titus 3:5-7 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

(2) Salvation is solely by Christ's person and work as a gift of God.

1 John 5:5-12 And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. 7 And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. 8 For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. 11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

Acts 4:12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Philippians 3:8-9 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that

³ Earl Radmacher, *The Grace Evangelical Society News*, Vol. 10, No. 3, May-June 1995, p. 1.

which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

The Witness of the Holy Spirit

(1) The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth.

John 14:17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

John 15:26 When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,

John 16:8-13 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. 12 I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

1 John 4:6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

(2) The Holy Spirit is called an anointing. Both of these descriptions portray the Holy Spirit's ministry of teaching believers God's Word.

1 John 2:20, 27 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know ...
27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

(3) The Holy Spirit opens the Word to our hearts.

Acts 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

(4) The Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and gives us understanding.

1 Corinthians 2:12-16 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Ephesians 3:15-19 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

(5) The Holy Spirit assures our hearts through the Word that we are children of God. The witness concerning life in the Son through believing in the Son as promised in 1 John 5:11 is really the message to which the Holy Spirit bears witness in the Word.

Romans 8:15-16 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

1 John 5:7-11 And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. 8 For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. 11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

Principles for Assurance

Principle 1: We need to draw our assurance from faith in the facts of Scripture and *not from our feelings*. Our faith and thus our assurance must stand on the sure promises of the Bible rather than on our feelings. The biblical order is: FACTS —> FAITH —> FEELINGS. Feelings are the responders of the soul or heart. They are to follow and respond to our understanding of Scripture, but they are never a safe guide to what we should believe or of the state of our salvation. This leads to the next point.

Principle 2: We need to draw our assurance from faith in the facts of Scripture and *not from our works*. Works or the biblical changes that occur in our lives as a result of the grace of God can confirm the reality of our life with God. We must be ever so careful, however, in making such subjective ground the basis of our assurance, for when a believer is out of fellowship he or she can have the appearance of an unbeliever especially if the condition lasts for any length of time.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?

If we depend on works or obedient living to prove our salvation then we are faced with the following dilemma: If we are living obediently now (the supposed proof of salvation), the possibility exists that could change in the future. If later on we cease to live obediently, then that would prove (based on the

above premise) that we are not now true Christians in spite of our obedient lifestyle. So present obedience can never really prove our Christianity and thus, we could never have assurance.

Post-generation performance is not a trustworthy basis for assurance of salvation. Scripture clearly warns against basing assurance or true relationship with God on performance. Note Matthew 7:13-23, for an example. The false prophets typically come in sheep's clothing. Catch that—they look good! They do all the right things. They appear to be 'model Christians,' pillars of the church. (Fruit here refers not to the behavior of these people but to their teaching—see Matt. 12:31-37.) But they've never trusted Christ; they have no vital relationship with Him (v 23). Instead, at the bottom line, they are trusting in themselves (v 22). Their performance looks good. In fact it leads them to conclude that they are right with God. And yet they are deceived. They learn too late that assurance of salvation cannot properly be based on performance.⁴

Proper Christian living should never be the fundamental grounds for assurance of salvation. Rather, assurance of salvation which should rest in the merit and sufficiency of the Savior and the believer's new life in Christ, must be the fundamental basis for proper Christian living.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

As John shows in 1 John 1:6-7, Christlike behavior is an evidence of genuine fellowship and that a person is truly walking with the Lord in the light.

1 John 1:6-7 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

However, proper Christian living is not necessarily an evidence of genuine relationship because when believers are out of fellowship for any length of time they will manifest the works of the flesh and may look very much like an unbeliever. As mentioned earlier, the apostle Paul speaks of this when he described carnal Christians as "mere men" in 1 Corinthians 3:3-4.

3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?

To walk like a mere man is to walk like those who do not know the Savior. The apostle was not questioning or denying the fact of their salvation. He affirmed his conviction of their salvation, but they were walking according to the flesh rather than according to the Spirit of God. This made them behave so they looked like natural men, like men who were without the saving power of Christ, when in reality they were in Christ with the Spirit indwelling them.

⁴ Rich Christianson, *The Grace Evangelical Society News*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January-February 1994, p. 4.

1 Corinthians 1:2-9 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Sometimes a passage like 2 Corinthians 13:5 is used to support the necessity of examining our works to prove our salvation. This is unfortunate because this is mere proof-texting and misses the context and the actual meaning and purpose of this passage in the argument of Paul in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 13:5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

MacArthur is an illustration of this. He writes: “Doubts about one’s salvation are not wrong so long as they are not nursed and allowed to become an obsession. Scripture encourages self-examination. Doubts must be confronted and dealt with honestly and biblically.” Then, after quoting 2 Corinthians 13:5 he concludes, “That admonition is largely ignored—and often explained away—in the contemporary church.”⁵

But is this the correct interpretation of this passage? Is Paul calling these believers to examine themselves for the purpose of assurance of salvation? The context says no! The following are some reasons for this position:

(1) Again, as in 1 Corinthians, Paul affirmed his conviction they were saved. He does not question their salvation for a moment as is clear from the passages mentioned above.

(2) Even if Paul were telling them to examine themselves for assurance, he does not tell them to examine their works for assurance. In light of the plain teaching of Scripture, if anything needed to be examined, it would be the **object** of their faith. Had they truly trusted in Christ rather than in some system of works?

(3) He does tell them to examine themselves, but he had another purpose in mind according to the context of verses 3-7. Some were questioning the validity of the ministry of the apostle because of the influence of certain false teachers. Compare 2 Corinthians 11:1-12:21 where the apostle defends his min-

⁵ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 190.

istry against their accusations. They were demanding proof in verse 3 that Christ was speaking through Paul. In verse 5 Paul shows them that the proof they were looking for was in themselves because he had been their father in the faith.

1 Corinthians 4:15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

The sure way to prove Paul's ministry was to examine their own faith since their belief in the genuineness of their faith carried with it the proof of the genuineness of Paul's ministry as a spokesman for Christ. Did they know the Savior? Yes. How did they come to know the Savior? Through Paul's ministry. He did not believe they were counterfeit and knew they were unlikely to come to a different conclusion about their faith which only proved he too passed the test. This is the point of 2 Corinthians 13:6, "But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test."

Remember that the basis God gives us for assurance of salvation is His record or witness to us as clearly declared in 1 John 5:11-13:

11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

The Bema (Judgment Seat of Christ)

Does the fact that we are confident of our salvation because of the finished work of Christ mean we can be indifferent about our lifestyle? Does assurance of salvation promote promiscuous Christian living and faulty stewardship? No, not if one understands the whole counsel of the Word.

Every believer as a child of God is a steward to whom God has entrusted stewardships of time, talents (spiritual gifts included), God's truth, and treasures. A steward is someone who manages the property or equipment of another. What does this mean? The apostle Paul teaches us "it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." God holds us responsible for what we do with our stewardship, and a day will come when we will be held accountable for what we have done with the life God has given us. This is the point of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15:

12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Note the contrast here. The believer is in heaven because of what Jesus did, but accountable reward-wise for what he did with the life and gifts God gave him. Again, listen to Radmacher's comments on this:

As I write these words, I stand in God's sight faultless and perfect because God Almighty sees me through Jesus Christ. There is no compromise to that. No one who knows Jesus Christ will ever appear at the Great White Throne Judgment of Revela-

tion 20. Believers shall appear, however, at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the *Bema*) and will be judged by their works (2 Cor. 5:10). It is significant to note that both the unregenerate and the regenerate will be judged by their works. The *unregenerate* will be judged by their works at the Great White Throne Judgment and the results of that judgment will be degrees of eternal punishment in hell. The *regenerate* will be judged by their works at the Bema and the result of that judgment will be either be reward or the lack of it.⁶

In lesson 7 we will cover the Judgment Seat of Christ in detail, but for now, it is sufficient for us to realize that while we are secure in the Savior as far as heaven is concerned, we have a wonderful stewardship for which we are each responsible. Our need is to be disciplined through God's grace unto godliness which has a promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; 8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

⁶ Radmacher, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 1, 4.

Lesson 3: Assurance of Eternal Security

Introduction

While the believer may gain assurance of his salvation and know that he has been saved, the question may arise concerning the permanence of his salvation. Once genuinely saved by trusting in the merit of Christ's death on the cross for sin, can the believer lose his salvation? Is there anything we can do to lose our salvation? The answer is NO! Why? Because Scripture clearly affirms the fact we are protected by the power of God through faith. Faith brings us into a grace relationship with God as a gift of God through the merit of His beloved Son. We are saved by His record, not ours.

1 Peter 1:5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

The following seven approaches set forth the case for the believer's eternal security, "buckled up for safety" because of the power of God and the overwhelming sufficiency of the person and work of Christ.

The Trinity Approach

The first argument for the eternal security of the believer stems from seeing how all three persons of the trinity work in concert to make and keep us secure in Christ.

From the Standpoint of the Son

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The declaration in Romans 8:34, "Christ Jesus is He who died," is given in answer to the questions of verses 31-33, and in anticipation to the questions and declarations of verses 35-39. The goal of verse

34, however, is to show the absolute security of the believer. Two reasons are stated in relation to God the Son:

(1) Christ Died as Our Redeemer and Substitute: By His death Christ removed the barrier that separates mankind from God. Man's sin and God's holiness, which form a barrier between the sinner and God, were dealt with at the cross so God is free to justify us, declare us righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. The same truth is declared in the following verses.

Romans 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Romans 5:1,8 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ... 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The book of Hebrews states Christ's death is the only sacrifice which counts and is once and for all time.

Hebrews 9:11-14 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 9:26-28 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Hebrews 10:12-14 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

(2) Christ Is Risen and Sits at God's Right Hand. The second argument of Romans 8:34 concerns the resurrection and session of the Savior at God's right hand. He sits at God's right hand as our powerful advocate and intercessor to plead our case when we sin or when accused of sin, and to intercede on our behalf by virtue of His finished work on the cross which reconciles us to God.

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night."

Romans 5:10-11 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Hebrews 7:25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

John 17:11 And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are.

From the Standpoint of the Father

Through the protection of our heavenly Father, whose holiness has been perfectly satisfied by the death of His Son, we are kept by:

His Sovereign Purpose

Salvation depends upon God to bring it to pass, not us. Nothing, not even our sin, can frustrate the eternal and sovereign purpose of God who determined to save us by grace through faith in His Son. Since God's holiness has been satisfied by the death of Christ, He can be just and the justifier of those who receive His Son by faith.

Ephesians 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

His Love for the Son

We are kept for the sake of the Son and His perfect work for our sin. Believers are "in the Beloved," the place where God's love abides, and nothing whatsoever can separate us from the love of God (cf. Eph 1:3-6 above).

Romans 8:39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 17:11 And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are.

His Work of Discipline

The Father's work of discipline proves we are still sons even when we sin. He does not disown us; He disciplines us.

Hebrews 12:5-11 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. 2 And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

1 Corinthians 11:30-32 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Sin does not change our relationship to God as His children though it does affect our fellowship, the intimacy of our walk with God, our ability to serve Him, and the rewards we will receive in the future kingdom.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

His Sovereign Power

Nothing or no one is greater than the Father which means nothing or no one can defeat God's purpose to save us or remove us from His love and care (cf. Rom. 8:31-39).

1 Peter 1:5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jude 24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

2 Corinthians 5:17-19 Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

From the Standpoint of the Holy Spirit

His Work of Spirit Baptism

Spirit baptism refers to the work of the Holy Spirit whereby He places believers into union with the body of Christ and identifies them with Christ's person and work. If believers could lose their salvation, it would mean the body of Christ could and would be maimed. This is foreign to Scripture. To the carnal church in Corinth, which was full of strife, envy, fornication, and drunkenness, Paul declared, "are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3). Yet, he affirmed the fact of their salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

His Work in Regeneration

Regeneration refers to the impartation of spiritual and eternal life which makes us new creatures in Christ. This can never change. First, it is based on the work of the Son, not our works. And second, as physical birth makes one a child of his parents forever, so spiritual birth does the same.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Titus 3:5-7 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

John 3:3-8 Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:16-18 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

As mentioned previously, rather than disown a disobedient child, God disciplines his children. At times it may even be to the point of physical death, but believers still remain His children (cf. above Heb. 12:5-12).

His Work of Indwelling

This refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer which was promised by our Lord as a permanent indwelling. The Spirit is given forever and given without conditions other than faith in Christ.

John 7:37-39 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’” 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

1 Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?

The Holy Spirit as a Seal

This is a description of the Holy Spirit from the standpoint of what He is to the believer through His indwelling. A seal in ancient times was a sign and proof of: (a) a completed transaction, i.e., our salvation, (b) of ownership, we belong to God, and (c) of security since only an authorized person could break the seal. In this case it is God and He has promised not to do so.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

2 Corinthians 1:22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

As a result, Paul declares that even the carnal Christians at Corinth belonged to God as a result of this finished transaction of their salvation in Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

The Holy Spirit as an Earnest

This forms another picture of what the Holy Spirit is to believers in Christ. As an earnest agreement on a house is a buyer's pledge to purchase and pay the full price for the house, so the Holy Spirit is God's personal pledge and guarantee of our security promising us there is more to come: we will receive the ultimate or eternal blessings of our salvation. The term "pledge" in the following verses refer to an earnest agreement-like pledge.

Ephesians 1:14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

2 Corinthians 1:22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

The Positional Approach

Spirit baptism joins the believer into union with Christ. This becomes the new spiritual position of the believer. Phrases such as "in Christ," "in the beloved," and "with Christ," used over and over again in Paul's epistles, refer to this concept. This calls attention to the fact the Bible emphasizes we are saved and accepted through our position in or union with Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 2:5-6 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus,

Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

2 Timothy 2:11-13 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.

This is a place not only of security, but of double security! Our union with Christ is a guarantee of glory.

Colossians 3:3-4 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

The Logical Approach

Simply stated, if God did so much for us while we were sinners, completely alienated and enemies of God before salvation, how much more will He not do for us now that we have been reconciled and stand related to Him as His children who have been justified, declared righteous in Christ?

Romans 5:8-10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

God's Hand Approach

A specific and wonderful promise from the Lord is that no one (and this must include Satan or ourselves) can remove us from either the hand of the Son or the Father. Scripture tells us we are in God's hand, which is a place of perfect security because He is greater than all.

John 10:28-29 and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

The Tense Approach

The use of the perfect tense in a number of New Testament passages would further point to the believer's security. The meaning of the perfect tense in Greek combined with the context and the analogy of Scripture forms another argument for the security of the believer. The perfect tense refers to action or an event which, completed in the past, has results existing in the present time (i.e., in relation to the time of the speaker). It looks at the present state of affairs. The following passages that use the perfect tense stress the saved state of the believer who has trusted in the Savior.

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Romans 5:2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 1:2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

The Grace Approach

This argument is simply this. The New Testament plainly states we are **saved by grace through faith** in the person and work of Christ, and that salvation is not of human works or works of righteousness which we have done. If, however, having put our trust in the person and work of Christ, we can lose our salvation by what we do or do not do, then in the final analysis, we are saved by works. This is contrary to the theology of the New Testament (cf. also Rom. 4:1-5; 11:6; Rev. 21:6; 21:17).

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

What Sin Approach

This approach asks the question, “*What sin causes a person to lose his salvation?*” Sin, any sin falls short of the perfect holiness of God. Every person, regardless of his maturity or relationship with the Lord, is far from perfect by God’s standard. We all have something in our lives which falls short of God’s glory, i.e., some sin though it may be unknown.

1 John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Where, then, do we draw the line? Those who believe we can lose our salvation categorize sin as though God overlooks some sins while He judges others. It becomes a matter of degrees and the question arises, how bad must we become before we lose our salvation? Which sin does us in? People often categorize sin into various levels, but their categories are usually out of touch with God’s perspective.

Proverbs 6:16-19 There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

Problem Passages

What about those passages that are often taken to mean the believer can lose his salvation? For this study, we cannot deal with all these passages. Generally, however, we can show that none of these passages teach we can lose our salvation if the immediate context and the context of the entire New Testament is considered, or if the principle of the analogy of the faith is considered.

The Analogy of the Faith

The analogy of the faith is a hermeneutical principle which says unclear passages should be understood in the light of clear ones, not vice versa. It is my conviction that those who believe we can lose our salvation, or who teach Lordship salvation, violate this principle.

They violate this principle in two ways:

(1) They base their understanding of the Gospel on a few difficult or unclear passages rather than the **many** very clear ones.

(2) They overthrow the correct interpretation of clear passages by understanding them in the light of their faulty views of the unclear or more difficult passages of Scripture.

Categories of Difficult Passages

The problem passages (those used to teach believers can lose their salvation, or used to teach that they were never really saved or they would never do such and such) in reality fall into one or more of the following categories and do not deal with the issue of eternal salvation:

(1) Passages that deal with the Bema (the Judgment Seat of Christ) and are thus warning believers against the potential loss of rewards—rather than the loss or lack of salvation.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

(2) Passages that warn against the severity of God's discipline in this life when believers refuse to respond to His grace.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

Hebrews 6:1-6 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we shall do, if God permits. 4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Hebrews 10:23-31 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing

near. 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(3) Passages that portray the nature of who we are as God's children, and that which must, therefore, characterize us as children of God. This includes passages that portray the nature and condition of unbelievers as a motivation to godly living or living like the people we have become positionally in Christ. These passages do not threaten us with the loss of salvation nor do they call us to question our salvation. They challenge us to live like the people we are in Christ. For instance, compare Ephesians 5:1-12.

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 3 But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth, 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

The Argument of 1 John 3:6f.

1 John 3:6-10 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

First John 3:6 occurs in a section where John is giving reasons why believers should not sin. Here he gives one reason after another not to question our salvation but to motivate believers to walk in the light. Does 1 John 3:6b mean the abiding believer, the one who clings to Christ, actually never sins?

Such an idea would contradict 1 John 1:8 and 10 and 5:16. Because of our weakness and lack of perfection in this life, even abiding believers sin. So what does John mean?

As an illustration, let's say a young child steals a pack of gum at the supermarket. When the mother finds out, she says, "the members of this family do not steal. Do you understand that?" Does that make sense? One of them had just done that very thing. What was this mother saying? She was saying that stealing was against the moral standards of their family, and therefore, the little boy had to learn this lesson and refrain from ever doing it again. She wasn't saying she had gone around and checked and found that none of the members of the family had ever stolen. She was pointing out **the standards** of their family as a motivation to her son.

John is simply telling us, this is the standard, that we do not sin, and we need to get with the plan. He is not denying that believers sin or that they can fall into the pattern of sinning. To drive this concept home even more, this verse is followed by more reasons and illustrations against sin in the lives of believers.

Another statement for motivation is in verse 9: "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." It is not saying believers are incapable of sinning. This would contradict the verses mentioned above.

Most take this verse to mean that John is saying Christians cannot sin or will not sin habitually. Is this what John is saying? No. I do not believe this is his point. "Practices" is a misleading translation. If that was John's point, the Greek *prasso*, which John uses in the verses below, could have expressed that more clearly.

John 3:20 For everyone who does (*prasso*) evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

John 5:29 and shall come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed (*prasso*) the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.

So, what is John saying? The word "cannot" does not always mean *incapable*. It can also mean *unwilling*. The following New Testament passages illustrates this:

Luke 11:5-7 And He said to them, "Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'"

Luke 14:20 And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'

Mark 1:45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

Mark 6:3-5 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. 4 And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his home town and among his own relatives and in his own household." 5 And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them.

1 Corinthians 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

First John 3 is saying we must be unwilling to sin because we were born of God's nature. This is much like Romans 6:1-10 which follows the declaration of 5:20-21.

Let's say a doctor tells a smoker with throat problems, "You cannot smoke again." This doesn't mean the person is incapable of smoking but that he must not because of the physical consequences to his body.

It is clear from the life of King David, who is called a man after God's own heart, that believers can and do fall into serious sin and for long periods of time. For believers in Christ (with all that they have in Christ) to live under sin's reign like the unbelieving world is an illogical and contradictory position. It carries with it very serious consequences including the possibility of the sin unto death as God's divine discipline to stop the pattern of sinning.

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

The Consequences of Carnality (Living with Known Sin in the Life)

Key Passages:

Psalm 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Psalm 32:3-4 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.

1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

(1) Loss of fellowship with the Lord plus loss of the control of the Holy Spirit and His fruit in the life (cf. 1 Jn. 1:5-7). Sin grieves and quenches the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). Sin affects our prayer life (Ps. 66:18), our witness (Acts 1:8), Bible study (1 Cor. 2:10-16; Eph. 3:16f), i.e., all the ministries of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. The Holy Spirit's ministry is turned from enabling to convicting, etc.

1 John 1:5-7 And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit;

Psalms 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Acts 1:8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

1 Corinthians 2:10-16 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Ephesians 3:16-19 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.

(2) Misery, loss of joy, because we are controlled by the sinful nature.

Psalms 32:3-4 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.

(3) Dissipation or wastefulness of our spiritual, mental, and physical resources.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

(4) Production of the works of the flesh with their awful consequences.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger,

disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

(5) Divine discipline, the heavy hand of God on our lives to turn us around.

Hebrews 12:5-10 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

1 Corinthians 11:29-32 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Psalms 32:4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.

(6) Broken relationships and pain to those around us, especially to our families.

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

(7) Loss of our testimony in the world and dishonor to the Lord.

1 Peter 2:12-15 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

1 Peter 3:15-17 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may

be put to shame. 17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 4:15-16 By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.

(8) Loss of rewards at the Bema seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Consequences of Continued and Open Rebellion

In addition to the above the following apply:

(1) Increased discipline from the heavy hand of God.

Psalm 32:4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.

Hebrews 12:6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.

(2) Continuation in sin may require the church to take action even to the point of excommunication (1 Cor. 5).

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associ-

ate with him, so that he may be put to shame. 15 And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Matthew 18:17 And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

(3) Divine discipline to the point of physical death.

1 Corinthians 11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

Certainly, believers are secure in Christ and cannot lose their salvation, a salvation accomplished by the finished work of the Savior who sits victoriously at God's right hand to plead our case. But reality, and Scripture shows us, unless believers abide in fellowship and deal in faith with the sin in their lives, they can fall into serious conditions of sin just like David. Such can happen because the person was never truly saved, but quite often the real cause is a failure to abide in the life and power of the Spirit of God.

It is our hope that this study on the eternal security of the believer has been a help. The goal of understanding our security is an assurance that motivates to godly living, never careless living or taking the Lord for granted. Remember, God is our heavenly Father who, in love will discipline His children to draw them back to himself.

The Apostle staked his faith on the trustworthiness of God's grace. Though some understand this to refer to God's deposit of gifts in Paul, I believe that which he had entrusted, literally, "the deposit," was his personal faith in the finished work of Christ as the basis of his salvation. Paul was confident that this would be preserved until all the dangers and failures of life would be past with the coming of the Lord.

Lesson 4: Assurance of God's Daily Provision

Introduction

When we trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we become a child of God, one who is both born and adopted into the family of God. As such, we become the recipients of God's personal care as a loving heavenly Father.

John 1:12-13 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Romans 8:15-16 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

As God is perfect, so His care must also be perfect and complete. The following overview covers some of the key areas of God's personal care for believers in Christ as His beloved children. These are truths that are of special importance to new believers.

The Promise That God Cares

As children of God, all believers become the personal responsibility of an all wise, sovereign, and all powerful God, who, as a heavenly Father, cares in an infinite way for each one of His children. The promise of 1 Peter 5:7 flows out of the exhortation of verse 6 and should be understood and applied in this context. Let's focus on three aspects of this promise: the responsibility, the root, and the reason.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. 7 Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

The Responsibility or Exhortation

The promise of God's care comes out of the preceding verse and the command, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." This is a call for a willing subjection or submission under God's sovereign authority and omnipotence. In the Greek, the verb is a command and is in the passive voice. Rather than "humble yourselves," it means "be hum-

bled,” or “allow yourself to be humbled.” The context in 1 Peter is that of persecution and suffering for the name of Christ during our sojourn on this earth. Suffering is a training tool that God uses, like the blast furnace used by a refiner of fine metals, to purify and develop our faith. This is a humbling process in that it causes us to live more and more in dependence on God. For the refining concept, note 1 Peter 1:6-9.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

The pride of man is best seen in his determination to live by his own solutions in independence of God. As an illustration, when under persecution, man’s tendency is to strike back or in some way to take matters into his own hands rather than rest his life under the mighty hand of God. Peter points us to the Lord Jesus as the perfect example of submission and humility in 1 Peter 2:21-25. By the command of verse 6, he is exhorting us to allow God to humble us through the sufferings of this life.

1 Peter 2:21-25 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

The Root or Foundation

The root for true submission under God’s might hand is seen in the words, “casting all your anxiety upon Him.” We might paraphrase the text, “Be humbled ... by casting all your anxiety upon the Lord.” This is more evident from the construction of the Greek text than the English, but this is the meaning. Casting our care on the Lord becomes the foundation and the means for the humbling process that needs to take place.

Furthermore, in the Greek text, “all your anxiety” is really, “the whole of your anxiety or care.” The idea is not that we are to cast each of our worries on the Lord, but that we need to come to the place where we have placed our lives, with all its burdens, concerns, and fears, into His loving and capable hands. Rather than take matters into our own hands, rather than try to manipulate and control others and our circumstances, we are to resolve to rest our lives in God’s care, purposes, and timing. When we truly do this, we are able to submit ourselves under God’s mighty hand to work out His sovereign purpose. When this is not the case, we will invariably exalt ourselves by trying to manipulate the circumstances of life, especially when under suffering and persecution.

In 1 Samuel, God appointed David to be king in place of Saul because of Saul’s disobedience (cf. 1 Sam. 15-16). Saul was a man who, rather than trust his life under the mighty hand of God, consistently sought to take matters into his own hands. He was a manipulator and a controller, and there is a lot of this

Saul-like character in each of us. God did not want David to be like a Saul, so He used Saul and his persecution of David to take the Saul-like character out of David. On two different occasions, Saul threw a spear at David to kill him. What was Saul attempting to do? He was seeking to manipulate and control his own destiny. He was refusing to submit to God's will. And what did David do? Did he pick up the spear and throw it back at Saul? No. Casting the whole of his care on God, he submitted his life under the mighty hand of God. He ducked and slipped away (see 1 Samuel 18:10-20).

The Reason or Explanation

The reason we are to submit and cast our cares on the Lord is seen in the words, "for He cares for you." Literally, the Greek text reads, "because to Him it is a care concerning you." This means you and I are His personal concern. We matter greatly to God. Why worry then if we are God's personal concern? To fail to trust in God's care is in essence an act of self exaltation. It is to act as though we care more than God and can do what God cannot do. Or it is to say, we are afraid of what God will do; we don't want to trust Him with our life. He may take something away that we think we need. If God did the maximum for us in that He spared not His own Son, how much more will He not care for us as His redeemed children?

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Romans 5:8-11 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

The Promise of Provision for All Our Needs

Since God is concerned for each of us as His redeemed children, the Apostle Paul assures us this concern certainly extends to our basic daily needs (but not our greed). The Apostle wrote, "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). This promise was made in connection with the financial support the Philippians had sent to Paul for his missionary ministry. He was assuring them that their giving would never be their lack. God would supply their needs, and the reason for His supply, was nothing less than "His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Governing God's provision is nothing short of the wealth of what God has done for us in Christ. Again, Romans 8:32 comes to mind.

The Lord Jesus gave an exhortation against anxiety regarding our daily needs. He focused on the fact of God's personal care for our basic needs in Matthew 6:25-34. Three times He tells us "do not be anxious" (6:25, 31 and 34). Five times questions are asked that are designed to show the foolishness of anxiety.

Matthew 6:25-34 For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your

heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. 30 But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? 31 Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' 32 For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Why is anxiety foolish? It is foolish because it is futile in view of the Father's loving care and knowledge of our needs (cf. 6:25, 26, 27, 28, 30). He teaches us such worry is the product of being people of "little faith." Worry is the product of failing to reflect on the fatherly care God must have for us as His people since He shows such wonderful care for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Finally, He shows that due to God's loving care and the temporary and evil nature of this world, our greatest priority and concern must be the spiritual (6:33-34).

The Promise of Provision Through Prayer

As members of God's family, all believers have direct access to God as their heavenly Father through their Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. While God knows our needs before we ask (Matt. 6:32), and is intimately concerned, we are, nevertheless, to take our needs and those of others to God's throne of grace in prayer.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

1 Peter 5:7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

1 John 5:14-15 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Philippians 4:6-8 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is

right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

Since God knows and cares, why pray? Because God has chosen to work in our lives through prayer. James 5:16 tells us the fervent prayer of a righteous person accomplishes much.

- Prayer is a vehicle of fellowship.
- Prayer is an evidence of faith or a spirit of dependence.
- Prayer is also a means of focusing our hearts on the Lord, His purposes, and His care.

Many of the Psalms are lament or petition Psalms. In them, we often find they begin highlighting a condition of trouble, sometimes even in a spirit of despair or frustration over the problems the author was facing. In the process of the Psalmist's prayer to God, however, as he takes his burdens to the Lord, he also gets his eyes on God's person, God's principles, and God's promises. As he does this, he gains a new outlook. The Psalms then finish in a spirit of confident expectation and joy in the Lord. God had not changed, but the Psalmist had been changed through the process of prayer (cf. *Psa.* 3:1-8; 5:1-12; 6:1-10; 7:10, 13). When our hearts are truly seeking God, prayer becomes a place where God is able to change us and mold us to His will.

Prayer is where we confess sin, give thanks and praise to God, and make our needs known in specific requests. But our greatest need is to be conformed into the image of God's Son, the Lord Jesus. The Lord promises that God, as a father kind of God, will not give us a stone if we ask for bread, nor a snake if we ask for a fish. In His perfect love and wisdom, He only knows how to give what is best to us. But we must understand that what we think of as bread or a fish, may in reality be a stone or a snake. This is why God often does not answer our requests with a yes, and why our prayer needs to be conformed to His will.

Matthew 7:9-11 Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will he give him a stone? 10 Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

This requires time and is perhaps why the Lord gives the three pictures of asking, seeking, and knocking in Matthew 7:7-8:

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

Prayer is not just a matter of asking, but of seeking God's direction and will, and waiting on Him just as one knocks and waits at the door for someone to hear and open the door. Keep asking, be patient, and be sure to ask what God's will is in the matter. Is what I am asking really what is best according to God's purposes and wisdom?

Hindrances to Prayer

The following is a list of some things that hinder our prayer life:

(1) Maladjustment to the Holy Spirit.

John 4:22-23 You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 22 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit;

Ephesians 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Psalms 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(2) Maladjustment to the Word of God (cf. also Ps. 119)

Proverbs 28:9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

(3) Failure to pray in faith.

Matthew 21:22 And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.

1 John 5:14-15 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

James 1:5-7 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

(4) Failure to ask because of a spirit of self-dependence.

James 4:2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

(5) Failure to ask from the right motives, without concern for God's will.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that."

1 Corinthians 4:19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power.

Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 26:42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done."

(6) Failure to endure, fainting under pressure.

Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

1 Samuel 27:1-3 Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand." 2 So David arose and crossed over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. 3 And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow.

Isaiah 40:31 Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

(7) Wrong relations with people, an unforgiving spirit.

Mark 11:25-26 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. 26 (But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.)

(8) Pretentious praying, praying to impress people.

Matthew 6:5-8 And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. 7 And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.

(9) Religious zeal in the form of vain repetitions and cultic ritual.

Matthew 6:7 And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

1 Kings 18:26-29 Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. 27 And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." 28 So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.

Romans 10:2-3 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

(10) Domestic breakdown in the home.

1 Peter 3:7 You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Conclusion

In the final decades of the life of George McCluskey he became extremely burdened for his children and each day spent the hour from 11 to 12 praying for them. He prayed not only for them, but also for his grandchildren and great grandchildren, as yet unborn. He asked that they would come to know the true God through His Son, and dedicate their lives to His service. Of the following four generations, every child has either become a minister or married a minister, with one exception. That exception is a name familiar to most of us today, Dr. James Dobson. Few will ever hear of George McCluskey, but because of him lives of future generations were undeniably blessed.

Lesson 5: Assurance of God's Provision for Sin

Introduction

Many questions will arise about the problem of sin in the life of the believer? Why do I continue to sin? What do I do about it? How do I get forgiveness? How do I overcome my old patterns? The believer will face the dilemma of Romans 7:15-18 and the struggle of Galatians 5:17. Obviously, this means Christians desperately need direction and encouragement from the Word on this issue.

Romans 7:15-18 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

A Definition of Sin

Sin is defection from any of God's standards. It is a lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state. It is anything in man that does not express, or which is contrary to the holy character of God.¹

The Categories of Sin

Key Scriptures:

Proverbs 6:16-19 There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

For convenience and help in grasping the nature of sin, we can divide sin into four categories:

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1986, p. 212.

Failing of the Grace of God

Failing of the grace of God means negative volition to God and His grace provision, and seeking to live by our own resources. It includes things like indifference to God's Word, failure to assemble ourselves together for spiritual encouragement, and failure to pray and take our needs to God.

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Isaiah 50:11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with fire-brands, Walk in the light of your fire And among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand; And you will lie down in torment.

Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD."

Ultimately, as suggested by these verses, failing of God's grace means seeking to handle life by our own resources and strategies rather than by the strength which God's supplies.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Evil Thoughts or Attitude Sins

These sins involve attitudes such as bitterness, resentment, worry, jealousy, covetousness, envy, discontent, and hatred.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Sins of the Tongue

Sins of the tongue involve lying, bearing false witness, maligning, filthy talk, gossip, spreading strife among brethren, and outbursts of anger.

Proverbs 6:17-19 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Ephesians 5:4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Overt Sins

Overt sins include immorality (adultery, fornication), stealing, fraud, murder, and licentiousness.

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Galatians 5:19-20 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

As we think of these four categories, it is important to see them from the standpoint of cause and effect or **root** and rotten **fruit**. This is the principle of the **root problem**. The Lord spoke of this in the following two passages:

Matthew 12:34-37 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man out of

his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. 36 And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.

Matthew 15:18-19 But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. In the Bible, the heart speaks of the inner person and may refer to the mind, the emotions, or the will, or to the whole inner person, mind, heart, and will. If we are thinking evil thoughts, those thoughts that are inconsistent with the mind of Christ, we will speak accordingly. Sins of the tongue are the product of sins of the heart or mental attitude sins. If we are filled with evil thoughts of envy, or jealousy, or anger, or fear, we will eventually malign others, brag about our exploits, cut others down in criticism and gossip, or speak in some way that is inconsistent with faith, love, and hope.

Even evil thoughts, however, have their source or root. Listed first in Matthew 15:19 with murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and slanders is the sin of “evil thoughts.” Obviously these other sins come from evil thoughts, but where do evil thoughts come from? Note that in Matthew 12:34-35 the Lord compares what fills the heart with treasure. The treasure is either good or evil. Treasure is something we value, but why do we value it? Because of what we think it will do for us like purchasing something we want or think we need.

May I suggest that evil thoughts have their source in faulty beliefs or in the lies we believe. When we are envious and covet what others have, for instance, we are guilty of thinking and believing that we need what someone else has to be secure or happy. When we think like that, we have believed Satan’s and the world’s lie that happiness comes in the abundance of the things we possess whether it is popularity, pleasure, position, power, giftedness, or material things.

The simple application of this means that, in order to deal with sin in our lives, we must learn to look beyond the surface sin and go to the root issues or we will never experience true and lasting change that begins deep in the innermost part of our being through faith. More will be said on this below.

The Provision for Forgiveness of Sin

Key Scriptures:

1 John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Romans 8:31-34 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

John 13:1-10 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. 5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter." 8 Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." 10 Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

Psalms 32:1-5 A Psalm of David. A Maskil. How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! 2 How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! 3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. 5 I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah.

Psalms 51:1-13 For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. 6 Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom. 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. 9 Hide Thy face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Thy presence, And do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, And sinners will be converted to Thee.

Salvation in Christ provides us with the means of dealing with sin in a victorious way, but it does not exempt us from the problem of sin and the temptation to sin. Our attitude and commitment is to be (a) that we do not sin (1 John 2:1), and (b) that we must not continue in sin that grace might abound (Rom. 6:1f). Being human, however, we are going to sin as long as we are in this life. This is clearly stated in 1 John 1:8-2:2.

What, then, is God's solution for us when we sin? The classic New Testament passage on this is 1 John 1:8-2:2.

1 John 1:8-2:2 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Romans 6:1-8 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

The Promise of Forgiveness Through Confession

First John 1:8-10 directs our attention to the following three aspects of confession: (a) Confession of the **principle** or guilt of sin; (b) confession of **particular** sins; and (c) confession of the **practice** of sin. These three aspects will be covered below.

Since the key word here is confession, what is meant by this term? The Greek word for confession in 1 John 1:9 is *homologeō*. This word means "to speak the same language," "to acknowledge, admit, agree with." It comes from *homologos*, "to be of one mind." We must agree with God and His Word concerning any sin and acknowledge it to God. Let me suggest two things as to its meaning:

(1) Confession is a responsibility to truly see our sin for what it is. It is harmful to us and others, dishonoring to God, ugly, and as that which needs not only God's forgiveness for continued fellowship with Him, but removal from our lives by His enabling grace. We dare not treat sin lightly. We are to come to hate sin as God does.

Proverbs 28:13-14 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. 14 How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

(2) Confession is the call to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves about our sin and what God defines as sin in His Word. Our tendency is to avoid facing the reality of personal sin. We tend to rationalize it, deny it, or blame it on others as Adam and Eve did when confronted by God in Genesis 3:7-13.

This age old tendency is clearly seen in four of the five "if" clauses of 1 John 1:6-10. Note there are three things in 1 John 1:8-10 which need to be acknowledged. Two are stated from the standpoint of a

false claim, "If we say," (verses 8 and 10) but the opposite of such a claim is an honest confession of the facts as they pertain to our sin.

Confession of the Principle (1 John 1:8)

John is writing to believers in 1 John regarding fellowship with the Lord. The Greek word *koinonia*, means "participation, a sharing in," and then "communion, close relationship." By walking closely with the Lord through faith, believers are to share in His life and experience His character in Christlike change. In 1 John 2:1, 7 and 12, John affectionately calls his readers, "my little children," "beloved," and simply "little children." He is confident they know the Lord and that their sins are forgiven, but he is concerned about their fellowship and daily walk with the Lord.

Believers can claim to have fellowship (1 John 1:6), but in reality walk in darkness because of their failure to acknowledge and deal with sin. John is writing to show what is needed to maintain fellowship and to set forth the evidences of genuine fellowship.

There is a difference, however, between **relationship**, being a child of God by the new birth through faith in Christ, and **fellowship**, walking intimately with the Lord by an active faith. Because of the many perversions and false teachings that continually pop up historically, some have claimed to have fellowship while also saying they have no sin. This is the claim that they have no guilt or sinful capacity dwelling within them. Sin is in the singular and refers to the inherited principle of sin or self-centeredness.² John says such people deceive themselves, certainly they deceive no one who really knows them. Also some have claimed that sin is insignificant and doesn't harm our fellowship with God.

The opposite of such a claim is to confess or acknowledge we still have a sinful nature or principle of sin that dwells within us. The new birth gives us a new nature, but, contrary to what some are teaching, it does not eradicate the old nature or sinful principle within us. Its power over us has been rendered inoperative and we no longer have to be its slave, but this principle of sin is still there. Understanding this truth and acknowledging its reality helps us to be alert that we might actively deal with it by faith in God's plan and provision of grace. We can't deal with an enemy if we do not know it is there.

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth.

Romans 6:4-11 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to

² J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John, An Introduction and Commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964, pp. 76-77.

sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 7:14-21 For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.

Galatians 5:17-21 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Confession of the Particular (1 John 1:9)

Knowing the principle of sin is still there, we are better prepared to be on alert to the potential of particular sins that we need to confess to God and deal with. John says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). This verse is not talking about salvation, we are not saved by confessing sin, only by belief in Jesus Christ.

“Sins” in verse 9 is plural and in the Greek text it has the article. In verse 8 sin was singular and was without the article. John is writing about the specific and particular sins God reveals to us. We are not to simply say, “Lord, forgive my sins.” Praying a general prayer like this does three things:

- (1) It lumps our sins together without having to face the fact of specific sin in our life.
- (2) It becomes a means of hiding our sins or ignoring them.
- (3) It hinders our ability to deal with specific sins and get to the root causes through faith in the principles of Scripture.

“Confess” is in the present continuous tense in the Greek text. This is what is called the iterative present. It refers to continuous repeated action like that of a hacking cough. The idea is, repeatedly, whenever we recognize sin, we are at that very moment to confess it and to look to the ministry of the Spirit of God and the principles of the Word for power to overcome that sin while resting in God’s forgiveness.

The promise is that God is faithful and righteous (just) to forgive us and cleanse us. If we will honestly and ruthlessly confess our sins, God is faithful every single time to forgive us. He restores us to fellowship. Known sin grieves the person of the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quenches His power (1 Thess.

5:19). Known sin constitutes negative volition to God's control, breaks fellowship, and hinders our walk with the Lord (cf. Isa. 59:1-2).

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit;

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short That it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.

However, though perfect holiness, God is just and free to forgive and restore us to fellowship because of the finished work of Christ, our Advocate, if we will confess our sins.

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

The only sins we can confess are our known sins, but as 1 John 1:8 and 10 suggest, as long as we are in this life, we will never be perfect or without sin. There will always be areas that need change. In other words, there will always be unknown sins. The promise is that as long as we are confessing our known sins and seeking earnestly to walk with the Lord, He not only forgives the sins we confess but He cleanses us from all sin (our unknown sins) and fellowship is maintained.

Cleansing us may also refer to the transformation process that confession is designed to bring about as it causes us to deal with sin and seek the fellowship and strength of God. Confession is not just to avoid divine discipline.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah.

Confession of the Practice (1 John 1:10)

To walk in fellowship is to walk in the light (1 John 1:7) and this means to walk in the illuminating, revealing light of the Word. The Bible is like a sword and light which illuminates our walk (cf. Heb. 4:12; Psa. 119:105, 130). Both of these word pictures (sword and light) point to the Bible's capacity to reveal and expose our sin and the various ways we fail the Lord and people.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Psalms 119:105 Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.

Psalms 119:130 The unfolding of Thy words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

Ephesians 5:8-17 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth, 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Some, however, make the claim they have not sinned. This is either the denial that they have ever sinned or that they have stopped sinning and do not practice sin or have any specific acts of sin taking place in their lives, i.e., the practice of sin. Based on the Greek tense of 1 John 1:10 (which is a perfect tense and refers to completed action with continuing results in the present from the standpoint of the speaker) the latter is more likely the idea. The effect of such a claim is to stifle the convicting ministry of both the Word and the Spirit of God.

The Purpose of Confession

Key Scriptures:

1 John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

Proverbs 28:13-14 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. 14 How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

First John 2:1 highlights the purpose John had in mind. As mentioned above, confession is designed to enable us to halt the sin process. It is designed to cause us to deal with sin and seek the fellowship and strength of God. The privilege of confession is never to become an excuse for sin, i.e., "I can sin as I please because I can always confess it." Such an attitude does several things, all of them bad:

(1) It treats sin lightly. It fails to see its evil potential and awful consequences on the glory of God, on our witness to others, on its debilitating and degenerating impact on us personally, on our relationships with others, and on eternal rewards.

(2) It misses entirely the point and reason for confession. We confess sin to stop sinful behavior and to reestablish fellowship and the power of God in one's life. Sin grieves and quenches the power of the Spirit; confession restores us to fellowship so we may then walk by faith in His power.

(3) It ignores God's goal to transform us into the image of His Son. True happiness and peace is never found in sinful living, only in knowing Christ and His fellowship.

(4) It ignores or forgets about God's discipline.

Hebrews 12:5-11 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Psalm 32:1-5 A Psalm of David. A Maskil. How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! 2 How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! 3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. 5 I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah.

The Propitiation (*Satisfaction*) for Our Sins

Key Scriptures:

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Romans 8:31-34 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

While the goal of this instruction in 1 John is that we might not sin, still the reality is we will. When we do sin, we have Jesus Christ who is the perfect solution for us at the right hand of the Father. That He is the perfect and only solution is brought out by a three-fold description.

Christ Is Our Advocate

This Greek word *parakletos* means “one summoned alongside as helper, or intercessor.” Though the idea of “advocate” or “defense attorney” was somewhat rare,³ this is clearly the idea here, especially in view of Paul’s instruction in Romans 8:34. As our advocate or defense attorney, if accused by someone like Satan (Rev. 12:10), He declares our forgiveness and righteous standing before God because He himself died in our place and paid the penalty that our sin deserved (Rom. 8:34). Luke 22:31-32 also illustrates how this advocacy works.

Romans 8:34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.”

Luke 22:31-32 Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Christ Is Righteous

This declares Christ’s qualification as the God-man Savior (undiminished deity and true, sinless humanity) to take our place as our substitute on the cross and to plead our case as our advocate, intercessor, and helper.

Christ Himself Is the Propitiation for Our Sins

Should any sinning believer wonder on what grounds he might secure God’s forgiveness or think his sin was too bad for God to forgive, the answer is found in this statement:

So adequate is Jesus Christ as God’s atoning Sacrifice that the efficacy of His work extends not merely to the sins of Christians themselves, but also to the sins of the whole world. In saying this, John was clearly affirming the view that Christ genuinely died for everyone (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 19; Heb. 2:9). This does not mean, of course, that everyone will be saved. It means rather that anyone who hears the gospel can be saved if he so desires (Rev. 22:17). In context, however, John’s point is to remind his readers of the magnificent scope of Christ’s “atoning sacrifice” in order to assure them that His advocacy as the Righteous One on their behalf is fully consistent with God’s holiness.⁴

³ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge, University Press, 1960, p. 623.

⁴ Zane Hodges, “1 John,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the New Testament Edition, Editors, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1983, p. 887.

The Provision for Deliverance Over Sin

Key Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

Psalm 32:6-7 Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they shall not reach him. Thou art my hiding place; Thou dost preserve me from trouble; Thou dost surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

Romans 6:1-14 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

See also Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 5:15-20; Colossians 3:1-16.

Since God's desire and goal is that we might not sin, how can we have victory over sin? Here we are dealing with the issue of experiencing God's victory over the temptation to sin, and over sinful patterns or life-dominating practices that may have defeated a Christian all his (or her) life. Because of the many temptations to sin, believers may wonder how they can handle these temptations. Or because of a pattern of failure, they may wonder if they really can break a habit that has dominated them all their lives. By the grace of God, the believer's union with Christ, and the power of the Spirit of Christ, the answer is a resounding, YES.

First Corinthians 10:13 is a fitting passage in answer to these questions and gives us a wonderful promise. It teaches us three vital elements about temptation and God's provision.

The Common Experience of Temptation

By the statement, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man,” Paul is not saying that since we all have the problem of temptation, we should just throw in the towel. After all, we are just human. This verse is not an excuse to give into temptation. Sometimes people try to excuse their sin by saying, that’s just the way I am. The implication is, since this is the way I am, I can’t help it. God is in the business of changing the way we are and the change is always in our best interest. He has our well being in mind, always!

Primarily, however, the Apostle is assuring us that our temptations are never unique just to us. We are not alone in our battle with sin. Others have faced the same thing and have experienced God’s deliverance. All our temptations are common to all men, so we cannot hide behind the idea that our problem is different and thereby seek to excuse our sin by its uniqueness. There is great comfort in knowing that others have faced similar and even worse testings and temptations and have endured by the strength and faithfulness of God.

Hebrews 11:2-12 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; 12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

So first, Paul has warned us about the commonality of our temptations. Now, based on the faithfulness of God, he points out two more things that we can count on the Lord for in any temptation.

God Controls the Environment of Temptation

God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to handle (1 Cor. 10:13-14). He knows our areas of weakness, our level of maturity, and all the particulars of our lives at any particular moment. He guards us against any temptation or testing we can’t handle. When temptation comes we may not handle it, but it is not **because we cannot**, but **because we won’t**. It is either because we have presumed upon our blessings or because we have not been careful in our daily walk with God.

1 Corinthians 10:13-14 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

This also means when temptation or testing comes, unless we are presuming upon the Lord, (a) we can handle it by God's grace, and (b) the Lord, though He never tempts us to sin, has allowed it for His own purposes. This says that God limits the temptations that He allows into our lives.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

This does not mean that we can take the Lord for granted and ignore our responsibilities regarding temptation. For instance, we are told in Scripture:

(1) To flee from certain temptations. Note the response of Joseph when tempted by Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:1-12.

1 Timothy 6:11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

2 Timothy 2:22 Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

(2) To pray regarding temptation.

Matthew 6:13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.)

(3) That we must not tempt the Lord. We tempt the Lord by unbelief, by not trusting in His power and aid, and by being careless, unguarded, or by failing to take heed.

Deuteronomy 6:16 You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.

Matthew 4:6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, Lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"

(4) It is always wise to avoid unnecessary temptation. We are never to presume upon the Lord or tempt Him by playing with fire. When we do, we are going to get burned.

Proverbs 5:8 Keep your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house,

Proverbs 7:6-20 For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice, 7 And I saw among the naive, I discerned among the youths, A young man lacking sense, 8 Passing through the street near her corner; And he takes the way to her house, 9 In the twilight, in the evening, In the middle of the night and in the darkness. 10 And behold, a woman comes to meet him, Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart. 11 She is boisterous and rebellious; Her feet do not remain at home; 12 She is now in the streets, now in the squares, And lurks by every corner. 13 So she seizes him and kisses him, And with a brazen face she says to him: 14 "I was due to offer peace offerings; Today I have paid my vows. 15 Therefore I have come out to meet

you, To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you. 16 I have spread my couch with coverings, With colored linens of Egypt. 17 I have sprinkled my bed With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. 18 Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with caresses. 19 For the man is not at home, He has gone on a long journey; 20 He has taken a bag of money with him, At full moon he will come home.”

God Provides the Escape From Temptation

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but **with** the temptation will provide the way of escape **also**, that you may be able to endure it (emphasis mine).

The words “with” and “also” are significant in this promise. This teaches that when we are walking with the Lord and trusting in His provision, i.e., not presuming upon Him (taking Him for granted), or tempting Him, then, temptations and escapes always go in pairs. There is no temptation without the corresponding escape, unless, of course, we are deliberately brazen and careless.

Note also that the verse reads “the way of escape” and not “an escape.” I think this is a warning about seeking unbiblical solutions to temptation. The way of escape refers to God’s methods for dealing with the problems of life as outlined in the Word of God.

Psalm 119:45 And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Thy precepts.

Psalm 119:133 Establish my footsteps in Thy word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.

Psalm 119:165 Those who love Thy law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

The word “escape” is the Greek *ekbasis* which literally means “a way out.” It is used only two times in the New Testament, here and in Hebrews 13:7. In Hebrews it means “issue, result, outcome.” It also had this usage or meaning in extra biblical writings. This is significant. In the Hebrews passage it is used of the outcome of a manner of life. The outcome is godly character—the result of a close walk with God—the fruit of men who spent their lives in the Word walking with the Lord by faith.

Maybe this teaches us something about the meaning of *ekbasis* in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Our means of deliverance or the way out of temptation is not just the result of one thing or some sudden deliverance which the Lord supplies like a man being snatched out of the fire. Though at times that will occur, that is not the promise here or certainly not the primary thrust. This is suggested from the last word, “endure.” It’s not removal or escape from temptation that God is promising, but the ability to bear up under it. The capacity to handle the temptation without sin.

In summary, this teaches us two things about our temptations:

(1) **“The way out” is itself the fruit of something, an outcome.** It is the outcome of adhering to the principles of the Word on a daily basis. Of course, the more we grow and the closer our walk with the Lord the greater our ability to handle testing or temptation.

(2) **“The way out” means the ability to handle the temptation.** It is not necessarily its removal, though ability to handle temptation often means the ability to wisely avoid temptation. And when we can't, it means the responsibility to flee temptation.

This is further supported by the last clause of this verse which explains what the *ekbasis* “the way out” means. The verse closes with “that you may be able to bear it.” The NASV, KJV and NIV all translate this as a purpose or result clause. In other words, God gives the way of escape with the result we can endure the temptation or testing without falling. Perhaps a better way to understand this clause is as an explanation telling us what the way of escape consists of, “the ability to endure.”⁵

The NEB may have had this in mind when they translated this, “enabling you to bear it.” We could translate it, “the way of escape, the enablement to endure.” Ultimately, “the way out” is the fruit, the outcome of walking with the Lord which is at the same time the ability to endure or to handle the testing or temptation.

God, by His grace through the provision of fellowship with Him, provides the capacity to handle temptation and it is our responsibility to responsibly appropriate that into our lives.

A Summary of God's Way of Escape

(1) Walking in dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Romans 8:2-10 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

⁵ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1934, p. 1087; James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek*, Vol. 1, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, Third Ed., 1967, p. 167.

(2) Living in the Word.

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word.

2 Timothy 2:16-17 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

Hebrews 3:7-12 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart; And they did not know My ways'; 11 As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" 12 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

(3) Understanding and reckoning on our position in Christ.

Romans 6:1-14 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 6 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

(4) Fleeing from temptation: The principle of avoiding needless temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 Timothy 6:11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

2 Timothy 2:22 Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Proverbs 7:6-15 For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice, 7 And I saw among the naive, I discerned among the youths, A young man lacking sense, 8 Passing through the street near her corner; And he takes the way to her house, 9 In the twilight, in the evening, In the middle of the night and in the darkness. 10 And behold, a woman comes to meet him, Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart. 11 She is boisterous and rebellious; Her feet do not remain at home; 12 She is now in the streets, now in the squares, And lurks by every corner. 13 So she seizes him and kisses him, And with a brazen face she says to him: 14 "I was due to offer peace offerings; Today I have paid my vows. 15 Therefore I have come out to meet you, To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you."

(5) Praying faithfully and in faith.

Matthew 6:13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.)

Ephesians 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Psalms 119:33-38 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. 34 Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, And keep it with all my heart. 35 Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, For I delight in it. 36 Incline my heart to Thy testimonies, And not to dishonest gain. 37 Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, And revive me in Thy ways. 38 Establish Thy word to Thy servant, As that which produces reverence for Thee.

(6) Bringing every thought captive—watching and controlling our mental processes and attitudes in the light of Scripture.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

(7) Walking circumspectly, soberly, alertly, vigilantly.

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

1 Peter 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

(8) Living by faith.

2 Corinthians 5:7 ... for we walk by faith, not by sight;

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Hebrews 11:1-6 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

(9) Seeking the right associations and fellowship.

Hebrews 10:24-25 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." 34 Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

Psalms 1:1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

Psalms 119:63 I am a companion of all those who fear Thee, And of those who keep Thy precepts.

(10) Having the mind of Christ. The right set of perspectives, values, priorities and pursuits.

Matthew 6:21-33 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 22 The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these.

30 But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? 31 Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' 32 For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

1 Timothy 6:6-12 But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. 11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

(11) Reflecting on the consequences: sin always has its wages—we reap what we sow.

Galatians 6:6-7 And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

Some consequences of sin are: loss of fellowship, divine discipline, loss of effective ministry, destroyed relationships, loss of rewards, and most of all, dishonor to the Lord.

Lesson 6: Assurance of God's Guidance

The main purpose of this lesson in these studies on assurance is to give Christians some basic biblical concepts about God's guidance. It is not intended to be a full treatise nor even a full outline on the will of God.

The Problem People Face

Proverbs 14:12 tells us there is a way *which seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Jeremiah also clearly states the problem of man's inability to direct his life. In Jeremiah 10:23 he said, "I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps." Because of man's finite wisdom and ability, his limited understanding of the facts coupled with his sinfulness, man simply cannot direct his steps. What seems right to him results in the way of destruction and death. As man's thoughts are not God's, so his ways must likewise fall short of God's perfect and all-wise plan.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

1 Corinthians 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Illustrations:

(1) There was a time back in the 1940s when men thought the atomic bomb would end all wars and bring world peace. It obviously has not.

(2) When faced with the problem of a marriage gone wrong, people often see divorce as the answer rather than face the pain and struggle of working through their problems. Working through problems in a marriage is certainly God's will according to the Scripture, which is always what is best for man and society as a whole. Recent research is beginning to show that Scripture has been right all along. Over the long haul, divorce brings more pain and difficulties than it relieves both to the society and to those involved in the divorce.

Only the eternal God who is the Alpha and Omega has the infinite wisdom and power, love and mercy needed to direct the affairs of man's life. As our Creator and the one who formed us in the womb, who better knows us, our abilities, our weaknesses, and all the details of our lives than God?

Psalm 139:13-14 For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, And my soul knows it very well.

The Promise God Gives

The declaration of Scripture is that God cares about each of us and wants to direct our lives. How infinitely superior His plan must be in every detail with all the wisdom and data He possesses, past, present, and future, and with all the power at His disposal as the sovereign God of the universe. The greatest

evidence of God's desire to guide our lives is found in the fact of the Scriptures. He has given us the Bible that we might know His will and purpose in all areas of life. This means knowing God and the life He has for us to live. Our responsibility, by God's own direction, is to entrust our way to Him for His direction and leading.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 16:1-4 The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives. 3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your plans will be established. 4 The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

Proverbs 16:9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

Passages on God's Will

As you think about God's will what comes to mind? It has been my experience that many people generally focus on certain things, but ignore the more basic and important areas. For example, guidance or finding God's will is often restricted to such things as:

- Whom do I marry? (someone who will make me happy and who is perfect, of course).
- Where do I work? (where it will be wonderful, challenging, and financially rewarding).
- What car should I buy? (one that never breaks down).
- What house should I buy? (one next door to Christians so I won't have to witness).
- Should I go to college, and if so, where should I go? (where I can make all A's, meet the right person, or get away from mom and dad).
- What kind of pastor does God want our church to have? (someone who can walk on water, leap tall buildings, and fly faster than a speeding bullet).

As is obvious, when such a list is the primary focus guidance becomes something people want for their own happiness and fulfillment so life will flow along smoothly like an interstate highway. Certainly we should seek God's guidance and pray about such things as James warned us when he wrote, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that'" (James 5:15). In a similar fashion, Paul wrote, "always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now by the will of God, I may succeed in coming to you" (Rom. 1:10), and Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established."

A brief look at those passages where God's will is specifically mentioned, however, show that our own happiness and the details with which we are so often occupied are secondary, never primary. Such an occupation or attitude typifies the shallow thinking of a society that is out of touch with the purposes of the living God and how He works. We are a consumer-oriented society bent on our own comfort and pleasure, whereas God has much greater goals in mind.

Just a brief glance at passages where the words "will of God" are found quickly show us God's primary concern is in the realm of the spiritual and concerns the moral will of God or Christlike change.

1 Corinthians 1:1-2 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

Ephesians 6:6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

1 Peter 2:15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

1 Peter 4:2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

1 Peter 5:2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

Principles We Must Apply

Devotion and Desire

The essential foundation for discovering and doing God's will is devotion to God and a desire to do His will—to please and glorify Him.

Psalms 25:12 Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Psalm 37:4-5 Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.

1 Thessalonians 4:1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God just as you actually do walk, that you may excel still more.

James 4:3-4 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Ephesians 6:6 ... not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

2 Timothy 2:4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

We Need Facts and Data

Data From the Word of God

Precepts or Commands: This refers to *detailed commands* of the Word given to guide our conduct. It is God's will for us to pray, read our Bibles, assemble together regularly, for husbands to love their wives, etc. We are not to steal, commit adultery, lie, murder, spread gossip, grumble, or be critical. All such commands express the will of God.

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Illustration: If a road sign reads, "Speed Limit 30 MPH," this is a precept or command. A biblical precept is "forgive one another."

Principles or Guidelines: The *general directions or guidelines* have multiple applications. They form axioms to guide us where Scripture does not give us direct commands.

Illustration: If a road sign reads, "Drive Carefully," it gives us a general principle to be applied in a variety of conditions. A biblical principle is "all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable" (1 Cor. 10:23). In Christ we have liberty to do a number of things not specifically forbidden in Scripture, but are they profitable for our body or for our testimony to others?

Data From the World

Principles to apply for processing data from the world:

(1) Believers are not of this world but they are in it and must use it wisely not only to sustain life and care for their families, but also to carry on ministry. (Cf. Luke 22:31-36.)

John 17:14-18 I have given them Thy word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. 18 As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

1 Corinthians 7:31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

Ephesians 4:28 Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.

Ephesians 5:10-18 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

(2) God is transcendent, sovereign, and immanent. He is at work in the world and at work in our lives. So there are legitimate sources of data or facts we can use to discover what God is doing and thus, do the will of God.

Romans 1:10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 11:36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 15:32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent? 14 In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other So that man may not discover anything that will be after him.

(3) But Satan is also at work, so we must be careful to use the index or screen of God's Word as a filter to sift out what is contrary to the will of God.

2 Timothy 2:26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Ephesians 5:15-16 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word.

Data From Personal Information

Principles to apply for processing data about ourselves:

(1) God is the one who has fashioned us, and raised us up on the scene of human history in our time and particular location according to His purposes. Other than our sinfulness, this includes everything about us—our sex, talents, personalities, IQs, physical features, parents, background, time in history, etc.

Psalm 139:13-16 For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, And my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from Thee, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. 16 Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Thy book they were all written, The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Isaiah 43:7 Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

Isaiah 54:16 Behold, I Myself have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, And brings out a weapon for its work; And I have created the destroyer to ruin.

Exodus 9:16 But, indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.

(2) As Christians, God has also given us spiritual gifts to enable us for spiritual ministries in the body of Christ and in the world (cf. also 1 Cor. 12:3-12).

Romans 12:3-8 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

(3) Each person is unique with a special design and purpose for his or her life according to the call and direction of God.

Psalm 119:73 Thy hands made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments.

Psalm 139:14 I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, And my soul knows it very well.

Romans 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Other Data to Consider

(1) Circumstances, open and closed doors.

1 Corinthians 7:20-21 Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.

Philippians 1:12-18 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.

Romans 15:32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

(2) Information, facts, and figures economically, politically, geographically, and socially.

(3) Personal disposition, personality, likes and dislikes.

(4) Gifts, talents, abilities, education, training, experience, and preparation.

(5) Physical condition or health, age.

(6) Sex (male or female).

Illustration: There may be an opening for a guard on a professional basketball team, but I know that is not God's will for my life. That I'm too old, too slow, and too short would be three very good reasons. The point is, we must learn to see that God is at work through our circumstances. Things do not just happen to us by chance or accident.

Summary Principles

(1) We must learn to be sensitive to use the data of our world (health, gifts, training, finances, sicknesses, and other conditions).

(2) We should seek to learn from these facts, to draw from them and even rest in them, and trust that God is in control and uses and works all things together.

(3) In examining all the data, we need to remember the Word must always be our index for what is right and wrong.

Hebrews 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Isaiah 55:7-9 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Proverbs 2:9 Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course.

God never gives or sends us data contrary to His Word. Satan does and so does the world, but not the Lord. For instance, a Christian woman may be inclined to marry a man named Charlie, but if Charlie is not a believer, she may rest assured, God is not at work in that inclination because of the clear statements (God's will) in Scripture.

1 Corinthians 7:39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

(4) Discerning God's will is not simply a matter of what is right and wrong, but of what is best according to the priorities of the Word of God.

Philippians 1:10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

Philippians 1:20-21 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Matthew 6:19-20 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

(5) As a rule, God doesn't give us desires contrary to common sense. A person may be inclined to marry someone they have known for only a few days. That doesn't make sense. You can't get to know

someone that quickly. Or, someone may want to quit his job and go into business—with a new baby, and no savings, and a pile of debts. But that doesn't make sense either, at least not for now.

(6) Similarly, the Lord does not give us inner desires which are contrary to other sensible data from the world. A person may want to become an artist or an architect but does he have artistic talent or drafting capabilities? If not, it is probably not of the Lord.

(7) All inclinations to do things that are contrary to Scripture are never of the Lord. *The Word of God is the key.* Check all desires and inclinations by the Word, its precepts and principles. If they square with Scripture, they could be from God, however, we still need to give it time and check it with the other data. We are to pray and ask for wisdom.

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

(8) The biggest key is *personal fellowship*. Luke 16:10 sets down a principle that may be applicable here. It says, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much." Crucial to what we think of as the major decisions of life—school, marriage, vocation, purchasing a car, house, etc.—is our faithfulness in our walk with the Lord and our commitment to Him in the routine of our daily life. This not only gives us discernment, but the spiritual ability to make right choices that put God's interests ahead of our own (cf. also Luke 14:25-27).

Psalm 119:133 Establish my footsteps in Thy word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.

Romans 12:1-2 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Matthew 16:23-24 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Ephesians 5:9-18 (for the fruit of the light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth),¹⁰ trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.¹¹ And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;¹² for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.¹³ But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.¹⁴ For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil.¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

While divine guidance will remove some of the bumps, give rest, and make life more pleasant, its primary purpose is not to make life like an interstate highway, without any bumps, potholes, or danger-

ous driving conditions. Divine guidance is designed to enable us to glorify the Lord and fulfill His will regardless of what life may bring.

Lesson 7:
Assurance of Eternal Rewards
The Doctrine of the Bema

A prominent doctrine of the New Testament concerns the Doctrine of Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is a doctrine often ignored or, when taught, it is misrepresented because of the term “judgment” that is used in translating the Greek text. Commenting on this Samuel Hoyt writes:

Within the church today there exists considerable confusion and debate regarding the exact nature of the examination at the judgment seat of Christ. The expression “the judgment seat of Christ” in the English Bible has tended to cause some to draw the wrong conclusion about the nature and purpose of this evaluation. A common misconception which arises from this English translation is that God will mete out a just retribution for sins in the believer’s life, and some measure of retributive punishment for sins will result.¹

As will be shown below, though it is tremendously serious with eternal ramifications, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place and time when the Lord will mete out punishment for sins committed by the child of God. Rather, it is a place where rewards will be given or lost depending on how a believer has lived his life for the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, the Apostle Paul drew courage and was motivated by the fact of rewards at the return of the Lord for the church which he mentions in every chapter in this epistle and which becomes the primary subject of 2 Thessalonians. The Lord’s return and what this means, not only to the world but to us individually, is a very prominent subject of the New Testament.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

It is significant that among the final words of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we find these words of the Lord: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12).

While salvation is a gift, there are rewards given for faithfulness in the Christian life as well as the loss of rewards for unfaithfulness. Rewards become one of the great motivations of the Christian’s life or should. But we need to understand the nature of these rewards in order to understand the nature of the motivation. Some people are troubled by the doctrine of rewards because this seems to suggest “merit” instead of “grace,” and because, it is pointed out, we should only serve the Lord out of love and for God’s glory.

Of course we should serve the Lord out of love and for God’s glory, and understanding the nature of rewards will help us do that. But the fact still remains that the Bible promises us rewards. God gives us salvation. It is a gift through faith, but He rewards us for good works. God graciously supplies the means by which we may serve Him. Indeed, He works in us both to will and to do as we volitionally appropriate

¹ Samuel Hoyt, “The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective, Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January-March, 1980, electronic media, p. 32.

His grace, but the decision to serve, and the diligence employed in doing so, are our responsibility and contribution, and God sees this as rewardable. Note the following passages:

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Colossians 1:29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Romans 14:10-11 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God."

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Revelation 3:11-12 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

The Meaning of the Judgment (*Bema*) Seat

Both Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 speak of the "judgment seat." This is a translation of one Greek word, *Bema*. While *Bema* is used in the gospels and Acts of the raised platform where a Roman magistrate or ruler sat to make decisions and pass sentence, its use in the epistles of Paul is more in keeping with its original use among the Greeks because of his many allusions to the Greek athletic contests.

Romans 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

This word was taken from Isthmian games where the contestants would compete for the prize under the careful scrutiny of judges who would make sure that every rule of the contest was obeyed. The victor of a given event who participated according the rules was led by the judge to the platform called the Bema. There the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory.

2 Timothy 2:5 And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

In all of these passages ...

Paul was picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the Bema to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ's Bema to receive his imperishable award. The judge at the Bema bestowed rewards to the victors. *He did not whip the losers.*²

We might add, neither did he sentence them to hard labor.

In other words, it is a reward seat and portrays a time of rewards or loss of rewards following examination. But it is not a time of punishment where believers are judged for their sins. Such would be inconsistent with the finished work of Christ on the cross because He totally paid the penalty for our sins. Chafer and Walvoord have an excellent word on this view:

With reference to sin, Scripture teaches that the child of God under grace shall not come into judgment (John 3:18; 5:24; 6:37; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; 1 Cor. 11:32); in his standing before God, and on the ground that the penalty for all sin—past, present, and future (Col. 2:13)—has been borne by Christ as the perfect Substitute, the believer is not only placed beyond condemnation, but being in Christ is accepted in the perfection of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:10; Heb. 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23).³

² Hoyt, 37.

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes: 52 Vital Doctrines of the Scripture Simplified and Explained*, revised by John F. Walvoord, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1974, p. 282.

Again, Chafer writes concerning the Bema, “It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the judgment is unrelated to the problem of sin, that it is more for the bestowing of rewards than the rejection of failure.”⁴

The Time of the Bema

The Bema will occur immediately following the rapture or resurrection of the church, after believers are caught up to be with the Lord in the air as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Arguments or Reasons in Support of This View:

(1) In Luke 14:12-14, reward is associated with the resurrection and the rapture is when the church is resurrected.

Luke 14:12-14 And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. 13 But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

(2) In Revelation 19:8, when the Lord returns with His bride at the end of the Tribulation, she is seen already rewarded. Her reward is described as fine linen, the righteous acts of the saints—undoubtedly the result of rewards.

Revelation 19:8 And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

(3) In 2 Timothy 4:8 and 1 Corinthians 4:5, rewards are associated with “that day” and with the Lord’s coming. Again, for the church this means the event of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

2 Timothy 4:8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4: Ecclesiology-Eschatology, Dallas Seminary Press, Dallas, TX, 1948, p. 406.

and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

So the order of events will be (a) the rapture which includes our glorification or resurrection bodies, (b) exaltation into the heavens with the Lord, (c) examination before the Bema and (d) compensation or rewards.

The Place of the Bema

The Bema will occur somewhere in the heavenlies in the presence of the Lord. This is evident from the following passages:

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Revelation 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

The Participants at the Bema

All the passages dealing with the Bema are addressed to believers or pertain to believers of the church. Note the emphasis on good works.

Romans 14:10-12 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." 12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

1 Timothy 6:18-19 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Titus 2:12-14 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

The resurrection program and thus the rewarding of Old Testament saints occurs after the Tribulation, after church age saints are already seen in heaven, rewarded, and returning with the Lord to judge the earth (cf. also Matt. 24).

Revelation 19:8 And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Daniel 12:1-2 Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

All believers, regardless of their spiritual state, will be raptured and will stand before the Bema to give an account of their lives. At that time they will either receive rewards or lose rewards. Some believe in a partial rapture theory which says that only those in fellowship with the Lord will be raptured as a form of punishment for sin. As mentioned above, this is not only contrary to the finished work of Christ who once and for all paid the penalty for our sins, but it is contrary to the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11:

8 But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. 11 Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. 12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men. 16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Please note verses 9 and 10. The context suggest that Paul has in mind the return of Christ for the church—the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The rapture is the means of our deliverance from the wrath he discusses in chapter 5:1-3. Further, the words “awake or asleep” of verse 10 refer to a spiritual or moral condition, not whether one is alive or dead when Christ returns as in 4:13-14. This is clear from both the context of 5:4-8 and by the fact he changed the Greek words he used for sleep. In 5:10 he used the Greek *katheudo* rather than *koimao*, the word he used metaphorically in 4:13-14 of physical death. Though *katheudo* was used of physical sleep and even death, it was also commonly used of spiritual apathy or indifference to spiritual matters, and this is clearly the context of chapter 5. The point, then, is this: Because of the perfect and finished nature of Christ's death (note the words “who died for us” of verse 10),

whether we are spiritually alert or not, we will live together with Him through the rapture to face the examination of the Bema.

The Examiner at the Bema

The Examiner is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who is even now examining our lives and will bring to light the true nature of our walk and works when we stand before Him at the Bema. In Romans 14:10 the Apostle called this examination time the Bema of God while in 2 Corinthians 5:10 he called it the Bema of Christ. The point is that Jesus who is God is our examiner and rewarder.

1 Corinthians 4:5-9 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Romans 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

The Purpose and Basis of the Bema

The purpose and the basis is the most critical issue of all and brings us face to face with the practical aspects of the Bema. Some crucial questions are: Why are we brought before the Bema? Is it only for rewards or their loss? Will any punishment be meted out? Will there be great sorrow? What's the basis on which the Bema is conducted? Is it sin, good works, or just what?

Within the church, there exists a good deal of confusion and disagreement concerning the exact nature of the Bema. The use of the term "judgment seat" in most translations, ignorance of the historical and cultural background concerning the Bema, and foggy theology regarding the finished work of Christ have all contributed to several common misconceptions which, in one way or another, see God as giving out just retribution to believers for sin, or at least for our unconfessed sin.

Three Views of the Bema

For a summary of three major views, let me quote Samuel L. Hoyt from *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

Some Bible teachers view the judgment seat as a place of intense sorrow, a place of terror, and a place where Christ displays all the believer's sins (or at least those unconfessed) before the entire resurrected and raptured church. Some go even further by stating that Christians must experience some sort of suffering for their sins at the time of this examination.

At the other end of the spectrum another group, which holds to the same eschatological chronology, views this event as an awards ceremony. Awards are handed out to every Christian. The result of this judgment will be that each Christian will be grateful for the reward which he receives, and he will have little or no shame.

Other Bible teachers espouse a mediating position. They maintain the seriousness of the examination and yet emphasize the commendation aspect of the judgment seat. They emphasize the importance and necessity of faithful living today but reject any thought of forensic punishment at the Bema. Emphasis is placed on the fact that each Christian must give an account of his life before the omniscient and holy Christ. All that was done through the energy of the flesh will be regarded as worthless for reward, while all that was done in the power of the Holy Spirit will be graciously rewarded. Those who hold this view believe that the Christian will stand glorified before Christ without his old sin nature. He will, likewise, be without guilt because he has been declared righteous. There will be no need for forensic punishment, for Christ has forever borne all of God's wrath toward the believer's sins.⁵

This last view I believe to be the one that is in accord with Scripture. Reasons for this will be set forth and developed as we study the nature, purpose, and basis for the Bema. But for now, lest we draw some wrong conclusions, we need to be ever mindful that God's Word clearly teaches there are specific and very serious consequences, both temporal and eternal, for sin or disobedience. Though we will not be judged in the sense of punished for sin at the Bema because the Lord has born that for us, we must never take sin lightly because of its consequences.

The Present Consequences of Sin

While the following is not exhaustive, it demonstrates that sin in the life of a believer is no small issue.

1. Loss of Fellowship With the Lord

Known sin in the believer's life causes a loss of intimate fellowship with the Lord with the consequent loss of His joy and peace.

Psalm 32:3-4 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

2. Divine Discipline From the Lord

We should not think of discipline as punishment. Discipline from God is the gracious work of a Father to train and develop His children. Sometimes this comes in the form of various kinds of testing, trials, failure, and predicaments which He uses to correct us and to train us, and if we have been going our own stubborn way, to increase our misery. The goal, however, is always to bring us back to Him. If the believer remains unrepentant, this can lead to the sin unto death as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and some of the believers at Corinth who were failing to confess their sin and get right with the Lord.

⁵ Hoyt, pp. 32-33.

Hebrews 12:5-11 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov’d by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

1 Corinthians 11:28-30 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

3. Loss of Power and Production

When we fail to deal with our sinful ways through honest confession, we grieve the Spirit’s person and quench His power in our lives. This means that rather than operating by faith in God’s provision, we end up operating in the energy of the flesh. We turn to our personal bag of tricks by which we seek to handle life. This results in the works of the flesh and their awful and fruitless consequences. Without the abiding life, the life of faith and obedience to the Savior, we can do nothing.

Galatians 3:1-5 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 5:1-5 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Galatians 5:19-21, 26 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things

like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ... 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Jeremiah 2:12-13 “Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate,” declares the LORD. 13 “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.”

John 15:1-7 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

4. Loss of Opportunities

When we are in control of our lives rather than the Lord, we become insensitive to people and opportunities for ministry—we lack vision. Carnal believers have no vision other than their own personal agendas and selfish goals.

John 4:34-38 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. 35 Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. 36 Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37 For in this case the saying is true, ‘One sows, and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

5. Loss of Desire and Motivation for Service

Carnal believers are occupied and controlled by their own self-centered desires. Perhaps this is a good place to discuss the concept of selfishness and rewards for some see an appeal to rewards as selfish and therefore carnal.

Galatians 5:16-17 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

Zane Hodges has some good thoughts on this concept:

Scripture does not teach us to be uninterested in our own happiness or well-being. The very desire to escape eternal damnation is a legitimate and urgent self-interest.

The instinct to preserve our lives is the same. Nor are pleasure and enjoyment illegitimate experiences.

When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, He furnished them with “every tree ... that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen. 2:9). They could enjoy themselves freely provided they abstained from eating from the one forbidden tree. Similarly, Paul tells rich people that “God ... gives us richly all things *to enjoy*” (1 Tim. 6:17; italics added).

Selfishness ought not to be defined simply as the pursuit of our own self-interest. Instead, it should be defined as the pursuit of our self-interest *in our own way*, rather than in God’s way. Since “love” is a preeminent virtue in Christianity, true selfishness often involves a pursuit of self-interest that violates the law of love.⁶

Self-interest in God’s way is legitimate. Self-centeredness or selfishness is preoccupation with self at the expense of others and God’s will in one’s life. When Adam and Eve chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they acted in self-centered independence which was idolatry and sin. When they enjoyed each other and the fruit trees and blessings of the garden, they acted in their self-interest but they did so in dependence on and in obedience to the Lord.

6. Broken Relationships and Disharmony

Carnality causes broken relationships and pain to those around us—our families, friends, associates, and co-workers in the body of Christ.

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.

Hebrews 12:15-17 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

7. Loss of Physical Health and Vitality

Of course all sickness, weakness, or suffering is not a product of sin, but it can be and often is.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

⁶ Zane C. Hodges, “We Believe in: Rewards,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Autumn 1991, p. 7.

Proverbs 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones.

Proverbs 14:30 A tranquil heart is life to the body, But passion is rotteness to the bones.

8. Loss of Rewards at the Bema

There will be the loss of rewards as seen in the following passage:

1 Corinthians 13:13-15 Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

The Purpose of the Bema Developed

The Bema is not punitive. It is not to judge believers for sin of any kind, confessed or unconfessed.

Scripture teaches that for the believer God's justice has already been fully and forever satisfied at the Cross in relation to the believer's sins. If God were to punish the believer judicially for his sins for which Christ has already rendered payment, He would be requiring two payments for sin and would therefore be unjust. Such a concept (punishment for sin) erroneously disparages the all-sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross.⁷

Christ paid the penalty for the believer's pre- and post-conversion sins. The believer will forfeit rewards which he could have received, but he will not be punished in the judicial sense of "paying" for his sins.

Scripture teaches that all sins, both confessed and unconfessed, have been forgiven and taken care of by the work of Christ on the cross, so the Christian will never face those sins again at the judgment. The following verses demonstrate the basic principle of the complete and finished nature of Christ's Work.

Romans 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more.

Hebrews 10:14, 17-18 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. ... 17 "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

⁷ Hoyt, pp. 33-34.

Isaiah 38:17 Lo, for my own welfare I had great bitterness; It is Thou who hast kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.

Isaiah 44:22 I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud, And your sins like a heavy mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.

Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

We cannot come into judgment. Why? Because Christ has born our judgment by being made a curse in our place.

Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

John 3:18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Then why do we have to confess sin? And why does God judge believers for unconfessed sin as with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and some of the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11:28f? Because this is a completely different matter.

Unconfessed sin relates to fellowship in this life, not to our relationship or standing with God. Unconfessed sin stands as a barrier to fellowship and His control over our life. As Amos 3:3 says, “can two walk together unless they be agreed?” Obviously the answer is no.

Confession means we agree with God concerning our sin and want to get back under God’s control. “Daily forgiveness of those who are within the family of God is distinguished from judicial and positional forgiveness which was applied forensically to all of a person’s sins the moment he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Hoyt, p. 38). We need to distinguish between fellowship forgiveness and legal or forensic forgiveness that justifies us and gives us a standing before God through Christ.

Key Scriptures:

Hebrews 12:5-11 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

These passages explain the nature of God's judgment of believers in this life. It is discipline designed to train and bring us back to a walk with God. They also teach us the basic cause of discipline is failure to examine and confess known sins because they hinder our fellowship with God.

In 1 Corinthians 11:32, "Condemned along with the world," most likely refers to the judgment of Romans 1:24f, moral degeneration and the gradual breakdown in the moral fiber of men when they turn away from God. The same thing happens in the life of believers, but God brings discipline to stop the process.

1 Corinthians 11:32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Romans 1:24-31 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

God does not judge us for our sin in the sense of making us pay the penalty for that sin.

Scripture teaches that Christ's death was all-sufficient, completely satisfying God's wrath toward sin in the believer. The question of sin in regard to God's justice has been forever satisfied in the mind of God by the all-sufficient sacrifice of His Son. The penalty for the believer's sins has been fully paid for by Christ, the believer's substitute. The Christian has been in court, condemned, sentenced, and executed in his substitute, Jesus Christ. God cannot exact payment for sins twice since payment has been fully and forever paid. The believer is seen by the Father as clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God can therefore find no cause for accusing the Christian judicially any more than He can find cause for accusing Jesus Christ. Therefore, at

the judgment seat of Christ forensic punishment will not be meted out for the believer's sins.⁸

Rather, God disciplines us as a father disciplines his sons to bring us back into fellowship that we might be conformed to His Son. It is a family matter.

The Positive Aspects of the Bema

To Evaluate the Believer's Work

The Bema will be a time to evaluate the quality of every believer's work whether it is good or bad, i.e., acceptable and thus worthy of rewards, or unacceptable, to be rejected and unworthy of rewards. Actually an evaluation is going on every day by the Lord (cf. Rev. 2-3).

To Remove Unacceptable Production

The Bema will be a time to remove and destroy unacceptable production portrayed in the symbols of wood, hay, and stubble. All sinful deeds, thoughts, and motives, as well as all good deeds done in the energy of the flesh will be consumed like wood, hay, and stubble in a fire because they are unworthy of reward. Why? This will be answered as we consider the basis on which rewards are given or lost.

To Reward the Believer

The Bema will be the time believers are rewarded for all the good they have done as portrayed by the symbols of gold, silver, and precious stones, that which is valuable and can stand the test of fire without being consumed because they were works done under the control of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

"Evident" is *phaneros* which means "known, plain, visible, revealed as to its nature." "The day" refers to a day well known and refers to the day of the Bema after the rapture of the church. "Declare it" is *deloo* which means "to make evident, clear." "Be revealed" is *apokalupto* meaning "to unveil." "Test" is *dokimazo* and means "to test for the sake of approval." "The quality" is *hopoion*, a correlative and qualitative pronoun meaning "of what sort or kind."

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

"Bring to light" is *photizo*, "to bring to light, make visible." "Disclose" is *phaneroo*, "to manifest, reveal." The issue should be extremely clear from these two verses: The Lord will evaluate the quality and nature of every person's work.

⁸ Hoyt, p. 38.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Revelation 22:12 Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

The Negative Aspects of the Bema

There are a number of passages that refer to the negative aspects of the Bema which need to be mentioned and explained. In these passages we read such things as “give account of himself,” “suffer loss,” “shrink away from Him in shame,” and “recompense for his deeds ... whether good or bad.”

Will believers experience shame, grief, remorse at the Bema? If so, how do we reconcile this with passages like Revelation 7:17, “God shall wipe away every tear from their eye,” and Revelation 21:4, “and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away,” or with Isaiah 65:17, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind”?

The negative effects involve the following terms or ideas:

The Forfeiting of Rewards

The loss suffered in 1 Corinthians 3:15 refers to the loss of rewards and not salvation as the verse goes on to make clear. Please note that the clause “he shall suffer loss” would be better rendered “it (the reward) shall be forfeited.”

1 Corinthians 3:15 If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Disqualification

The disqualification mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:27 means disqualified from rewards, not loss of salvation. This is clear from the context and the analogy to the Greek athletic games.

1 Corinthians 9:27 but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

Recompense

The “recompense” or the “receive back” (KJV) of 2 Corinthians 5:10 refers to the dispensing of rewards or their loss. The verb used is *komizo* and means “to carry off safe,” “to carry off as booty.” In the middle voice as here, it meant “to bear for oneself,”⁹ or “to receive back what is one’s own.”¹⁰

⁹ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 252.

¹⁰ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., Regency, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 468.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Matthew 25:27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest.

Ephesians 6:8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

That dispensing of rewards in view is also evident from the Greek words in 2 Corinthians 5:10 translated “good” (*agathos*—valuable like good fruit) and “bad” (*phaulos*—unacceptable like rotten or spoiled fruit). The idea is not good in the sense of righteousness versus bad in the sense of evil or sinfulness. For those ideas Paul would have most likely used *kalos*, “good,” and *kakos*, “evil.” For good works, those valuable like good fruit, we will receive back rewards, but for bad works, those rotten and worthless, we will lose rewards.

This is no more a punishment than when a student turns in a worthless assignment and receives an F or a D. His poor work results in a just grade or recompense. This is what his work deserves. When I was at Dallas Theological Seminary there was a sign in the registrar’s office which read, “Salvation is by grace ... Graduation is by works.”

Shrinking Away

Another term used of the negative aspects of the Bema is found in 1 John 2:28. This verse undoubtedly refers to the Bema and shows there will be both boldness as a result of abiding, and shame before the Lord as a result of failing to abide.

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

“And now little children” is John’s term of endearment for his readers as born again people.

The phrase “abide in Him” is a synonym for fellowship which is the subject of the book (1:3-7). It means to remain in Him from the standpoint of drawing on His life as the source of ours and then to obey Him out of that relationship of dependence. This is the basis of rewards, or if absent, the cause of their loss. The abiding, Christ dependent life is the issue.

“So that” points us to the purpose, the return of the Savior and what it will mean.

“When He appears.” “When” points to the imminency of the return of the Lord. It is literally “if He appears.” The conditional clause does not question the reality of Christ’s coming, only the time of it and thereby points to its imminency. “Appears” refers to the rapture which leads quickly into the Bema.

“We may have confidence.” “Confidence” is *parresia* and means “courage, boldness to speak.” Though none of us are perfect or ever will be, still, faithfulness to abide and obey the Lord will give confidence of rewards.

“And not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming (presence).” Please note several things here. The verb is what we call in Greek an aorist subjunctive, and with the basic meaning of this verb, the grammar points to a future act, but not a continuous state. This in no way suggests a permanent condi-

tion. The voice of the verb is passive. The subject receives the action, that is, he is made to feel shame. But how? There are two views:

(1) The believer who does not abide is made to feel shame by the Lord, i.e., the Lord puts him to shame. This would be somewhat punitive and does not fit the concept of the Bema or the promises of the Lord that we will not come into judgment.

(2) The believer who does not abide is made to feel shame by the revelatory nature of the event caused by his own awareness and realization of what his own failure and sin has caused him in terms of the loss of rewards and loss of glory to the Lord. But this will only be momentary at best in view of passages like the following:

Revelation 7:17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.

Revelation 21:4 and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

Hoyt has a good summary of what this passage is talking about and involves:

The Bible suggests that there will be shame at the judgment seat of Christ to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the measure of unfaithfulness of each individual believer. Therefore it should be each believer's impelling desire to be well-pleasing to the Lord in all things. Although Christians apparently will reflect on this earthly life with some regret, they will also realize what is ahead for them in the heavenly life. This latter realization will be the source of boundless joy. English strikes a proper balance on this subject.

Joy will indeed be the predominant emotion of life with the Lord; but I suspect that, when our works are made manifest at the tribunal, some grief will be mixed with the joy, and we shall know shame as we suffer loss. But we shall rejoice also as we realize that the rewards given will be another example of the grace of our Lord; for at best we are unprofitable servants.¹¹

The elements of remorse, regret, and shame cannot be avoided in an examination of the judgment seat of Christ. But this sorrow must be somewhat relative because even for the finest of Christians there will be some things worthy of unceasing remorse in the light of God's unapproachable holiness. This would mean that the finest of Christians could be sorrowful throughout eternity. However, this is not the picture that the New Testament gives of heaven. The overwhelming emotion is joyfulness and gratefulness. Although there is undeniably some measure of remorse or regret, this is not the overriding emotion to be experienced throughout the eternal state.

The emotional condition of the redeemed is that of complete and unending happiness. Emotion proceeds from the realization of facts in personal experience. Hope will at last become reality for all those who are delivered from the bondage of corruption in-

¹¹ E. Schuyler English, "The Church At the Tribunal," in *Prophetic Truth Unfolding Today*, ed. Charles Lee Feingberg, Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, NJ, 1968, p. 29.

to the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:18-25). Elimination of the curse, pain and death will also remove sorrow, tears and crying (Rev. 21:4).

The judgment seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder. However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have been graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.¹²

The Nature of the Rewards

What are these rewards? How are they described in Scripture? What we learn about rewards from Scripture is in terms that are more general than specific. These are:

(1) The promise of crowns. This seems to be used as a symbol of victory, authority and responsibility.

(2) The promise of heavenly treasure. This stresses their eternal value and security.

Matthew 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

1 Peter 1:4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

(3) The promise of accolades or commendations. This is seen in those passages where a reward is administered in the form of something like “well done thou good and faithful servant ...”

Matthew 25:21 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.’

Luke 19:17 And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.’

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.

(4) The promises to overcomers. These could refer to special blessing of rewards to those believers who overcome special trials and tests rather than a general promise to all believers.

¹² Samuel Hoyt, “The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective,” Part 2, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, electronic media, p. 131.

Revelation 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Revelation 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

Revelation 2:17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.

Revelation 2:26 And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations;

(5) The promise of special responsibilities and authority over the Lord's possessions.

Matthew 19:28 And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Matthew 24:45-47 Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 47 Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

Matthew 25:21, 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.' ... 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Luke 19:17-19 And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' 18 And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' 19 And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

Luke 22:29-30 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Revelation 2:26 And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations;

Analogies to Consider

(1) **A Thanksgiving dinner.** At a Thanksgiving dinner, each person eats a different amount, but each is satisfied. After our glorification, there will be no sinful nature to produce envy, or jealousy, or resentment, or feelings of dissatisfaction. We will each be enthralled with God and our glorified state.

(2) **A bat boy at the World Series.** Any young man who loves baseball would be thrilled to be a bat boy in the World Series, and he would not be jealous or resentful because he was not one of the stars of the game. He would just be delighted to be there doing what he was doing.

(3) **A graduate at commencement.** All the graduates are there and excited about graduating, yet at the time of rewards, some sorrow might be experienced, but it is quickly overcome by the joy of the event.

(4) **Our spiritual gifts.** Our rewards may be likened to our spiritual gifts. Our rewards seem to be primarily a matter of responsibility and maybe opportunities. They will not be like badges or medals worn in the military. Remember that all of our crowns will be cast at the feet of Christ, for only He is worthy. Also, Matthew 25:21, 23 and Luke 19:17-19 show us our rewards consist of authority over either many things or many cities. They may include galaxies of the universe. All believers will live in the millennium and in eternity with the Lord. Some will reign with Him, but, because of loss of rewards, evidently some will not.

Revelation 4:10-11 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."

Matthew 25:21-23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.' 22 The one also who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted to me two talents; see, I have gained two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Luke 19:17-19 And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' 18 And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' 19 And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

(5) **In Scripture, the church is viewed as the heavenly kingdom and a universal priesthood.** This may indicate something of our authority. We may rule over galaxies, celestial bodies, the heavens, and definitely over angels, and the world.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?

1 Corinthians 4:8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.

(6) **Israel is the earthly kingdom ...** and will undoubtedly have authority over portions and sections of the millennial kingdom and the eternal kingdom as emphasized in Matthew 25:21; Luke 19:17-19 (see above).

Daniel 7:18, 22, 27 18 But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come ... 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. ... 27 Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.

Crowns of the New Testament

Words Used for Crowns

Stephanos

This was the victor's crown, the wreath given to the victorious athlete before the judge at the Bema. It is the word used of the crowns promised to believers for faithfulness in the Christian life.

Diadem

This was the royal crown, the crown of a king. It is used of the seven diadems of the Beast in Revelation 12:3 and 13:1. To stress that Christ is King of kings, this word is also used of the many diadems the Lord will wear at His return.

Revelation 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The Lord Jesus is the Victor, and our victory is really His victory which is appropriated by faith. Crowns are given as rewards for faithfulness to appropriate God's grace and Christ's victory in the Christian life. They remind us of our responsibility to abide in the vine.

Significance of the Crowns

The Crown of Thorns

The crown of thorns speaks of Christ's work on the cross and stands for His victory over sin, Satan, and death.

Matthew 27:29 And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Mark 15:17 And they dressed Him up in purple, and after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on Him;

John 19:2, 5, 2 And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and arrayed Him in a purple robe; ... 5 Jesus therefore came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!"

The Incorruptible Crown

This describes all the crowns. It contrasts our crowns with the temporal and temporary treasure of this life. It is also a special crown given for faithfulness in running the race and exercising self-control in order to serve the Lord and finish the race.

1 Corinthians 9:25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

The Crown of Exultation or Rejoicing

This crown is a reward given for witnessing, follow-up, and ministry to others. In one sense, the Thessalonians will be Paul's crown, and the effect at the Bema and throughout eternity will be rejoicing or exultation over their presence in heaven.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

But what did Paul mean that the Thessalonians will be his crown? In view of his use of "crown" (*stephanos*, the victor's wreath) in other places, and the fact believers will cast their crowns before the Lord, Paul may also have in mind a personal crown or reward that he will receive because of their presence at the return of the Lord. Though, in this passage the Apostle does not say he would receive a crown, this is suggested, if not here certainly in other passages. Though some of them were not living as they should, looking ahead and seeing them in glory brought joy and would bring great rejoicing.

Revelation 4:10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

The Crown of Life

This crown is given for enduring testings (trials) and temptation (Jam. 1:12; Rev. 2:10). The crown is not eternal life which is a gift through faith alone in Christ alone, but a reward for enduring trials and overcoming temptation.

James 1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Revelation 2:10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

Romans 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Romans 5:15-17 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

The Crown of Righteousness

This crown is a reward given for faithfulness to use our gifts and opportunities in the service of the Lord and for loving His appearing. Note that these two things go together. To love His appearing is to live in the light of it.

2 Timothy 4:8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

The Crown of Glory

The crown of glory is a reward promised to elders for faithfulness in the discharge of their responsibilities in shepherding the people.

1 Peter 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

The Casting of Crowns

Because Christ alone is worthy and because we can only be fruitful when we abide in Him allowing His life to fill ours, we will all cast our crowns before Him in recognition that all we have done is by His grace.

Revelation 4:10-11 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."

The Many Crowns (Diadems)

These are the crowns of royalty which stand for Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords who alone has the right to rule and judge the world.

Revelation 19:12 And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself.

Conclusion

This concludes our study on the various ways God has assured us of His infinite care and complete love. God's assurance extends from that past assurance of our salvation in Christ, through the present and all the various needs of life—security, daily provision, forgiveness, victory over sin, and guidance through the maze of life. But by His grace, it doesn't even stop there. As this last lesson has shown us, His assurance extends beyond to the eternal future. In this we see His blessed assurance that our labors are never in vain in the Lord because it is His plan to reward faithful believers for their service to Him as they overcome by faith in His matchless grace.

Is it any wonder that the author of Hebrews referred to our salvation in Christ with the words, "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3)? But it is also fitting that we close this study by reflecting on his warning with regard to our "so great salvation." He wrote:

Hebrews 2:1-4 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away *from* it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Since under the Old Testament Covenant, instituted through angels, Old Testament saints received severe judgments for disobedience, we must never imagine that we, as members of the New Covenant, shall escape the consequences of ignoring our so great salvation accomplished by none other than the Son of God Himself. With this salvation has come the assurance of God's perfect provision past, present, and future. As good stewards of the blessings God has given us, we have an awesome obligation to act upon our new life in Christ as faithful recipients of this so great salvation.

In regard to this warning Zane Hodges explains:

If the readers lost sight of the ultimate victory and deliverance that was promised to them in connection with the Son's own final victory, they could expect retribution. What its nature might be the writer did not spell out, but it would be unwarranted to think he was talking about hell. The "we" which pervades the passage shows that the author included himself among those who needed to pay close attention to these truths.

The "salvation," of course, is the same as that just mentioned in 1:14 ... and alludes to the readers' potential share in the Son's triumphant dominion, in which He has "companions" (cf. 1:9). The Lord Jesus Himself, while on earth, spoke much of His future kingdom and the participation of His faithful followers in that reign (cf., e.g., Luke 12:31-32; 22:29-30). But **this salvation** experience, **which was first announced by the Lord** had also received confirmation through the various miracles and manifestations of the Spirit which His original auditors, **those who heard Him**, were empowered to exhibit. In speaking like this, the writer of Hebrews regarded these **miracles** as the powers of the coming Age (cf. Heb. 6:5) and, in harmony with

the early Christians in the Book of Acts, saw them as expressions of the sovereignty of the One who had gone to sit at God's right hand (cf. "signs," "wonders," and/or "miracles" in Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12; also cf. 2 Cor. 12:12). That the author was indeed thinking throughout of "the world to come" is made clear in Hebrews 2:5.¹³

The concern is not for the loss of salvation, which is eternally secure in Christ, but for failure to live by faith, sharing daily in His glorious power and life, and doing this always with a view to the eternal rewards of His coming kingdom.

¹³ Zane Hodges, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, editors John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Scripture Press, Wheaton, Illinois, 1983, 1985 p. 783.

**Part Two:
The Transformed Life**

Preface

Spiritual growth is a life-long, ongoing process. In this process of maturing, every believer needs a thorough grasp of what can be called 'Truths That Transform.' These are growth truths of Scripture designed by God to transform us into the image of Christ. These are the truths that enable us to live more and more dependently on the Lord in accordance with the principles of Scripture. This means faith in the power of God rather than faith in our own schemes for how to live the Christian life.

There is a propensity in all of us to try to live the Christian life in our own strength, ever seeking to measure up to what we or someone else thinks we ought to be. The principles found in this series of lessons take believers through the faith/growth truths of Scripture that, when understood and appropriated by faith, enable them to experience change from the inside out through the Spirit of God.

These lessons build on the basics covered in *Part One: The Assured Life*, and at the same time prepare the way for the studies in *Part Three: The Multiplied Life*.

Lesson 1: The Purpose-Directed Life

Introduction

Do you have one single goal in life that consumes you, something that has become the primary force that stimulates and motivates you daily in everything that you do? Or do you feel like someone in a canoe whose objective seems to change with the various hazards he finds around every bend in the raging river as he is being propelled along trying to navigate white water, logs, and rocks. Life can be like that. If we are not careful, our goals and objectives are set for us by the demands of the everyday forces of life and by false belief systems.

Goals and objectives are tremendously important because they are dynamic and determinative of what we do with the life God has given us. It has been said, "Aim at nothing and you will hit it every time," and "People don't plan to fail, they just fail to plan." Without defining goals and then the objectives needed to accomplish those goals, most people accomplish very little. Of course, we all have goals, even if we haven't clearly defined them, and these goals determine a great deal of what we do.

Again, let me ask the question, if you could reduce your life to one primary goal, what would it be? On a day-to-day basis, what are you actually focused on and seeking to accomplish? Don't answer this question with what you think the answer should be, like, "My chief aim in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!" Or, "My goal in life is to please the Lord in everything I do!" Be honest. Think about what was on your mind every morning this week when you woke up or as you faced the varied circumstances of the week.

Were your thoughts on how you might change your spouse who doesn't treat you the way you want to be treated? Or how you might handle your boss who is a bully and unfair? Perhaps your focus was on your car which keeps breaking down, or on some home appliance that would make life easier. Perhaps your objective is to get through school with a 3.5 grade point average. Or maybe your goal is simply to keep your head above water in your job.

The world has a way of intruding like a thief into our lives to steal from us what should be our focus or the major objectives of life. These intrusions have a way of disturbing us, even though we may not realize the source, because in losing sight of God's purpose or goal we fail to see the problems of life in accord with God's overall purpose and consequent objectives.

Isaiah declares:

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast (being sustained), because he trusts (continues to depend on) in you. (Isaiah 26:3) (NIV)

God doesn't expect us to be oblivious to the problems and needs of life, but when our goals are God's goals we are better able to look through our problems to the Lord and His supply. When our focus is the Lord, something wonderful begins to happen in us: God begins to change us and make us like His Son "who for the joy set before Him (consuming goal) endured the cross, despising the shame, ..." (Heb. 12:2).

Joy and Peace: Consequences of God's Purpose

Isaiah 26:3 The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee (NASB).

One of the consequences of having God's purpose, as we see from Isaiah 26:3, is a life of peace even in the midst of trials. To prepare His disciples for His departure and absence, the Lord instructed them concerning their purpose in the world (John 13-16). In the midst of this instruction, just a few hours before the Lord Jesus went to the cross to die that we might have peace with God and know the peace of God, He made this very illuminating statement: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; *not as the world gives*, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27, emphasis mine).

Then, in Galatians 5:22, we are told that two character traits of the fruit of the Spirit are **joy** and **peace**. These verses teach us that when we are experiencing His life within ours (the Christ-exchanged life) we are going to experience joy and peace along with other Christlike qualities even in the midst of pain and suffering.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Many Christians, however, seem to have little joy or peace. One of the reasons is found in the Lord's statement regarding peace. We too often seek our joy and peace from that which the world gives rather than from the Savior who provides peace and joy in a very different way and from a very different source.

I am not at all suggesting that the goal of the Christian life is to be a self-centered focus like joy and peace. Joy and peace, however, do constitute part of the fruit of a life that is experiencing God and the spiritual transformation that He works within at the core of our being when He is truly the source of our trust. Joy and peace become **barometers** of how well we are resting all the various facets of our life on Him (Isa. 26:3). It's like taking our temperature. As a fever is indicative of an illness, so the absence of the joy and peace Christ gives is an indication something is wrong and we need the prescribed remedy of God's Word and healing touch of the Great Physician.

As illustrations compare the following passages:

Psalm 56:3 When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee.

Psalm 32:3-4 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Two key notes are sounded in the book of Philippians: "**Joy**" is found seven times, and "**peace**" is found only three times, but it is still a very important concept in the theme of the book (Phil. 4:6-7).

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of

God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Two other books which were written in the same year as Philippians were Ephesians and Colossians. These are companion or sister epistles and there is an interesting relationship that can be observed between these three epistles that is pertinent to the issue of joy and peace, and the transformed life.

Ephesians gives us the truth stated—in Christ ascended, in the heavenlies, blessed with every spiritual blessing. It declares the sublime truth of the believer's new position and identity in Christ. All believers are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the realm of the heavenlies in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

Colossians gives us the truth guarded—in Christ complete, sufficient in Christ. It protects the believer's new and glorious identity and what it should mean to his faith as the walk of faith is confronted with all sorts of religious systems claiming to be the answer for the spiritual life. Colossians shows that, since believers in Christ are complete in Him (2:10) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3), they need nothing more for transformed lives than Jesus Christ. He is our hope of glory both for heaven and for transformed living. We don't need the joy/peace killer of legalism nor the futility of any of man's religious or philosophical systems. As we have received Christ alone by faith in the message of the Gospel (1:4-5), so we are to continue to walk by means of His life by faith in the truth of God's Word (2:3-10).

Colossians 1:4-5 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel,

Colossians 2:3-10 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. 5 For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. 6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Colossians warns us against accepting man's substitutes for either justification or for sanctification (transformed living) because man's substitutes, or those of the world, are always faithless in our complete position in Christ and futile to our sinful condition.

Colossians 2:16-23 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is

from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 which all refer to things destined to perish with the using— in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Philippians gives us the truth practiced—in Christ satisfied, joy and peace in Christ. In a number of ways this epistle promotes the application of the messages of Ephesians (blessed with every spiritual blessing) and Colossians (in Christ complete). Philippians shows us how to know joy and peace as we walk down the path of life with its many ups and downs, its blessings and afflictions, and its pleasures and pain. Knowing we have such a glorious identity in Christ is obviously a cause for great joy and the source of true peace, but so often Christians fail to experience true joy and peace. So enters the book of Philippians, which has much to say about joy and peace in Christ.

Philippians 1:4, 18, 25 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,... 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.... 25 And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,

Philippians 2:28-29 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. 29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;

Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Philippians 4:4,7-9 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ... 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.

Right in the middle of the book (Philippians 3) is an extended passage which points us to the heart of the issue being discussed here—experiencing Christ’s joy and peace. Biblically, joy and peace are related to the pursuit of the right goal, one that is to become the all-consuming goal of a Christian’s life. Please note especially verses 8-15.

Philippians 3:8-15 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fel-

lowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

What's the thrust of this passage? Notice verse 14. Paul says, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." This focuses us on the ultimate goal of the passage—possessing and pursuing God's goal for one's life. That goal is an upward, heavenward call. Included in that call is spiritual transformation through knowing Christ intimately and the power of His resurrection that we might be made like Him being conformed to or perhaps even, by His death—passing through death into new life, and at last to capture the coveted prize, being in Christ's presence at the Judgment Seat, or Bema, to receive the awards that will be given on that day (see 2 Tim. 4:6-8). Paul was living not to gain heaven by his works, but to receive the prize of knowing the power of Christ's life in his daily life with a view to the eternal rewards that would follow. The goal of the apostle was to live daily in view of the resurrection (literally, "the out resurrection from among the dead") as mentioned in 3:11. Speaking of this same hope, John wrote, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3, NIV).

Pressing Toward the Goal

Philippians 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Explanation of the Text

"I press" is the Greek word, *dioko*, meaning "to pursue, chase, to press on." It is used figuratively of one who runs swiftly in a race to reach the goal in order to obtain the prize. The verb is a present of continuous action which shows this pursuit is to be the pattern of the believer's life on a daily basis.

"Goal" is the Greek, *skopos*, which refers to an observer, a watchman, or the distant mark on which to fix the eye, the goal or end one has in view. In this context it is defined as "the prize." For emphasis, the text literally has, "Toward the goal, I press on" which highlights the concept of fixing one's eyes on the goal.

"Prize" is the Greek, *brabeion*, which refers to "the award given to the victor in the ancient Greek games." In this context, may I suggest that it refers to two things: (1) primarily, Paul's focus is on the return of Christ for the church because that will mean (a) *glorification* and *translation* into heaven either by resurrection for believers who have died, or transfiguration of those believers who are alive at that time (1 Thess. 4:13-18), (b) *examination* before the Bema for eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10), and (c) *compensation*, the bestowal of the rewards that await believers for faithful service. "The upward call of God in Christ Jesus" further defines the goal which is also the prize. But I believe this upward call also includes (2) the heavenly reward of Christlike character, transformed lives. In other words, living in anticipation of the awesome event, or with this as the focus of life, should have a transforming impact on the way we live moment by moment (see also 1 Cor. 9:24-27).

This takes us back to the thought of verses 10 and 11, resurrection life, dying and rising with Christ in transformed living by the power of God through faith (cf. vs. 9 for the faith emphasis).

While there is some disagreement about the meaning of the words, “resurrection from the dead,” in 3:11, Paul probably has in mind his hope in the imminent return of Christ with all that event will mean for believers as mentioned above. This is supported in the context with 3:20-21, and by the factor of the doubt and uncertainty expressed in this verse. For instance, the NASB has “in order that I may attain,” but in the margin, it has the more literal translation, “if some how” in place of “in order that.” The KJV has “If by any means.” The Greek text has *ei pōs* (“if by any means”). This construction is found in only three other places in the NT (Rom. 1:10; 11:14; Acts 27:12), and in each case an element of doubt is expressed. This idea of uncertainty is further supported by the use of the subjunctive mood which expresses contingency, potentiality, anticipation, but not certainty, an element reserved more for the indicative mood in Greek.

Was Paul questioning the fact of the resurrection? Of course not, and that is evident from 1 Corinthians 15:1-34. I believe Paul is speaking of not the fact, but the when. He had in mind something he might experience in his lifetime, the rapture of the church, his translation and consequent reward.

Others believe that he is not speaking about the resurrection of the body or questioning it as a fact for the believer, but means he wants more and more to realize in his daily walk what it means to have been co-identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. He has in mind experiencing the truth of Romans 6:4-14 and Galatians 2:20. But ultimately, both concepts are in the apostle’s view as part of the goal with the imminent hope of Christ’s return being one of the motivations that constrained or controlled the life of Paul.

Application of the Text

We Need the Right Goal in Life

Our goals not only say a great deal about us but they also, from a Christian perspective, have everything to do with spiritual change and with our experience of joy, peace, and other Christlike qualities. Lying close to the bottom of all we say and do are our basic aims, whether we are seeking to protect ourselves, meet our perceived needs or desired pleasures, or whether we are seeking to protect someone else. The point is simply that goals are dynamic and determinative. They will strongly affect how we live.

Goals Are Determined by Our Objects of Faith

This includes the concept of motives. Equally important with our goals is the question, why do we have the goals or objectives we pursue? The answer is, we all have certain goals because we believe these goals will somehow meet our perceived needs. We think they will give us joy and peace, security and happiness, significance and meaning. Behind our pursuits are often a variety of motives and false belief systems.

Robert McGee writes:

Many of us tend to approach Christian living as a self-improvement program. We may desire spiritual growth, or we may have one or more fairly serious problems from which we desperately want to be delivered. While there is certainly nothing wrong with spiritual growth or desiring to be rid of a besetting problem, what is our

motivation in wanting to achieve goals like these? Perhaps we desire success or the approval of others. Perhaps we fear that God can't really accept us until we have spiritually matured, or until "our problem" is removed. Perhaps we just want to feel better without having to struggle through the process of making major changes in our attitudes and behavior.

Motivations such as these may be mixed with a genuine desire to honor the Lord, but it's also possible that deep within us is a primary desire to glorify ourselves. When self-improvement becomes the center of our focus, rather than Christ, our focus is displaced.

It is important to understand that fruitfulness and growth are the results of focusing on Christ and desiring to honor Him. When growth and change are our primary goals, we tend to be preoccupied with ourselves instead of with Christ. Am I growing? Am I getting any better? Am I more like Christ today? What am I learning?

This inordinate preoccupation with self-improvement parallels our culture's self-help and personal enhancement movement in many ways. Personal development is certainly not wrong, but it is misleading--and it can be very disappointing to make it our preeminent goal. If it is our goal at all, it should be secondary. As we grasp the unconditional love, grace, and power of God, then honoring Christ will increasingly be our consuming passion. God wants us to have a healthy self-awareness and to periodically analyze our lives, but He does not want us to be preoccupied with ourselves. The only One worthy of our preoccupation is Christ, our sovereign Lord, who told the Apostle Paul, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).¹

An Adequate Goal

The only adequate goal for the Christian is knowing Christ (Phil. 3:8-10) and Christlike transformation (Phil 3:11-14). This means pursuing Christ which will result in growth in the experience of the character of Christ—his love, grace, mercy, endurance, values, priorities, pursuits, etc.

Since growth and maturity are the subjects of this series of lessons, let's take a short overview of what Philippians 3 teaches about having the right goal.

(1) As to its Source: Having the goal of knowing Christ and Christlike maturity is a matter of spiritual insight or knowledge of the surpassing value of Christ over anything man or the world has to offer. Faith in Him is the product of that insight (cf. Phil. 3:8-9). But the text reveals several elements that are critical for a faith that has this goal.

Philippians 3:1-15 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as

¹ Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance*, Rapha Publishing, pp. 128-129.

to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

- We must repudiate our former confidences or sources of trust as meaningless and useless. None of our former confidences can provide salvation in any sense (Phil. 3:1-8a, quoted above). But how do we come to such a place?
- We must come to the place where we recognize the surpassing value and total sufficiency of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing Him and seeing the value of His person and work replaces all our former confidences or objects of faith—the things we trusted in for peace and joy, for salvation and spirituality, for significance and meaning, etc. (Carefully read Philippians 3:8b-9, quoted above).
- We need to rest in his life as the source of ours rather than in the strategies people typically depend on for security, happiness, significance, or for salvation and sanctification.

(2) As to its Value: As seen in verse 14, the apostle saw the goal as itself the reward, the prize worth the pursuit of all his being. In addition to the glory this brings to God, nothing is more rewarding, exciting, or causes more joy or peace than to experience fellowship with the Lord Jesus and the character of His life reproduced in ours. By contrast, compare this with the frustration, disappointment, the sense of futility and guilt that people face when they place their trust in any other pursuit.

(3) As to its Attainment: For the Christian, the one who has placed his trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the pursuit of this goal is a process that never ends in this life because no one ever reaches perfect maturity. This is another principle taught in Philippians 3. Other than the Lord Jesus, who could have been more mature than the Apostle Paul? But Paul clearly declared that, though mature, he had not arrived at complete maturity or perfection (Phil. 3:12-15). There will always be room for growth.

(4) As to God's Will: One question Christians (especially new believers) often ask concerns knowing the will of God. What does God want me to be? What does He want me to do? Usually these questions are aimed at the issues of vocation or occupation or some of the other details of life—marriage partner, geographic location, school, ministry in a church, etc. While these are important matters, they are issues that are resolved from the pursuit of the one great goal of this passage. God's will is much more basic and is expressed in the words, "that I may lay hold of that **for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus**" (emphasis mine). God's goal in saving us, and that of Christ Himself, is not just heav-

en. Though heaven is assured for believers through the finished work of Christ, God's desire is to make us like His Son. He wants to conform us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Growing and reaching greater levels of maturity (another word for Christlikeness) is God's primary will for all believers. As that occurs, all the other aspects of God's will fall into place to the degree we are experiencing His life in ours. The need and goal of growth and maturity are expressed in a number of New Testament passages (cf. also 1 Cor. 2:6-3:3).

Ephesians 4:11-16 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

1 Peter 2:2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Hebrews 5:11-6:1 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. 6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.

The need for growth and maturity or spiritual transformation is in essence a call to holiness or sanctification. This is a call to wholeness as believers become more and more set apart to God and experience His life in theirs through the work and ministry of the Spirit of God, but always in the light of the Word of God, the Bible. The Word is our foundation and the light that illuminates our path.

1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Hebrews 12:10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

Lesson 2: The Faith-Rest Life

Introduction

The Scripture emphatically declares: “For the righteous man shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11); “Without faith, it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6); and “We walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:8). It is so important that we do not underestimate the importance of faith in the life of the believer that to overemphasize it is almost impossible. Some might respond that works are also important and quote James 2:15f for support. But the emphasis of Scripture is that bonafide works must be the product of faith in the person and plan of God which sets God free to work in the heart and life of the individual.

Faith brings the power of God into the life of the believer. We become the children of God and justified by faith, but we are also to live and experience the Christ-exchanged life by faith. The Christian life from start to finish is of necessity a life of faith—a life of dependence on God and His grace provision for us in Christ. It is a supernatural life to be accomplished by God through faith in the Spirit who, as a gift from God, indwells every believer from the moment of salvation. As God’s gift, the indwelling Spirit accomplishes a variety of ministries each of which are vital to the believer’s spiritual life. We can no more live the Christian life by self effort than we can manufacture a resurrected body by our own effort.

The Apostle Paul rebuked the believers at Galatia for their failure to recognize this very important principle. They began by faith in Christ, but because of the pressure of legalists they had moved into the realm of human achievement through religious works for spirituality. In fact, he viewed their failure to understand this as the result of being *bewitched*. Such is undoubtedly the product of Satan’s deception.

Galatians 3:1-5 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Reasons faith in the power and plan of God is absolutely necessary:

(1) Because of the nature of man.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

(2) Because of man’s inherent weakness.

Romans 6:19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, re-

sulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Romans 8:3-4 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Matthew 26:41 Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

(3) Because of the blindness and deceptive nature of the world in which we live.

John 12:46 I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.

John 14:17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

1 Corinthians 1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

Ephesians 2:2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Ephesians 4:19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

(4) Because of the activity of Satan and his forces.

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

(5) Because we are totally inadequate and God alone is adequate, it is vital that we learn to walk by faith with every step.

2 Corinthians 2:16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

As we have received Christ by faith in the message of the Gospel (God's witness concerning His Son or justification through faith) so we are to walk step by step by faith in the Bible's message of sanctification.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Colossians 2:6-8 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Faith is such an inherent part of the message of Bible that a study on faith is fundamental and essential to the transformed life. As we think in terms of spiritual growth and the transformed life, I'd like to begin with an emphasis on faith because we need to guard against four serious problems that work against faith and spiritual transformation.

Problems We Must Guard Against

A Spirit of Legalism

Legalism is a disposition in which man seeks to establish his own righteousness with God. It is man doing good deeds or religious works to impress God, to merit God's blessing, or even to impress people. Legalism relies on human resources rather than on God's resources of grace, on human abilities rather than on divine enablement. Legalism brings glory to man rather than to God. In summary, we may define legalism as "my effort using my resources to obtain God's blessing to my glory."

Romans 4:1-2 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

In a number of passages, the Apostle Paul strongly warns against legalism in any form. The author of Hebrews also warns against what he calls "dead works," a reference to all that men do (any kind of religious works or human good) to meritoriously acquire either salvation or spirituality.

Romans 10:1-4 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Galatians 3:1-5 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 5:1-5 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

Hebrews 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

In the life of the Christian, good works, Christian labor, and endurance, etc., are to be the result of spirituality—being rightly adjusted to the Spirit of God through faith. The details of this will be discussed later in the lesson on *The Spirit-Filled Life*.

Compare the NIV's grammatically accurate translation of 1 Thessalonians 1:3: "We continually remember before our God and Father your **work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ" (emphasis mine).

Working in the Energy of the Flesh

This means working in the energy of our own strength—our own abilities, talents, or resources. One of the strongest evidences of mankind's fall into sin and his alienation from God is his proneness, indeed, his commitment to operate independently of God. As in the beginning with Eve, this is where Satan still seeks to deceive and tempt us the most. True, salvation through faith in Christ means the believer is a new creation with a new nature or new capacity for knowing, loving, and choosing for God. But the old nature, the self-life, or the flesh as it is also called, still struggles to control. The most prominent characteristic of the flesh is that of self-dependence—seeking to handle life apart from God's plan and resources.

A few words are needed regarding the sinful nature or the flesh. The "flesh," as used metaphorically by the Apostle Paul, may be defined as that indwelling spiritual principle or force, that strong disposition in all of us to operate out of our own resources independent of God to meet our needs and wants, the things we perceive we must have for security and significance, etc. The "flesh" is the opposite of trust in God. It is a spirit of independence and faith in self. As faith in self, it is a commitment to do our own thing, in our own way, and from our own resources. The flesh is evil, sinful, and anti-God. That "flesh" is often used of this propensity within man is clear from Jeremiah's warning in Jeremiah 17:5.

Thus says the LORD, “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD.”

This passage points out four key concepts about the flesh: (a) the act of depending on human resources, (b) the act of depending on human resources rather than on God’s resources, (c) such an act is in essence, a turning away from God, and (d) such an act brings a curse, it is detrimental.

As a force in man’s life, the flesh is man’s natural means of protection. As man’s natural means of protecting himself, it is a way that seems right to man, it feels natural, but its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

The Mentality of Our Culture

As never before in human history, the very nature of our modern society undercuts true dependence on God. With all the advances in modern science and technology in health, convenience, comfort, speed, power, amusement, information, etc., man’s natural spirit of independence and self-sufficiency has become even more acute. In spite of the gigantic social and moral problems facing society, mankind generally thinks in terms of “we are sufficient.” The Scripture, however, declares we are not and cannot even direct our lives. Jeremiah wrote, “I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself; Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD.

The Imbalance of Passivity

This is the “let go and let God” mentality which teaches believers are to sit back and let God do it all. Ryrie warns about this as an imbalance of what the Scripture teaches. He writes:

... there is the view which emphasizes the idea that God does all that needs to be done for us in the spiritual life. We not only can do nothing; we must do nothing; otherwise we will hinder the work of God in our lives.¹

So that we do not misunderstand this emphasis and Ryrie’s comment about it, let me quote what he says just prior to the above quote.

Let it be said, too, ... I am not suggesting that the entire teaching is wrong; it contains, in my judgment, *an imbalance* because some aspect of the spiritual life has been emphasized in a manner **disproportionate to the place given to it in the Scripture.**² (Emphasis mine)

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1969, p. 183.

² Ibid.

This is basically the issue of taking personal responsibility to appropriate God's resources. The hundreds of commands in the New Testament make this clear. Certainly, we are to do these things in dependence on God's resources, but we are nevertheless responsible to do them. God is not going to do them for us.

Dependence on the power of God and effort on the part of the believer are not mutually exclusive. Self-discipline and Spirit-dependence can and must be practiced at the same time in a balanced spiritual life. Dependence itself is an attitude, but that attitude does not come automatically; it usually requires cultivation. How many genuine Christians there are who live day after day without even sensing their need of dependence on Him. Experience, routine, pride, self-confidence all tend to drag all of us away from that conscious dependence on God which we must have in order to live and act righteously.³

In all obedience there must be the *balance of disciplined dependence*. A number of New Testament passages teach this truth and if we fail to see this balance, we will become imbalanced, and end up in a very unbiblical position. For instance, note the element of personal responsibility in the following passages:

Romans 8:13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

2 Peter 1:5-8 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 4:7-10 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; 8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9 It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. 10 For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

To be sure, each of the above commands are to be done in the Spirit by faith in God's strength, but still *we have a vital part*—we are responsible. God does not walk in the Spirit for us. We see the blending of these two concepts, responsibility and dependence, in the following two passages:

Colossians 1:29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

³ Ibid., p. 189.

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Understanding the balance between dependence on God's resources and expending human energy while depending on God's enablement protects a believer from two serious errors. It protects him from:

... (1) the error that there is some sort of a switch which he can touch in order to turn off the current of temptation and keep it from coursing through his being; (2) the Christian life is a passive one in which all the believer does is 'yield.' If yielding means I decide to be what I truly am in Christ through the Spirit's power no matter how great the struggle then it is clear that there will be much battle even as Paul stated when he wrote that 'the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another, ...' (Gal. 5:17). The spiritual life is neither automatic or passive.⁴

We might add, the spiritual life is not only not automatic, or passive, but it is also not painless. Bill Lawrence has a good summary of the issues under a section called, "We are responsible to obey by faith."

In a sense, the believer's responsibility in the spiritual life can be summarized in one word: Obedience.

The bottom line of the believer's responsibility in the spiritual life is obedience. Believers are to do what God has told them to do and they can do what God has told them to do because the Holy Spirit makes this possible, though not without the exercise of discipline.

Discipline is not a matter of obeying God in our own strength even as we obeyed our parents or our employers in our pre-Christ days. Discipline is a matter of faith, because, "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Discipline must be an act of trust in God's resources through which the believer draws upon the infinite power of God and meets His righteous standard.

Obedience by faith means that we act by dependence on the Holy Spirit and count on His enabling power as we trust Him. It means that we *do* act, that we exercise every ounce of energy the Lord Jesus Christ "... mightily works within ..." us (Col. 1:29). We act in *His* power; we obey through the Spirit's resources. We act, but Christ does it through us in the sense that it is His power that enables us to do what He commands. In terms of power, He does it through us; in terms of activity, we do it through Him. We do what we could never do in our own capacity: we obey God and live up to His righteous standard.

Your obligation is not to do it in any strength of your own, or to try to do it, but to do it in the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit ... You will do it in the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit and this is where the believer's responsibility brings him. That is the thing that constitutes the ability to live the spiritual life and that is none other than the ability to walk by means of the Spirit in your daily life. That is

⁴ William D. Lawrence, Dallas Seminary notes, 1993, p. 13-15.

the salvation from the reigning power of sin ... Therefore you fall back upon the *infinite* power--think of it--the infinite power of the indwelling Spirit.⁵ (ital. orig.).

We draw on the Spirit's power through a simple prayer of dependence in which we acknowledge our inability to accomplish anything for God apart from Him. We tell the Spirit, "I cannot do this in my own power. I give myself to You for You to enable me to do what You want me to do and I thank You by faith that You will keep Your promise to me to enable me to obey and serve You." Then we act on that prayer and move to do the thing for which we are trusting God. In that moment we discover the infinite power which enables us to do what we could never do on our own.⁶

Any of these dangers will not only kill our joy in Christ, but more importantly, they leave us powerless to truly experience God's deliverance and the Christ-exchanged life, i.e., Christ producing His character in us or the fruit of the Spirit. Because these two dangers are *faithless* in our new life in Christ, our position in Him, and in the power of the indwelling Spirit, they leave us *powerless* to deal with our spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Colossians 2:16-23 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 which all refer to things destined to perish with the using— in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Among the truths that transform there are those that relate to spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, and worship. While these are crucial for building faith and cultivating our walk with the Lord, we should never do them to merit God's favor because we already have His favor as believers in Christ—we are complete in Him.

Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Believer's Responsibility," transcription of a class lecture, Dallas Theological Seminary, pp. 1, 5.

⁶ Lawrence, pp. 13-6-7.

Rather, these spiritual disciplines are to be done as acts of simple faith, out of a spirit of faith-dependence on the Lord. We do them to develop and maintain a deeper faith relationship and walk with God—never to achieve status with God.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

2 Corinthians 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Just as we eat wholesome meals for physical strength, so we are to study the Bible and pray that we might grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and experience God’s strength.

1 Peter 2:2-3 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

But what is faith? How do we develop faith? What about the object of faith?

The Basics of Biblical Faith

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith means learning to trust God for what we *cannot* see with our visible eyes. It means learning to think and act on the principles and promises of the Word regardless of how things seem to us. We are told to walk by faith and not by sight. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God.

2 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight—

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

There are two key concepts we learn from these verses:

We Cannot Please God Without Faith

Faith is the *modus operandi* for the Christian life. It is God’s desire and plan that we learn to live by faith because faith acknowledges our weakness and rests in God and in His provision. It glorifies God. But faith in what?

Faith Consists in Two Concepts

(1) **We must believe that He is.** We must believe in the existence of God. But according to the Bible, a true belief in God's existence includes faith in His transcendence and essence. Transcendence is the concept that God exists outside and beyond the universe. Essence speaks of who God is as the independent and sovereign God who is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, infinite, and unchangeable, holy, love, veracity, etc.

(2) **We must believe that He is also a rewarder of those who seek Him.** This means belief in the personal love of God, belief in the provision and care of God. Included in this is the concept of God's immanence, that though transcendent, He is nevertheless involved in the affairs of the universe, and that the creation cannot exist or function properly without Him and His intimate involvement.

Mankind is totally dependent on God for his existence, for his happiness, and for his security and significance. And God cares about us intimately.

For many Christians, the Christian life is devoid of God's power. It is simply a matter of doing the best *they* can to conform to certain expected standards. Some are more successful at conforming externally to the pattern of their peers than others, but even for these, there is generally the awareness that something is missing. Some find comfort in the fact that no one is perfect; everyone has their weaknesses. Because they are doing their best, they hope God understands.

Unquestionably, no one is perfect. Maybe we are doing our best and certainly God does understand, but this does not alter the fact that unless we are walking by faith in God and His plan and provision, we are missing the abundant life Christ offers. Our best is not what God wants. He wants faith in **His best**—the Lord Jesus—His very own Son and the fullness of blessing He has made available for us in Him.

Think about these facts:

(1) **No one can live the Christian way of life any more than they can perfectly keep the Old Testament Law or the Sermon of the Mount** (cf. also Rom. 7:1-25).

Romans 3:9-20 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one." 13 "Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving," "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 Destruction and misery are in their paths, 17 And the path of peace have they not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes." 19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Galatians 3:10-14 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them." 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them." 13 Christ re-

deemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

(2) If we could live the Christian way of life without God’s enablement, why do you suppose God would send the Holy Spirit to indwell us?

John 7:37-39 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’” 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 14:17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

(3) If we could live the Christian way of life and serve the Lord without God’s power through faith, why would the Lord Jesus give the Holy Spirit the title of the “Helper” or the “Enabler” (John 14:16, 26)? Why would He point to the disciples’ inadequacy apart from the Spirit (John 16:7-15) and tell them not to attempt any ministry until the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-8)?

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 16:7-15 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. 12 I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.

Acts 1:4-8 And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” 6 And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Because of all we face in the enemies of God who are arrayed against Christians, the world around us, the flesh within us, and the devil against us, the Christian life and ministry is an absolute impossibility apart from God's supernatural ability which must be appropriated moment by moment through faith. The nature of these forces and our weakness necessitates the need for nothing short of the divine power of God. To think that we can live the Christian life is the height of ignorance or pride. So then, what is faith?

The Details of Biblical Faith

The New Testament Word for Faith

The New Testament word for "faith" is *pistis*. It means conviction of the truth or reality of anything; belief in something or someone. In the New Testament it is used of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and spiritual things, generally with the included idea of trust or reliance. The verb form is *pisteuo* which means "to believe, rely on, trust in." It often occurs with prepositions to stress the concept of "personal trust and reliance as distinct from mere credence or belief."⁷

A Definition of Biblical Faith

Biblical faith is confidence and trust in the ability, power, skill, and promises of another—specifically the God of the Bible as *He is revealed in Scripture*. In terms of New Testament theology, faith or belief is reliance (belief and confidence) on the work and grace of God's plan. This includes all phases of salvation and sanctification, *the past* (deliverance from the *penalty* of sin), *the present* (deliverance from the *power* of sin), and *the future* (deliverance from the *presence* of sin).

Biblical Faith Is Non-Meritorious

Biblical faith is not a work, it is the one thing we can do without doing anything. Faith consists not in doing something, but in receiving something. Salvation is a gift which one receives by faith. Does a gift cease to be a gift simply because we receive it? No!

John 6:26-29 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. 27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal." 28 They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

These Jews thought in terms of works for salvation, but the Savior taught that salvation was a gift, the product of the work of God in Christ, which was to be received by believing in the Son of Man, the Messiah, upon whom God had placed His seal.

⁷ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 361.

Faith is an admission of our spiritual inability and helplessness to merit or work for salvation or even to handle our own life apart from God's grace provision as revealed in the New Testament. When we drive over a bridge to cross a gorge, for which there is no other way to cross, we are saying we are trusting the bridge to get us to the other side. But we are also saying, we can't get to the other side on our own without this bridge.

Romans 4:1-5 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Faith is a rejection or repudiation of any confidence in the flesh (cf. Jer. 17:5-9; Rom. 3:9-24). Therefore, recognizing our helplessness and the sufficiency of Christ, biblical faith rests in God's complete and finished work and provision in Jesus Christ or Christ's merit. Faith brings merit not to self, but to the object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ and all that comes to us in Him.

Philippians 3:1-9 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Romans 4:25 He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

Romans 11:6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

Hebrews 4:10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

Faith Is Not Always Demonstrated by What We Are Doing for God

This is a popular notion, but not quite true. Works may actually demonstrate faith in oneself or in other false objects of faith as with the Pharisees who were meticulous about works. Certainly, an active and growing faith will produce works in the life of a believer, but in reality, biblical faith demonstrates what God, in His power and grace, is doing for, in, and through the one who is believing God.

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

This is why we should never praise a person for his faith. We may be thankful for having faith and thank God for the faith of others (cf. 2 Thess. 1:3). We may also be rebuked or rebuke others for a lack of faith (cf. Matt. 6:30), but in the final analysis who is glorified by our faith? The **object of faith** of course! Why? Because faith is simply a disposition which allows something or someone to do for us because of what it is or who they are.

Whenever we sit down in a chair, we exercise faith in the chair. We show we believe the chair will hold us up. Our faith simply brings the chair and our posterity together so we can rest, but we aren't sitting on our faith. Our faith doesn't hold us up, the chair does. Who is to be congratulated, us or the chair? The chair, of course, or the one who made it. Our faith glorifies the creator of the chair. Likewise, biblical faith simply allows God to be God in the person; it brings God into action; it glorifies God. Faith is non-meritorious.

We can compare faith to a clutch and its workings in a standard shift automobile. The clutch relates the power under the hood to the wheels on the road. This is how we move an automobile down the road. We get down the road not just by the engine or by the wheels but by that which relates the two together. That's the part faith is designed to play in the life of the Christian.

Faith Must Have a Valid Object

This is the reason biblical information is so important. It brings our faith to bear on the right objects of faith no matter what area of life is involved. Faith in the wrong object is worse than no faith at all.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Illustration: If we are driving a piece of equipment that weighs 20 tons and try to cross a bridge with a 10-ton load limit because we believe the bridge will support us, the results will be disastrous. Our false confidence will destroy us.

Three things a valid object of faith must be or have:

(1) It must be *ABLE and FREE* to save.

Hebrews 5:7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

Hebrews 7:25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

James 1:21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

James 4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

(2) It must be *AVAILABLE* to save.

Acts 17:26-27 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

Romans 8:34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Romans 10:13 for "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Hebrews 7:25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 9:24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," 6 so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"

(3) It must be *WILLING* to save.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Hebrews 10:9-10 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Thy will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Philippians 2:6-8 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-

servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

1 Peter 5:7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Faith Does Not Operate in a Vacuum

For faith to function accurately and properly it must have information—it must have accurate biblical content to believe and appropriate. In Scripture there is “faith,” trust or confidence in the Lord, but there is also “**the faith**,” the objective body of revealed truth which is to be believed or appropriated by faith. “The faith” is the content of our faith, the things we are to believe which form the index for faith.

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Ephesians 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

Acts 6:7 And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

1 Timothy 3:9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

If faith is to be effective, it must have a valid object which includes the right content. This is a tremendously important principle. The Lord Jesus reduced all of Scripture to two great commands: loving God and loving one’s neighbor as himself.

Mark 12:28-34 And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 And the scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher, You have truly stated that He is One; and there is no one else besides Him; 33 and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 And when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

Those who promote situational ethics often claim that the only thing which should control or dictate what one does is love. They claim the only rule for action is to do the most loving thing. But what is that? With man's self-centered bent and his natural spiritual blindness, we need the content of God's Word to show us what the most loving act really consists of or we will be cast on the tossing waves and shifting sand of human ideas.

Others would say, "We have freedom in Christ; we are not under the law. We are simply to follow the leading of the Spirit." The Spirit, however, does not lead us contrary to the principles of the Word. The Bible is the Word of Truth and the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit never contradicts the Word which He Himself inspired. This is one of the reasons there is such an emphasis in the Bible on knowing what the Word teaches in an accurate way.

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Faith Must Be Personal

We cannot operate on the faith of someone else. Each person must personally receive Jesus Christ by faith.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

John 12:48 He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

People must personally know and believe the principles and promises of the Word if they are to experience God's work in their lives so that there is true spiritual change. Each person must mix faith with the promises of God to enter into God's rest, or His provision for any aspect of salvation.

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Romans 14:5 One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.

Romans 14:10-14 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." 12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it.

Biblical Faith Is Not Blind Faith

(1) God has provided abundant evidence in creation for the fact of His being.

Psalm 19:1-6 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. 6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

(2) We have abundant evidence from archaeology, history, fulfilled prophecy and many other things for the reliability and inspiration and acceptance of Scripture.

Psalm 19:9-11 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

2 Peter 1:19-21 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

(3) We have an abundance of evidence for the truth of the resurrection. All this evidence is so tremendous that to deny it one must actually deny his own rational processes because of a prejudice against the miraculous. Faith, however, is not based on rationalism or human reason, nor on experience or empiricism. It is also not irrational nor blind nor contradictory to known and verifiable truth.

Acts 17:31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

John 7:17 If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.

Faith Must Be Progressive

There is immature (weak) faith and mature (strong) faith. Like a plant, faith must be fed and strengthened.

Romans 4:20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

Romans 14:1-2 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. 2 One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.

Ephesians 4:13-16 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,

1 Peter 2:2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Faith can and must grow or it will become inactive, non-functional, and dormant. The classic illustration of this is James 2:14-20.

James 2:14-20 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

As seen above, biblical faith does not operate out of a mindless vacuum. It is related to what we know and are thinking. The content of our minds, the stuff we think with, is that which gives validity, vitality, and growth to our faith. Bible doctrine gives faith the right object or direction, expression, power, and vigor. How, then, does our faith grow?

(1) Faith grows by hearing and learning the Word.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

(2) Faith grows by the ministry of the teaching, verifying work of the Spirit of God.

John 16:11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Ephesians 3:16-20 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,

1 John 2:27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

1 John 3:24 And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

(3) Faith grows by the variegated trials of life which cause people to look to the Lord and His provisions for life.

James 1:2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

(4) Faith grows through the encouraging, teaching, and supporting ministries of other believers.

Ephesians 4:11-16 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is

the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,

1 Thessalonians 3:10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith.

1 Thessalonians 5:11-14 Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. 12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.

The Lies We Believe

The lies are beliefs, notions, attitudes, and expectations that do not fit with the truth of the Word of God.

General Nature

These lies include everything from the strategies by which we attempt to handle life on a daily basis to what we believe is needed to be saved or to be spiritual. The Bible refers to these false belief structures through a number of metaphors, some of which are listed below. Regardless, they are the product of ignorance or rebellion and are the execution of our plans and not those of the Lord.

Isaiah 30:1-2 "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; 2 who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection to Egypt's shade for refuge." (NIV)

Some illustrations of these pictures of self-dependent strategies are:

(1) Trusting in one's own strength.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD."

(2) Broken cisterns that hold no water.

Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.

(3) Self-made firebrands by which people seek to lighten their path.

Isaiah 50:11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with firebrands, Walk in the light of your fire And among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand; And you will lie down in torment.

(4) Influences from the East—human substitutes for faith in God and His plan of salvation and spiritual deliverance.

Isaiah 2:6 For Thou hast abandoned Thy people, the house of Jacob, Because they are filled with influences from the east, And they are soothsayers like the Philistines, And they strike bargains with the children of foreigners.

Religious Illustrations

These lies include any method that depends on human works for salvation; things people do in the belief this will save them such as attempting to keep the Law or a set of religious rules, keeping the sacraments, asceticism or some form of self-denial.

Romans 10:1-3 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Colossians 2:16-23 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 which all refer to things destined to perish with the using—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Another variation of this is believing in Christ but, rather than faith alone in Christ alone, adding some religious work such as circumcision, baptism, walking an aisle, promising to give up our sins, etc., as a means of salvation (cf. also Rom. 4:1-16).

Galatians 3:1-3 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Galatians 5:1-5 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Other Illustrations

These lies include any method by which people seek to handle life, to find peace, significance, joy, satisfaction, or security apart from faith in God's plan for us in the person and work of Christ. Such constitutes a false belief system. When we pursue power, position, praise, wealth, pleasure, comfort, acceptance, etc., as our means of joy, peace, security, and significance, we are looking to these false sources of trust in the belief they will give us what we perceive will meet our needs. Whatever they give will be temporary and dependent on good circumstances and desires that are self-centered. This means we will be manipulating, hurting, or walking on others in the process.

Some excellent books that cover this last category in detail are *Defeating the Dragons of the World, Resisting the Seduction of False Values*, Stephen D. Eyre, InterVarsity Press. *The Lies We Believe*, Chris Thurman, Thomas Nelson Publishers. *Myths the World Taught Me*, R. Scott Richards, Thomas Nelson Publishers. *Why Settle for More and Miss the Best*, Tom Sine, Word Publishing.

Explanation of the Faith-Rest Life (Heb. 4:1-16)

Hebrews 4:1-16 Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; 5 and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." 6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. 14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

The Meaning of “Faith-Rest”

The noun used for “rest” in Hebrews 3 and 4 is the Greek *katapausis*, “a putting or causing to rest.” It means “resting” (active) or “rest” (passive). It is common in the Septuagint for God’s rest (Isa. 66:1), the people’s rest (1 Kings. 8:56), or the Sabbath rest (Ex. 35:2).

In Acts 7:49 (based on Isa. 66:1) it denotes God’s rest, i.e., the place where he fixes his presence. The verb form is *katapauo* and means “to cause to cease or rest” with the following shades of meaning, “to end” (actions or conditions), “to restrain” (used of persons), “to give rest” (i.e., cause suffering to cease), usually with God as the subject in the Septuagint, and “to rest or cease from works” (cf. Ex. 20:11). As we will see, it looks at a rest which God gives because of the work God has accomplished.

Usage of the Word “Rest”

Eight times *katapausis* is used in Hebrews 3 and 4 and in each case it is used of God’s rest or the rest that God supplies (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10, 11). Once the noun *sabatismos*, “a Sabbath rest,” is used in 4:9. This word is found only in this passage and seems to have been coined by the author to express the rest of God anticipated in God’s creation rest and in that of the Old Testament ordinance. The verb form, *katapauo*, is used three times: of God who rested after He finished creation (4:4), of Joshua’s failure to give rest in the ultimate sense (4:8), and of those who enter God’s rest as He rested from His works in creation (4:10). God rested when He had finished the work of creation and a rest for the people of God has been available ever since.

Contextual Meaning

Hebrews 3 begins with a comparison between Christ and Moses (3:1-6). This naturally leads to a comparison between their followers. The writer uses the conduct of the Israelites as a means of challenging his readers to a walk of confident faithfulness with God through a faith that rests in the sufficiency of Christ who is the fulfillment of all that is seen in the Old Testament. There was a promise in the Old Testament that God’s people would enter into God’s rest, one anticipated by God’s rest after creation. The writer sees this promise as ultimately fulfilled only in Christ. In drawing attention to this, he shows from another angle that Christ is God’s final word to mankind (cf. 1:2); He is the means of God’s rest both now and in the future.

Doctrinal Meaning

The term “rest” is a descriptive synonym of God’s various provisions for man, ultimately including His provision of salvation. It describes God’s provision from the standpoint of *means*, resting by faith in God’s work, and the *results*, ceasing from works, enjoying and resting in what God has provided. Let me elaborate.

(1) The term “rest” is used because it portrays the results of God’s work as historically illustrated in creation (vv. 3b-4). It refers to what has been accomplished by God for man. Eden was a place of rest and dominion for man where he could enjoy the perfect provision of God. In Eden, man could enter into the fruit of God’s labors. This was lost, however, by the fall. There is the need, then, of another rest.

Hebrews 2:5-10 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. 6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, "What is man, that Thou rememberest him? Or the son of man, that Thou art concerned about him? 7 Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, And hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; 8 Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. 9 But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

(2) The term "rest" is used because God's provision is entered by faith apart from human works. The rest (a picture of deliverance) is based on the work God Himself has accomplished as in creation, and symbolized in the Sabbath rests of the Old Testament.

(3) The term "rest" is used because, as God rested because of His creative labors, so He gives man rest in the sense of repose, deliverance, or salvation. Rest, as a picture of God's salvation, has three aspects:

- **Salvation from sin's penalty** (analogous to Israel's deliverance out of Egypt which was to be remembered by keeping the Sabbath rest).

Deuteronomy 5:15 And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

- **Salvation from sin's power** (analogous of Israel's entrance into the land).

Deuteronomy 12:10 When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security,

Joshua 21:44 And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand.

- **Salvation from sin's presence.** The future hope and inheritance of believers when they will have rest from their labors on earth, from their enemies, and when they may also have the privilege of reigning with Christ (cf. Heb 2:5-10).

Hebrews 1:13-14 But to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies A footstool for Thy feet"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

This is the primary focus of Hebrews 3 and 4. Reigning is dependent on faithfulness as members of the household of Christ. To be faithful, however, we must hold fast our confidence in Christ, i.e., resting by faith in the sufficiency of the Savior rather than turning back into some form of legalism

The faith-rest life is a life which encompasses three aspects:

First, it is a life in which the believer rests through faith in the finished work of God in Christ as God's final word to man.

Second, stemming from this basic confidence in Christ, it is then a life which the believer enters through faith into God's daily rest, His provision for strength and faithfulness, prayerfully and dependently laboring in the strength which our great High Priest supplies (4:16).

Third, it is a life in which the believer, through faith, anticipates God's final rest, the rest of His inheritance in the kingdom of God.

In essence then the faith-rest life includes the three phases of God's salvation—past, present, and future. Works or fruit in the Christian life are to be a result of the faith-rest life.

The “Rests” of Scripture

1 Corinthians 10:6 Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.... 6:11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Based on the use of the word “rest,” “Sabbath,” the analogy of Scripture, and the concept of Old Testament types or examples, the following is a suggested amplification for the various rests of the Bible.

Creation Rest

God rested on the seventh day, after the completion of creation (Gen. 2:1-3). He rested not because He was tired, but because He had finished His work of creation. This points out one of the basic elements of God's rests, the cessation of labor because the work is done, finished by God. Adam and Eve were able to enjoy this rest of God in a perfect environment. Adam and Eve had a vocation: they were to care for the garden, and were to populate and have dominion over the earth. They were to walk with God in perfect fellowship, and there was no toil nor sweat of the brow as in a cursed earth.

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Sabbath-Keeping Rest

The Sabbath rest was inaugurated for Israel as a special sign for the nation. It stood for:

(1) God's emancipation of Israel from bondage in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 5:15 And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

(2) An ordinance to give rest from labor.

Exodus 23:12 Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor in order that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.

(3) A sign to the nation that it was the Lord who sanctified them as a people for His own and who supplied their needs.

Exodus 16:23 then he said to them, “This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.”

Exodus 31:13-17 But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 14 Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15 For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. 16 So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’ 17 It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.

Ezekiel 20:9-12 But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. 10 So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. 11 And I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. 12 And also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

This was a sign for Israel that as God had provided creation for man, so He had redeemed them, would provide for them, and would one day provide a new spiritual creation that would also lead to a restoration of all that was lost.

Canaan Rest

Entrance into the land of promise with the promise to defeat Israel’s enemies was also viewed as a rest provided by God.

Deuteronomy 12:10 When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security,

Joshua 21:44 And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand.

Psalms 95:11 Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest.

Hebrews 3:11-19 “... As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’” 12 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart,

in falling away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; 15 while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." 16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Numbers 14:23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.

By way of an analogy for the Christian, this is a daily rest, a faith rest for the problems of life, a rest amidst pressure and the enemies of God with the promise of a God-provided victory. Even though Joshua took Israel into the land of promise and they experienced a great deal of victory over their enemies, another rest was still anticipated in the Old Testament. This is clear in that the author of Hebrews quotes David from Psalm 95 to show a rest still remains for the people of God in David's time. If Joshua had given them the final rest, David would not have spoken of another rest (Heb. 4:4-10). Four times the author shows a rest remains today (4:1, 6, 9, 11 quoted above).

Salvation Rest

The salvation rest ultimately anticipates the millennial and eternal rest. The fall of man in sin resulted in the loss of creation's rest or the loss of dominion. It was wrested from man by Satan who became the god of this world. The promise of Genesis 3:15 anticipated the regaining of this rest through the seed of the woman.

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.

The Sabbath rests of the Old Testament, while they had special historical significance to Israel, anticipated the work that God would do through the One who would come. This is the focus of Hebrews 1:4-4:13. God's Son, the final Word from God, will restore all that was lost by man as the victorious God-man King. This ultimate rest has three aspects:

(1) An Eternal Rest: Salvation from sin's penalty, the gift of eternal life through faith in Christ.

John 1:12-13 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Romans 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

This was accomplished by the finished work of God in Christ and is received as a free gift through faith in Christ. Thinking that salvation or God's blessings could be worked for, Jesus was asked what they might do to work the works of God. Christ answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29). Salvation is the work of God in Christ and it can only be received as a gift through faith.

(2) A Daily Rest: Every day is a Canaan type of rest in that we can possess our blessings and have victory over our enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil. For this to occur, however, we must rest by faith in the sufficiency of God's complete work and provision for us in Christ. We must know what we have in Christ (Rom. 6:1-7), believe and count on it to be true (Rom. 6:8-11), and present ourselves by faith to the Spirit of God to reproduce the character of Christ in us (Rom. 6:12-14).

Galatians 2:19 For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God.

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

In that this rest constituted a call to discipleship, I believe this is the rest offered by the Savior in Matthew 11:28-30:

28 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.

(3) An Eschatological Rest: This is the millennial rest in which believers, as rewarded saints, will be able to reign with Christ. While heaven is guaranteed for all believers, rewards and reigning with Christ depend on faithfulness in the daily rest, walking by faith as partners with Christ who overcome through the strength of the Savior's life (cf. also Gal. 5:1-26; Rom. 8:1-17; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 9:24-27).

Revelation 2:26-27 And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father;

Revelation 3:21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

The Danger of Failing to Live the Faith-Rest Life (4:1)

The rest that God offers is still available today (Heb. 4:1, 6, 9). Some might think that Joshua had been given the promised rest, but the author stresses the rest still remains both for the present and the future (cf. vs. 8-9). Therefore, just as Israel failed to enter God's rest (their inheritance in Canaan) because of an unbelief that led to disobedience through the hardening of the heart, so today there must be a godly fear and diligence (vs. 11) lest we too come short of God's rest (cf. 3:18-19).

This is the daily rest which gives God's strength to His people to overcome and the privilege of reigning with Christ as rewarded saints in the Savior's future kingdom on earth. But why is this such a danger?

The Means and Nature of the Faith-Rest Life (4:2-3, 10)

God's rest is declared and explained in the promises of His Word—the good news of salvation in Christ—past, present, and future. This good news they (and we) have had preached to us. Those promises, however, must be believed or rested in through faith. We must mix faith with the promises of God.

The recipients of this book were believers who had trusted in Christ for salvation (3:1; 4:3; 10:19-25), but there are three phases of God's salvation rest. They had entered into the first phase, the rest of God's salvation from sin's penalty. Heaven was assured, but not heavenly rewards. There was grave danger of failing to finish their work on earth and therefore of losing rewards because of failing to continue to cling to the Savior through faith.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

To be rewarded and reign with the Savior in the future rest, there must be faithfulness in phase two of God's rest—the daily rest of faith in the fullness and sufficiency of Christ (4:16). The daily faith-rest leads to a life of obedience as active partners with the Savior who partake of His saving life through fellowship (3:1, 14). This is phase two, the faith-rest of deliverance from the power of sin, overcoming evil, and the power to do good through faith in the power of God.

Finally, there is phase three, the rest of ultimate salvation which includes special rewards or crowns for faithful service when our work on earth is finished just as God rested when His work of creation was finished (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15 quoted above).

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

These Hebrew Christians were being pressured to return to the Old Testament system of the Law and its legal demands or Judaistic works as a way of life. As in the books of Galatians and Colossians, they were being told they needed something more than Christ. The main issue here is not faith versus

works for salvation (the author considered them saved), but a strong confidence in the sufficiency of Christ who is superior to everyone and everything in the Old Testament. Such confidence or rest in Christ should lead to productive works that result in rewards in Messiah's kingdom because the believer will have finished his course (cf. Heb. 12:1-2; with 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

The History of the Faith-Rest Life (4:4-9)

In verses 4-9 the author explains why the rest still remains today and traces a brief history of the rest of God. Even after Joshua's time, David spoke of the rest of God in Psalm 95. "There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (4:9).

The Characteristics of the Faith-Rest Life (4:10-16)

1. It is a life that rests in God's finished work by faith (v.10)

Entering God's rest in any phase of His rest means resting from one's own work just as God did from His. This is an instruction in that it reminds us that all phases of God's rest can only be entered through faith. This is also, and this is the primary focus here, a reassurance that one day, just as God rested when He completed His work of creation, so we too will enjoy our eternal rest or inheritance when we have completed our task, the race laid out before us (cf. Heb. 12:1-2).

2. It is a life that is diligent to enter God's rest (v. 11)

Since the rest remains and since we can one day enter our ultimate inheritance of reigning with Christ, we need to be diligent that we might enter that final rest as overcomers when our labor on earth is over. Since, however, faithfulness in the daily rest is a matter of faith in the sufficiency of the Savior who gives help in our time of need (4:16), this is also a call to diligence to enter the daily rest of continued confidence and trust in Christ.

It is important to remember that the disobedience of Israel to which the author again refers in this verse had its source in unbelief, in a failure to mix faith with the promises of God (3:18-19; 4:2). The warning here is not against losing eternal life, but of being disqualified for rewards which will include reigning with Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:27 but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

Revelation 2:26-27 And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father;

Revelation 3:21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

3. It is a life that is open to God's Word (v.12)

Early on in this warning, there was the call to listen and heed the voice of the Spirit of God (3:7, 15) which of course is heard in the Word of God. Failure to listen to God's penetrating Word, which reveals the inner life with its motives and causes of unbelief, will result in a failure to walk by faith.

The Word of God is itself a protection against a life of unbelief when it is cherished and carefully listened to. Faith comes by carefully hearing and taking heed to the Word of Christ. The Psalmist declared: “Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee” (Ps. 119:11).

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Not only is God’s Word a power the Spirit uses to keep us from sin, but it is a power He uses to enable us to detect sin because, like a judge and a sword, it is able to penetrate and reveal the condition of the inner life.

4. It is a life that knows we are accountable before God (v. 13)

We must never suppose that the true condition of our inner life is undetected before God. He knows all the details of our lives inwardly and overtly and we must know and live in view of the fact we will all be held accountable for the use of our lives at the judgment seat of Christ. If at this time our lives have been marked by disobedience because of a failure to walk by faith, we will suffer loss of rewards. This undoubtedly includes the loss of our inheritance rest in the sense of reigning with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

5. It is a life that is confident in our access to God (vv. 14-15)

We can be confident in our access to God because we are resting in the finished work of Christ and His priestly ministry at God’s right hand (4:14-15). There is every reason to hold firmly to the Savior and walk by faith because He sits as our sympathetic and concerned High Priest at God’s right hand where He acts as our advocate and intercessor. He is one who, though without sin, has been tempted in every way and who can feel for all we are going through.

6. It is a life that goes confidently to the throne of grace (v. 16)

With such a High Priest, we can go boldly (confidently) to the throne of grace to find the mercy and help we need. Here is the assurance that we have access through this sympathetic High Priest to a sovereign God and His gracious and sovereign provision (brought out in the words “throne of grace”) for whatever life might bring. Our need is to daily and dependently rest in and look to our all-sufficient Savior.

One of God’s provisions for prevention against a life of sin is the high priestly ministry of the Savior as our intercessor and advocate in which He prays for us, and where we have the privilege of going to Him for aid. This is beautifully illustrated in a number of ways in the gospels (cf. Mark 6:45-52; Luke 22:31-32; John 17:1ff).

Hindrances to the Faith-Rest Life (Heb. 5:11-6:6)

1. Ignorance

Ignorance of God’s Word and its revelation of God, of man and his true condition in sin, of what He has done for us in the person and work of Christ, of what believers have in Christ, etc., is, of course, fundamentally the greatest hindrance to the faith-rest life.

Both the written Word (the Bible) and the Living Word (Jesus Christ) are God's revelation to mankind to move people from unbelief and their attempt to live life apart from the true God to faith in God and His plan of salvation as it is found solely in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Jesus, speaking to those who had believed in Him, said, "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). Then, when praying to the Father regarding His disciples and all who would believe in Him, He said, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

The book of Hebrews was written to remove the ignorance of its recipients concerning the superior ministry of the Lord Jesus. It declares Him to be the final revelation of God and the ultimate vehicle of God's revelation to man. He is far superior to the prophets, to angels, and to Moses in that He is no less than God's Son and God of very God Himself (Heb. 1:1-14).

The recipients of this letter, and this includes all believers of all ages, needed to rest in the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus as their Savior and get on with the walk of faith and the ministry to which God had called them. Their lack of understanding in the superiority and sufficiency of Christ's person and work, however, was hindering their walk of faith. People can only walk by faith when they understand and believe they are perfected once-for-all by simple faith in Christ as the all-sufficient Savior.

Hebrews 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 10:14-19 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, And upon their mind I will write them," He then says, 17 "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. 19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

One of the problems they faced was a doctrinal ignorance that was foundational to a walk of faith. They needed to grow and press on toward maturity and so must we (cf. Heb. 5:12-6:1). Unless we are resting in the sufficiency of Christ, we will turn to some form of dead works or human achievement for spirituality or to meet felt needs.

2. Indifference

Hebrews 5:11-12 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Coupled with the problem of ignorance was the age-old problem of a spirit of indifference or apathy toward spiritual things (verse 11). Continuing his desire to remove their inadequate understanding, the author of Hebrews was encouraging his readers to a greater confidence of faith in the ministry of the Savior as a priest because of the greatness of His priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. He sensed it was hard to explain, however, because of his readers' apathy or slowness to learn. The word "dull" is the

Greek *nothros*, “dull, slow, sluggish, lazy.” As verse 12 indicates, plenty of time had lapsed for them to have moved on to maturity, but their apathy had held them back from growing and grasping the fullness of what they had in Christ.

What causes apathy or a sluggishness toward attentively listening and learning the truth of God’s Word? Spiritual apathy is basically caused by a spirit of self-sufficiency. Here again is the problem of the flesh with man neglecting the grace of God and trying to operate from his own resources apart from faith in God.

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Galatians 3:1-5 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

This self-sufficient mentality, which results in indifference to God’s truth, manifests itself in many ways: in materialism, in religionism, in legalism, in emotionalism, in the occult, or in any of the substitutes by which man seeks to achieve happiness, security, or acceptance with God apart from faith in God’s plan as it is revealed in the Bible. Dependence on human works or achievement whether religious, ritualistic, or altruism is one of the most prominent ways.

Analogies to Warn Us Against Independent Living

We have mentioned these previously, but because this is such a constant problem, let’s review them.

(1) We tend to turn to the *influences or substitutes of the world for our needs, rather than to the Lord.*

Isaiah 2:6-15 For Thou hast abandoned Thy people, the house of Jacob, Because they are filled with influences from the east, And they are soothsayers like the Philistines, And they strike bargains with the children of foreigners. 7 Their land has also been filled with silver and gold, And there is no end to their treasures; Their land has also been filled with horses, And there is no end to their chariots. 8 Their land has also been filled with idols; They worship the work of their hands, That which their fingers have made. 9 So the common man has been humbled, And the man of importance has been abased, But do not forgive them. 10 Enter the rock and hide in the dust From the terror of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty. 11 The proud look of man will be abased, And the loftiness of man will be humbled, And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. 12 For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning Against everyone who is proud and lofty, And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased. 13 And it will be against all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted up, Against all the oaks of Bashan, 14 Against all the lofty

mountains, Against all the hills that are lifted up, 15 Against every high tower,
Against every fortified wall,

(2) We tend to walk by our own *firebrands* by which we seek to find our own way.

Isaiah 50:10-11 Who is among you that fears the LORD, That obeys the voice of His servant, That walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. 11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with firebrands, Walk in the light of your fire And among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand; And you will lie down in torment.

(3) Like sheep, we tend to *wander, go astray* by turning to our own way.

Isaiah 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

(4) We tend to *build our own cisterns* to quench our thirst, but these are always broken cisterns that actually hold no water and they constitute forsaking the Lord, i.e., independent living.

Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.

(5) We tend to *lean on the arm of the flesh*, here defined as trusting in man rather than on the mighty power and provision of God (Jer. 17:5).

Self-Protective Strategies of Human Independence

These include unconscious human strategies people use for avoiding pain and gratifying personal desires such as:

- Retaliation, revenge tactics
- Withdrawal, hiding, running away, avoidance
- Activity—overwork, busyness
- Overly talkative, dominating conversations
- Denial, projection
- Narcotization—drugs, alcohol
- Striving for recognition, power, money, position, etc. for security or significance
- Blaming others or conditions
- Compensation—covering up undesirable traits by focusing on desirable ones

Conclusion

So what's the need? Psalm 51:16-17 gives us the answer.

For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

The need is brokenness. Brokenness occurs when we come to the end of ourselves so that we experience, recognize, and confess the futility of our own strategies by which we have attempted to live life apart from faith in God's full provision for us in Christ.

What does God do regarding our self-sufficiency? He works in the lives of believers as a Father who disciplines (Heb. 12:5-15) and as the Vinedresser who prunes the branches to make them more productive (John 15:1-7). He does this to bring us to the point where we will stop struggling to handle life apart from the faith-rest life, i.e., apart from faith in the person, promises, principles, purposes, and plan of God for every area of life. In this regard note the comments of the Psalmist in Psalm 119 regarding affliction.

- Verse 67: Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Thy word.
- Verse 71: It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Thy statutes.
- Verse 75: I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me.

The Psalmist clearly saw the affliction of his life as the tool of a loving and faithful God to remove his self-sufficiency, to draw him back to God, and please note, to rekindle his hunger for and trust in God's Word which the Spirit of God uses to reveal our sin and to keep us from sin.

Psalm 119:11 Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.

James 1:2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1 Peter 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

Carefully read Psalm 119, but as you do, note that, with the exception of verses 1-3 and 115, the entire Psalm is addressed to the Lord in praise, petition, and confession. In this Psalm, the Psalmist praises God for the power and greatness of His Word. He refers to God's Word in every verse except verses 90, 122, 132, and to show the nature and its dynamics, he uses ten different terms for it. He also prays for deliverance and strength according to the principles and promises of God's Word, but chiefly he is acknowledging his own insufficiency to handle his sin and life in general apart from God and His Word.

A Proper Response

Dear Heavenly Father, I confess my total insufficiency to handle life apart from you; You alone are sufficient. I confess that I have been trusting in my own strength and struggling to live my life through my own strategies for security, significance, and happiness. I admit I have been trying to get my needs met through (replace the following with what applies to you) controlling people and circumstances, through seeking praise or recognition from people, through my achievements, through possessions, through pleasure, etc. I ask you to revive and strengthen me according to the promises of your Word and the new life I have in Christ. Help me, by your grace, to walk in the power of your life through the Holy Spirit. Give me the grace to replace my self-dependence with a deep dependence on Christ.

Lesson 3:
The Christ-Centered Life
The Doctrine of Positional Truth

Introduction

A foundation is the basis upon which a thing stands, is founded, or is supported, but a solid foundation is necessary to withstand the storms of life. Build your house on sand rather than on a rock and it will crumble under the tempests of life.

As the Lord taught in Matthew 7, the same is true for our spiritual life. The only adequate foundation for eternal life and a life that results in true spiritual transformation is the person and work of Christ and the spiritual wealth of our position in Christ—our co-identification or union with Christ in His person and work.

This study introduces us to the concept of positional truth. Positional truth has to do with who we are in Christ as believers. Since it has to do with who we are in Christ, it will also affect our self-concept. The focus, however, is on who we are in the Savior through faith in Him and how that should impact our lives as believers.

We must understand that the first key to effectiveness in living a godly life is to know what God has done for us. This forms the foundation for our response. Only as we understand and rest in how God has acted in Christ are we able to act through Christ. In terms of all aspects of our salvation and all that it brings we must know and consider that God has done it all.

Begin to show [people] what they are in Christ and all that the Great Physician is and they will apply it to their own life. ... That is why preaching positional truth always proceeds in point of importance to life truth. In the great epistles, the doctrinal epistles like Romans and Ephesians you have this order. Take Ephesians and its six chapters. The first three chapters tell you what Christ has done for you and then the next three chapters tell you what you can do for Him.¹

Understanding what God has done for us and who we are in Christ is foundational to having the right motive in living the Christian life, and the right motive is a vital key in the process of transformation. Chafer called this “the right motive.” Lawrence quotes Chafer who said:

What is your motive for doing right? I suppose that above anything else in the world you want to honor God with the right kind of a life. I believe that, men. You do not need to convince me of that. But what is your motive? Why do you want to live right? Is it in order that God might accept you or is it because He has accepted you? ... Ninety-nine out of one-hundred people who are members of our Protestant churches today ... think their job is to win the favor of God and they do not know that they have the favor of God from the moment they believe on Christ. ... He has

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, “*The Believer’s Responsibility*,” transcription of a class lecture, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948, taken from class notes by William D. Lawrence, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993, p. 13-3.

given you everything that He ever required and that is yours right now when you believe. Never are you called to fall back on the merit system. ... Are you living the best you could because you were set right, or did you live the best you could hoping to be set right?²

Commenting on this statement by Chafer, Lawrence writes: "This is the foundational factor in obeying God's commands: obedience is a response to God's provisions for holiness, not an attempt to earn God's blessings and provisions (cf. Rom. 8:32)."³

We hear a great deal today about our self-worth, self-esteem, self-image, and learning to love yourself. Many psychologists focus on self-worth with the goal of simply helping people feel good about themselves. Understanding just who we are and self worth are important aspects of emotional and spiritual stability and are a driving force within all human beings. As human beings created in God's image, we each have value, meaning, and purpose in the plan of God. Having a right concept of ourselves is biblical, but only if we keep the right focus and purpose.

For instance, in Romans 12:3 we are told to think properly about who we really are according to God's grace. The means for knowing who we are, so that such knowledge transforms our motives and thinking, is a renewed mind in the Word (12:2).

Romans 12:1-3 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

The goal and motive of a right self image, rather than self-centered objectives, is loving ministry to the body of Christ that is empty of hypocrisy.

Romans 12:4-9 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

An accurate and biblical self concept has two important sides or contrasts. It contains both strength and humility. It contains both a deep concern over the fact of our sin and joy and relief over forgiveness, and both a strong sense of our inadequacy and need of God with an understanding of how God in grace has perfectly met that need in Christ.

As human beings who are spiritually weak, we not only need a proper self-concept we need God's power and ability to change and overcome the sinful nature (the flesh) and those patterns of life that are

² Ibid., p. 13-3.

³ Ibid., p. 13-3.

so destructive to ourselves and to others. The Christian's position in Christ and his co-identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection form the foundation for victory over the flesh and a new capacity for life.

To be sure, the Spirit of God, whose responsibility it is to glorify Christ and mediate His life to you and me, will never produce spiritual power or bring true spiritual change into any life that is not resting in the merit, significance, and sufficiency of Christ as the source and ground of all life and meaning. Such would be out of the question due to the purpose of the ministry of the Spirit as declared in Scripture.

If we want to experience the transformed life, we must understand who we are in Christ by God's grace and how that affects our walk in life. Understanding the practical ramifications of our position and union in Christ (Romans 6) is foundational to the walk in and by the Spirit of God (Romans 8).

The Holy Spirit cannot cooperate or engender any reality of experience when the very basis of a grace relationship to God is ignored. How, indeed could the holy Spirit empower a life which is wholly misguided and wrong in its objectives, methods, and motives? His benefits, of necessity, have significance only for those who recognize and believe that they are perfected once-for-all by simple faith in Christ as Savior and that their new obligation is not to make themselves accepted but rather to walk worthy of the One in whom they are accepted.⁴

A Note of Warning

In Colossians 2:8 the Apostle Paul gives us a word of caution and one that is particularly fitting for our focus in this study:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. (NIV)

Satan is a master of deception and, aided by his world system in which we live and by our own blindness, he seeks (as he did in the beginning) to hold us captive as slaves to a whole range of false beliefs and strategies by which we attempt to achieve that which only God can give. Ironically, we seek to achieve by our own self-effort that which we already have in Christ. The result is we often become focused on false goals which, like a hypnotic spell, hold us captive and keep us from experiencing God's love, strength, and freedom, and the significance of life in Christ. These goals we so often pursue involve standards of achievement we (or others) have established as evidences of our success and thus of our self-worth.

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with doing our best and in doing things well for God's glory and for the blessing of others as well as for our own enjoyment. However, when this becomes the focus, we can become a slave to perfectionism or to defeatism. Note some of the problems which typically occur with the perfectionist or those who are under pressure to meet self-imposed standards to feel good about themselves:

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. VI, Pneumatology, Dallas Seminary Press, Dallas, Texas, 1984, p. 164.

- They usually base their self-worth on how well they do things and on the response of others to how well they have performed.
- They tend to be critical and look down on those who don't do so well.
- If criticized they are devastated and become defensive because they seek their value through their performance. Perfectionists tend to be vulnerable to big mood swings depending on their success.
- In their pursuit of a perfect standard, they tend to become controlling as they fight to have things perfect so they will feel okay.
- The self-imposed standards usually result in a rule-dominated life. They set rules and schedules for nearly every area of life and focus their attention on their ability to accomplish the rules and meet their schedule.

In contrast to this, the Christian's focus needs to be on Christ and his new life in Him, not on self-imposed regulations, schedules, achievements, etc., regardless of their nature whether religious, social, or secular. Christ will bring order with spiritual control and ability into the life, but He will be the center, the focus, motive, and source of what we do and how we do it rather than neurotic motives to achieve.

Definition of Positional Truth

Positional truth is the doctrine of the believer's heavenly, spiritual, and eternal position in Jesus Christ by which a person spiritually and positionally is united and identified with Christ in His person and work—past, present, and future. This truth is especially seen in the Pauline epistles where, over a hundred times, the apostle uses such phrases like "in Christ," "in the beloved," "in Him," "with Christ," etc. These phrases draw attention, indeed, they put the focus on the secure position and many blessings that all believers are given through their union with Jesus Christ. The basis of these blessings is the finished work of salvation accomplished through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

Scriptures Showing the "In Christ" Concept

1 Corinthians 1:2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

Philippians 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Colossians 2:6-12 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Colossians 3:1-3 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

2 Timothy 1:1 and 9 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, ... 9 who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

Compare also Romans 6:1-11; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:4-10.

The Mechanics (Who, When, Where, How)

When people receive the Lord Jesus Christ (the who and when) by personally believing in Him as their Savior (trusting in His person and work on the cross for their sinful condition) they are placed into vital union with the Savior (the where) through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (the how) so that they become co-identified spiritually and actually with Jesus Christ in His person and work (the results).

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Romans 6:3-5 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,

Colossians 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Key Concepts of Positional Truth

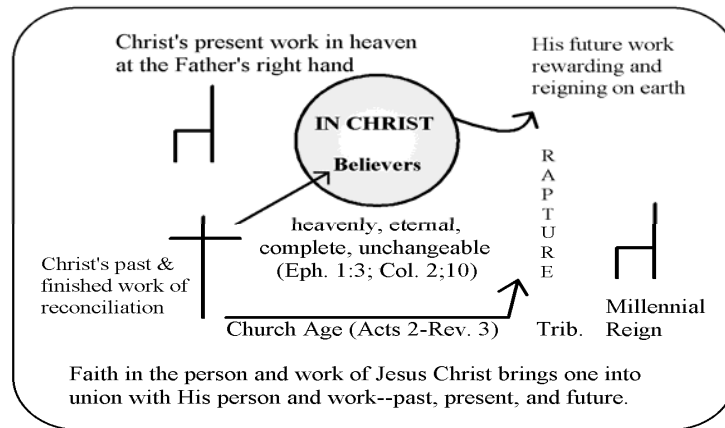
It's the Foundation for Growth and Change

As stressed in the introduction to this lesson, understanding positional truth is foundational for growth in the Christian life. When properly grasped, it protects against man's and Satan's substitutes for spirituality, and it forms the foundation for spiritual victory over the sinful nature or the flesh. In other words, the truth of Romans 6, our position in Christ, is crucial for the truth of Romans 7 and 8, overcoming the power of indwelling sin by means of the Spirit who indwells within. One finds the same concept in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Colossians.

Positional truth means we share in all that Jesus is in *His person* and we share in what He did and will do, *His Work*. Thus:

- **As He died unto sin, so we too have died unto sin.**
Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?
- **As He rose from the dead, so have we.**
Romans 6:5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,
- **As He is seated at God's right hand, so are we.**
Ephesians 2:6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,
- **As He is the Son, so we are now sons.**
Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
- **As He is eternal life, so we have eternal life.**
Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **As He is perfect righteousness, so we have His righteousness.**
Philippians 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Note the chart on Positional Truth.



The Nature of Our Position in Christ

Our position in Christ is not a conscious experience, an emotion, or a second blessing to be sought. It is a spiritual fact and takes place as a grace work of God when one believes in the Savior, and this is true for all believers regardless of feelings or understanding. Of course, understanding positional truth is important to experiencing the benefits of being in Christ. This is most obvious in Colossians 2:6-12 quoted above and in Romans 6:3-12.

Romans 6:3-12 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,

The Believer's Position Is Perfect and Complete

Unlike spiritual growth and maturity in the Christian walk, **positional truth is not progressive.** From the moment of salvation, having been placed into Christ by the Spirit, believers are blessed with

every spiritual blessing and are complete. They lack nothing, but they do need to grow in their understanding of what they have in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Hebrews 5:11-14 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

1 Peter 2:1-2 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Positional truth means at least three wonderful facts for every believer:

- **Christ totally surrounds us; we are enveloped by His life.**

Colossians 3:3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

- **Christ protects us from everything that is hostile or dangerous.**

Romans 8:32-39 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- **Christ supplies us with every possible need for life.**

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Raymond Ortlund writes:

We're in Him the way a baby's in a womb—but better.
We're in Him the way a moth is in a chrysalis—but better.
We're in Him the way a deep-sea diver's in his diving suit—but better.
We're in Him the way birds are in the air, or fish are in the sea—but better.⁵

The Believer's Position Is Eternal and Permanent

Salvation is totally a work of God's grace and based on the merit and worth of Christ and His finished work rather than our works. Since that is true, there is nothing we can do to lose it. In addition to Romans 8:32-39 quoted above, note our Lord's promise.

John 10:28-30 and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

This truth is evident from the fact that the carnal believers at Corinth are still viewed as permanently set apart, sanctified in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

"Have been sanctified in Christ Jesus" represents the perfect tense which looks at an event or fact completed in the past with results going on in the present. Though he declared them carnal in chapter 3, the apostle viewed them as still positionally in Christ.

The Wealth of the Believer's Position in Jesus Christ

As to Christ's *PERSON*

Being in Christ we share in the following:

- **As He has perfect righteousness, all believers have Christ's righteousness imputed to them.**
2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- **As He has eternal life, so all believers have eternal life.**
Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **His eternal destiny becomes the destiny of all believers.**

⁵ Raymond C. Ortlund, *Circle of Strength*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1978, p. 5.

Ephesians 1:4-5 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Ephesians 1:10-11 with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

- **As He is the Son of God, so all believers become sons and members of God's family by adoption and by regeneration, the new birth.**

John 1:13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Ephesians 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.

- **As He is the Father's chosen One, so all believers are chosen ones.** [Some see this as a corporate choosing, others as personal and corporate which fits best with Scripture as a whole.]

Ephesians 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love

- **As He is the Heir of God, so all believers are heirs of God.**

Ephesians 1:11-14 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ... 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

- **As He is the Great High Priest, so all believers are priests of God.**

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

But being in Christ, believers also share in Christ's redemptive work on the cross.

As to Christ's *WORK*

Being in Christ, we share in His work *past, present, and future*:

- **In Christ, believers are reconciled to God by His substitutionary death.**

Romans 5:10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

- **In Christ, believers have peace with God.**
Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- **In Christ, believers have His righteousness imputed to them.**
2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- **In Christ, believers are justified, declared righteous.**
Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.
- **In Christ, believers are redeemed by His blood and have forgiveness of sin.**
Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,
- **In Christ, the demands of God's holiness have been satisfied; God has been propitiated.**
Romans 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;
- **In Christ, there is now no condemnation.**
Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- **In Christ, the penalty of sin has been expiated, removed.**
Colossians 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
- **In Christ, believers are no longer guilty or under the condemnation of the Law and its sentence of death.**
Romans 7:4-6 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.
Colossians 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
- **In Christ, believers are accepted, made fit and sufficient to be partakers in God's family and inheritance.**

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Colossians 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

All the above deal with Christ's substitutionary death *for* sin's penalty as He died in our place, bearing our penalty. But Christ's death also includes His judicial work against the reign of sin.

Christ also died *unto* sin's power to break its reign. He died *for* sin and *unto* sin and its reign.

Romans 6:10-12 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,

- **In Christ, believers have also died with Christ in His death and burial.**

Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Colossians 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

- **In Christ, the believer's relationship to Adam has been severed and the dominion of the sinful nature, though still present, has been broken.**

Romans 6:1-14 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

- **In Christ, believers have been raised together with Him in His resurrection.**

Ephesians 2:5-6 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved, 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,

- **In Christ, believers have been raised with Him for a walk in newness of life (cf. Rom. 6:8-12 above).**

Colossians 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

- **In Christ, believers are seated with Him in the heavenlies at the right hand of the Father.**

Ephesians 2:6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,

- **In Christ, believers have an eternal access to God, they are made nigh to God, translated into God's kingdom, and delivered from Satan's kingdom and the power of darkness.**

Ephesians 2:18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Ephesians 3:12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

- **In Christ, believers have a perpetual and effective High Priest, an advocate and two intercessors, the Son at God's right hand, and the Holy Spirit who dwells within (Rom. 8:26-27, 34; 1 John 2:2).**

- **In Christ, believers have special significance and the basis of a true self-concept as the children of God.** Being in Christ, the believer is one who is God's child by spiritual birth and legal adoption. This means believers are in the royal family of the King of kings. Believers are royal sons of God, a holy and royal priesthood, ambassadors of the King, and partners with the Savior. How could we possibly be more significant and have a greater reason to live than that?

1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy .

Hebrews 1:9 Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee With the oil of gladness above Thy companions.

Hebrews 2:11-13 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise." 13 And again, "I will put My trust in Him." And again, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me."

Application

There are a number of ways we could apply the truth of our position in Christ, the truth of identification. Let me suggest just two, with the second being a further outworking of the first.

Concerning Obedience

First, concerning obedience or overcoming the pulls of indwelling sin and the passions of the flesh. After declaring the believers identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, the apostle says: “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). The KJV translated “consider” as “reckon,” and it is truly the reckoning that counts. The Greek word is *logizomai*. It means “to calculate, count on as true” as in adding up a set of numbers to arrive at their true sum. By calculating the facts presented in verses 1-10, we are to know for certain that we are dead to the power and rule of sin and alive for the power of Christ. This means the ability for obedience to God (Rom. 6:12-18). Our union with Christ is made up of two aspects: death and resurrection (life). Identification with Him in His death leads to identification with Him in His resurrected life.

- We must know the facts of identification with Christ.
- We must count on these facts as spiritual realities by faith.
- Knowing and believing in our new identification, we are to present ourselves to God for obedience.

This presentation is ultimately carried out through walking by faith in the Spirit who dwells within (Rom. 8:1-13). Being instruments of righteousness as seen in Romans 6:13 is equivalent to the fruit of the Spirit of Galatians 5:22-23.

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Romans 6:13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

However, before we experience the life of identification (death and life) through this reckoning that counts, we too often have to experience the failure and weakness of Romans 7:15-25, the futility of trying to live according to law by our own resources and good intentions. Faith in God’s resources only really begins when we stop trusting in our resources.

Concerning Man’s Behavior

Robert S. McGee writes:

What a waste to attempt to change behavior without truly understanding the driving needs that cause such behavior! Yet millions of people spend a lifetime searching for love, acceptance, and success without understanding the need that compels them. We

must understand that this hunger for self-worth is God-given and can only be satisfied by Him. Our value is not dependent on our ability to earn the fickle acceptance of people, but rather, its true source is the love and acceptance of God. He created us. He alone knows how to fulfill *all* of our needs.⁶

All believers have the perfect basis for a proper sense of identity or a good self-concept, one dependent on who they are in Christ and, please note, one dependent on the value God places on their lives rather than on the value they or others may place on their lives. Whose opinion is the most important? Yours and mine, or God's? Do we properly grasp how foolish it is to live our lives for the opinions of man? Compare the following verses:

1 Corinthians 3:3-7 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

The three fundamental needs people have for a sense of purpose and significance are **Acceptance**, **Belongingness**, and **Competence**, and each of these is found in Christ. Our life, therefore, is to be directed away from ourselves, the carnal and the visible, to the secret source of life—the risen Savior and our perfect union in Him and His life.

(1) We are *Accepted* in Christ with free access to God.

Ephesians 1:6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (KJV)

Ephesians 2:18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Ephesians 3:12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

⁶ Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance*, Rapha Publishing, p. 15.

Romans 14:3 Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.

(2) We *Belong* to the family of God as adopted children.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

1 Corinthians 3:23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

(3) We Have *Competence, ability in Christ to be and do what God calls us to.*

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Our union in Christ (our position) is a call for us to be Christ-centered and oriented in our thinking. For a practical application of what this means regarding who we are as individuals compare the two self-concept diagrams at the end of this lesson.

In view of these many declarations of Scripture which use "in Christ," or a similar term, it is clear why Paul said that in Christ we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing and that we are therefore "*complete in Him.*"

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Conclusion

Since believers are complete in Christ, there is nothing they can add to gain salvation, or to maintain their salvation (cf. Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 8:32-39). We are saved by the record of the Savior, not ours.

Likewise, there is nothing believers can add to the work of Christ or to their new life in Christ in order to walk with God and experience true spirituality. The need is to reckon, to rely on this new spiritual life and these marvelous resources we have by grace in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 2:1-23; Gal. 3:1f; 5:1f).

Colossians warns believers against being led away from full confidence in their complete position in Christ. Similarly, Hebrews and Galatians warn against moving into legalism or into some form of works and away from trust in the finished work of Christ as the ground of one's spiritual life. To trust in any-

thing other than God's full provision for us in Jesus Christ is to be *faithless* in our position and *futile* to our condition.

As a result of union with Christ, the believer's life is hidden permanently in God through this union and identification with Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:1-3 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

There are two ideas in these verses:

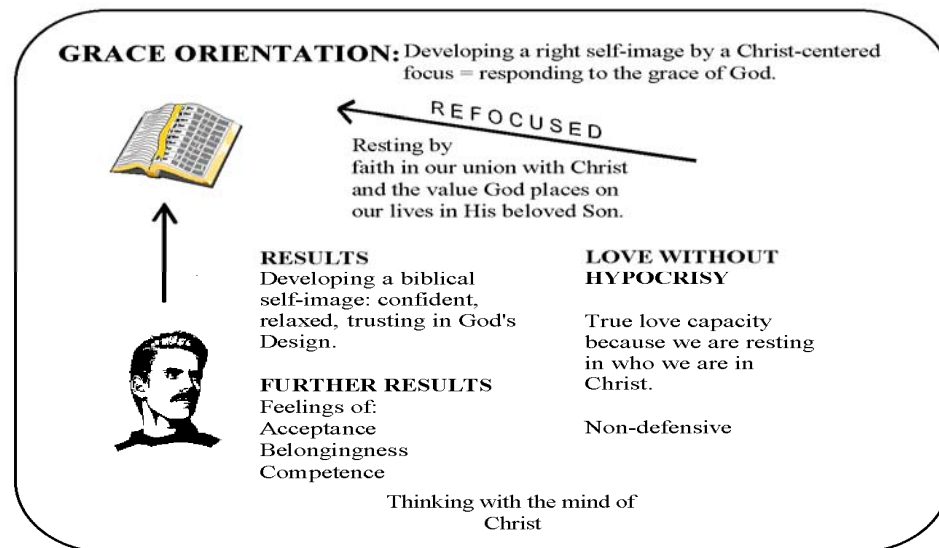
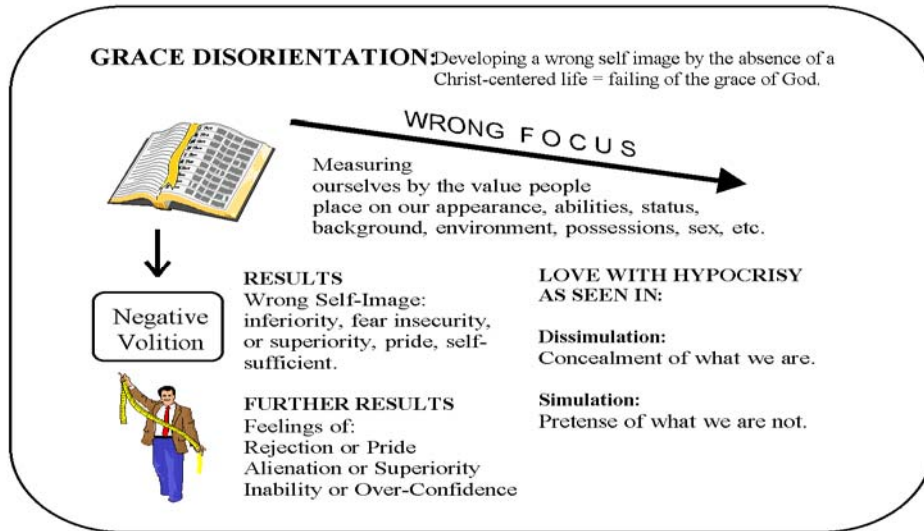
(1) Safety: Believers are doubly safe with Christ in God.

John 10:28-29 and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

(2) Secrecy: Believers' lives are nourished and supplied by hidden resources which the world cannot know or give.

In conclusion, let me repeat what was said at the beginning of this lesson. The Spirit of God, whose responsibility it is to glorify Christ and mediate His life to you and me, will never engender spiritual power or bring change into any life that is not resting in the merit, significance, and sufficiency of Christ as the source and ground of all life and meaning. Such would be out of the question.

If we want to experience the transformed life, we must understand and count on who we are in Christ and how that affects our walk in life. Romans 6, understanding the practical ramifications of our position and union in Christ is foundational to Romans 7 and 8, the power of indwelling sin and the walk in and by the Spirit of God.



Lesson 4:
The Spirit-Filled Life
(Part 1)

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

The Apostle Paul reminds us that the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power (1 Cor. 4:20), and that the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in (or “by” pointing to the means) the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). The message of the Gospel brings the power of God into every believer’s life through the person and work of the Lord Jesus and the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

1 Corinthians 1:18, 24 For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Far too many Christians, however, are not experiencing the enabling power of God. For these believers it is simply a matter of doing the best *they can* to conform to certain expected standards. On the surface, some appear to be more successful at conforming to the rules than others, but if they are honest with themselves, and this is no easy task because of our bent for self-deception, there is the ever present awareness that something is wrong.

In our attempt to rationalize, we may seek to find comfort in thoughts such as: “No one is perfect, we all have our weaknesses,” or “I am doing the very best I can, and I am sure God understands.” Of course, no one is perfect, and certainly God does understand. Let’s assume we are doing our best, but this does not alter the fact that unless we are walking by faith in God and in His abundant resources in Christ, we are missing the abundant life Christ offered when He said, “I came that they might life and have *it* abundantly” (John 10:10b).

Is *our best* what God wants? No! He wants faith in *His best*, the Lord Jesus, and in the person of the Spirit whom God has sent to indwell us and empower us so we can experience the power of Christ and the ability to do our best, not in our own strength, but in the strength which God supplies. “And for this purpose, I work hard, struggling constantly in accordance with His working which continues to work in me mightily” (Colossians 1:29, author’s translation).

Because of human weakness, no one can live the Christian life any more than one can perfectly keep the Law of the Old Testament (cf. Rom. 3:9-20; Gal. 3:10-14). If we could live the Christian life without God’s enablement, why do you suppose God would promise the Holy Spirit to indwell the church (John 7:37-39; 14:17)? If we could live the Christian life and serve the Lord without God’s power

through faith, why would the Lord Jesus give the Holy Spirit the title of “the Helper” or better, “the Enabler” (John 14:16, 26), then point out the disciples’ inadequacy apart from the Spirit (John 16:7-15), and tell them not to attempt any ministry until the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-8)? Yet, it seems to me that we so often try to do just exactly that. So often, we tend to run off to do this or that in our own steam because we are all so prone to trust in our own resources.

Since the Spirit is our Enabler, the doctrine of the filling of the Holy Spirit (like positional truth) is critical to fellowship with God and to obedience. Without an understanding of this doctrine the believer cannot properly function in the Christian life.

It is sometimes said, Christianity is not a way of life, it is a life to live. It is the reproduction of Christ in the believer’s life by faith just as the apostle stated in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” However, it is God the Holy Spirit who reproduces the character of Christ in the life of the believer. This has both a positive and a negative side.

(1) The Positive Side: Paul had the positive element in mind in Romans 8:4 when he wrote “in order that the righteous requirements of the Law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (NIV). Positive righteousness, i.e., the fruit of the Spirit or the character of Jesus Christ, is reproduced in the believer who is under the Spirit’s control.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(2) The Negative Side: In Romans 8:13 Paul added, “for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” This teaches that, on the negative side, the deeds (sins) of the flesh are put off, not by will power—though our will is certainly involved—but by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Note Galatians 5:16, “... but I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” Producing the character of Christ from both the negative (putting off the deeds of the flesh) and from the positive (putting on godly characteristics) is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The necessity of a proper understanding of the filling/controlling ministry of the Spirit is intensified by such passages as Galatians 4:19 where Paul prayed, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” Included in the meaning of the Greek word translated “formed” (*morphoō*) is the concept of giving **outward expression** of **inward character**. “The form means the essential form rather than outward shape. The idea is therefore of real Christlike character.”¹ Paul is praying for Christ to be outwardly expressed in the believer, but from within through the power of the Spirit. Mere external conformity is not the goal. Note also that the verb “be formed” is passive. This means the subject receives the action rather than produces the action.

Christ formed in one’s life is not something the Christian can do, nor is it something Christ does Himself. Christ does not manifest Himself in the life of the Christian. This ministry has been given to the Holy Spirit and that fact is born out in numerous passages such as John 16:14 where the Lord says of the

¹ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Regency, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 513.

Spirit, "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you" (NIV). Compare also, the following passages:

Ephesians 1:16-19 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might

Galatians 5:16-25 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Perhaps it can be illustrated this way if one doesn't take the illustration too far. The believer is like an automobile whether new and beautiful or old and not so pretty. Either way the automobile has all the equipment necessary to run with power—a transmission, an engine, a carburetor, wheels, tires, etc. But without one ingredient, gasoline, the car cannot function. All of its equipment is there, but it is useless unless there is gas to bring about internal combustion. The Holy Spirit is that combustion power for the believer, who, unlike the gas in our cars, is always present since He comes to permanently indwell every believer (Eph. 4:30).

In Romans 6, Paul points to our wonderful resources (our position in Christ) which provide the basis for newness of life. But in Romans 7 he teaches us two important truths with regard to deliverance and spirituality. First, the Law or any other system of ethics, while it exposes our sin, cannot make us righteous or deliver from the power of sin. Second, the apostle teaches us our new position, though absolutely necessary for spiritual transformation, is powerless by itself. It is the necessary foundation for deliverance, but with this new position, we need the empowering work of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as described in Romans 8 to utilize our new resources in Christ.

We need to understand that every believer has been indwelt by the Spirit and has both the resources and the power necessary for the abundant life that the Savior promised us in John 10:10b. Our problem is not putting gas in the tank, but using (walking in dependence upon) the power that is there. The need is for every believer to understand and follow the biblical injunctions of Ephesians 5:18, "be filled (be controlled) with (by means of) the Spirit," and Galatians 5:16, "walk by the Spirit." Later in this study, support for this view of Ephesians 5:18 will be given.

Learning to walk by the Spirit, however, is not so easy. In the first place, the Scripture does not give us a simple definition of how to be filled, and it is not learned by a casual reading of the New Testament.

In the second place, there are all kinds of erroneous concepts floating around in Christian circles today. Some teach a spirituality by works (legalism) or will power. Legalism (spirituality by the keeping of the Law) was the problem at Galatia. Others teach a relative concept of filling in that they treat the Spirit as a substance which we get a little at a time. Still others today are viewing the filling of the Spirit as merely a quality of life that is somewhat analogous to spiritual growth. They may even talk about the control of the Spirit, but when you carefully look at their whole proposition for the Spirit-filled walk, it seems to me it borders on a form of self-reformation wherein one simply learns to replace old life dominating patterns with a new lifestyle patterned after the Scripture. There is truth in this approach, but not the whole truth. It lacks the concept of the moment-by-moment dependence on the Spirit coupled with the concept of growth.

Many fail to understand the difference between indwelling, anointing, sealing, and baptizing, and the filling of the Spirit. We often hear people pray for a special anointing. Hymns are sung such as *Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove*, or *Fill Me Now* which do not reflect sound theology in relation to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The second verse of *Fill Me Now* says, "Thou canst fill me, gracious Spirit, though I cannot tell Thee how; But I need Thee, greatly need Thee, Come, O Come, and fill me now." Surely the writer of this old hymn was expressing our need of the ministry of the Spirit and His control, but the wording is inaccurate and misleading because it fails to distinguish between the indwelling of the Spirit and the filling (control) of the Spirit. The same applies to the chorus *Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh On Me*. The Spirit, as will be explained in more detail later, is not a substance which comes to fill us, but a person who **has come** to indwell us if we have trusted in Christ. Indeed, one of the proofs of salvation is the presence of the Spirit. Romans 8:9 reads, "... but if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."

The purpose of this study is to:

- (1) Define and clarify just who the Holy Spirit is and what it is that He does.
- (2) Understand the unique age in which we live as it relates to the Holy Spirit.
- (3) Define and clarify the terms used of the Holy Spirit such as anointing, indwelling, and filling, etc.
- (4) Demonstrate from Scripture how to be filled with the Spirit, i.e., how to walk under the control of the Holy Spirit in order to experience the character of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ will not express Himself in the life of the believer apart from the ministry of the Spirit. If the Spirit's ministry is not understood, then His work in reproducing Christ in us is hindered, if not completely quenched.

Before we actually begin to deal with the Spirit-filled life, what it means, and how we can experience it, there is some ground work that must be laid or we could quickly go off into error with regard to the ministries of the Spirit.

The Person of the Holy Spirit (Who the Spirit Is)

The Personality of the Holy Spirit

The least understood person of the Godhead is the Holy Spirit. Yet a proper understanding of the truth of His personality is crucial to a number of other doctrines of Scripture, including the ministry of the Spirit Himself.

To deny the personality of the Spirit is to “deny His real existence, the existence of the Trinity, and the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject. Nevertheless, His personality has been denied throughout the ages, first by the Monarchians, the Arians, ... and the Socinians in the days of the reformation.”² In modern days, His personality has been denied by one Pentecostal group and by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The name “Holy Spirit” occurs 89 times in the New Testament, and this number does not include the times He is referred to simply as “Spirit.” This, plus the fact He is promised in the Old Testament and is a special gift from God in the New Testament, should show just how important it is to understand what the Scripture teaches about the Spirit.

*He Has the Attributes of Personality*³

(1) Intellect.

These verses show the Holy Spirit has a mind, that He thinks, searches, and teaches. When we combine this with the other attributes of the Spirit set forth in the Bible, we see this is not like a programmed computer with memory, or like a sign that gives direction along the road, but the Holy Spirit has a mind and does things as a person.

1 Corinthians 2:10-13 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Romans 8:27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

(2) Emotion.

We cannot grieve or cause pain to an influence. We are only able to grieve a person who can love and feel. Because of the Spirit’s holy character—another element of personality—He is grieved by our sin. Note in particular the statement in James 4:5: “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the

² Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1965, p. 11.

³ The outline and basic argument used in this section, with slight variation, is taken from *The Holy Spirit*, by Charles C. Ryrie.

Spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely?" (NIV) An "influence" or an "it" does not envy or jealously guard another.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Hebrews 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

(3) Will.

Concerning the will of the Holy Spirit, Ryrie writes:

The distribution of spiritual gifts is said to be according to the will of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11), and He is able to direct the activities of God's servants. This is well illustrated by the Spirit leading Paul at Mysia and Troas. He forbade Paul to preach in Asia and Bithynia, ...⁴

We can translate, "as He wills" of 1 Corinthians 12:11 as "as He purposes or determines." This could hardly be predicated of a mere *it*.

1 Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Acts 16:6-11 And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; 7 and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; 8 and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;

He Performs the Actions of Personality

(1) He teaches.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 16:13-15 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.

⁴ Ryrie, p. 12.

(2) He testifies or bears witness.

John 15:26 When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,

(3) He guides or leads.

Romans 8:14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

(4) He performs miracles.

Acts 8:39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing.

(5) He convinces.

John 16:7-8 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment;

(6) He restrains.

Genesis 6:3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

(7) He commands and directs people.

Acts 8:29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

(8) He intercedes in prayer.

Romans 8:26 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

We can learn from books or from our experiences, but they do not really function as teachers who possess will and purpose. Handcuffs can restrain, but in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 (if this refers to the Spirit through His role in the church, and many believe it does) the restrainer is spoken of as "he"—a person. (See below on the concept of accidence.)

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

The aspect of bearing witness is presented as the work of one who is a person. All of these actions of the Spirit are presented in Scripture, especially when taken as a whole, as the work of a person who is vitally involved with us as people in a relationship. For instance, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us and performs miracles—things which only a person can do.

He Receives Ascriptions of Personality

Ryrie writes: “Certain acts are performed toward the Holy Spirit which would be incongruous if He did not possess true personality.”⁵

(1) He can be obeyed.

Acts 16:6-7 And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; 7 and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

(2) He can be lied to.

Acts 5:3 But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?”

(3) He can be resisted.

Acts 7:51 You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

(4) He can be blasphemed.

Matthew 12:31 Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

(5) He can be grieved.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

(6) He can be insulted.

Hebrews 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

He Receives Accidence of Personality

The Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma* which fundamentally means “breath, wind.” “Wind” in John 3:8 is *pneuma*. From this word, we derive English words like “pneumonia” or “pneumatic.” *Pneuma* is a neuter gender word and would normally require a neuter gender pronoun according to a rule of Greek grammar called concord. However, because the Holy Spirit is a person, the New Testament writers sometimes used a masculine pronoun in place of a neuter pronoun for the neuter noun *pneuma*. Masculine pronouns are used of the Spirit in John 15:26; 16:7, 8, 13, and 14.

Ramifications of the Personality of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is related to people as a distinct person rather than simply an influence. The following are some illustrations:

⁵ Ryrie, p. 13.

(1) He is related to the apostles as a distinct and separate person who thought about what was best and related that to the apostles who were in accord with the Spirit.

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

(2) He is related to the Lord Jesus as a distinct and separate person.

John 16:14 He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.

(3) He is related to the other persons of the Godhead so as to indicate personality. Concerning this, Ryrie writes:

In the passages where this occurs it would be completely unnatural to regard the Spirit as a thing while understanding the Father and the Son as persons. The baptismal formula is in the “name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). Not only does the association of the Spirit with the Father and the Son argue for the Spirit’s personality, but the use of the word “name” in the singular also indicates that He is a person just as the others are. The apostolic benediction leads to the same conclusion: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14).⁶

(4) He is distinguished from His own power as a person. Ryrie writes:

Further, the Holy Spirit is related to His own power and yet distinguished from it, so that one may not conclude that the Spirit is only power. “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Luke 4:14). A verse like this leads one to understand that the Spirit is a person who has power, and not that the Spirit is simply a powerful force or thing. Other examples of this distinction between the Spirit as a person and that person’s power are found in Luke 1:35; Acts 10:38; Romans 15: 13; I Corinthians 2:4. The phraseology of these verses would be useless and inexplicable repetition if the Holy Spirit were conceived as merely a power or influence and not a distinct personality with power of His own.⁷

The Deity of the Holy Spirit

Proofs for the Deity of the Holy Spirit

The fact that the Holy Spirit is a person does not prove that He is God, but the reverse of that is true. If He is God, then He must be a person as God is. However, the denial of His deity and personality usually go together. Erickson writes:

The deity of the Holy Spirit is not as easily established as is that of the Father and the Son. It might well be said that the deity of the Father is simply assumed in Scripture, that of the Son is affirmed and argued, while that of the Holy Spirit must be inferred

⁶ Ryrie, p. 16.

⁷ Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 16.

from various indirect statements found in Scripture. There are, however, several bases on which one may conclude that the Holy Spirit is God in the same fashion and to the same degree as are the Father and the Son.⁸

Proven by His Titles

The title “the Holy Spirit” is in itself an affirmation that He is God in keeping with the emphasis of God’s holiness found throughout the Bible. His deity, however, is further borne out by the various references to the Spirit which are clearly interchangeable with references to God, and in essence speak of Him as God. Two prominent illustrations show this.

The first illustration is Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-4. Concerning this Erickson writes:

Bringing a portion of the proceeds to the apostles, they represented it as the whole of what they had received. Peter spoke harsh words of condemnation to each of them, and both were struck dead. In rebuking Ananias, Peter asked, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?” (v. 3). In the next verse he asserts, “You have not lied to men but to God.” It seems that in Peter’s mind “lying to the Holy Spirit” and “lying to God” were interchangeable expressions. It could, of course, be argued that two different referents were in view, so that Peter was actually saying, “You have lied both to the Holy Spirit and to God.” The statement in verse 4, however, was apparently intended to make it clear that the lie was told not to humans, to someone less than God, but to God Himself. Thus, we are led to the conclusion that the second statement is an elaboration of the first, emphasizing that the Spirit to whom Ananias had lied was God.⁹

A second illustration is found in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 where again the titles “Holy Spirit” and “God” are used interchangeably in the apostle’s discussion of the body of Christ and believers as individuals.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

It is also significant that the word for temple is the Greek *naos* which was used of the Holy of Holies portion of the temple, the place where the Ark was and where God dwelt in the Old Testament before the parting of His glory. Today, the believer’s body is the *naos*—the dwelling place of God through the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:21-22 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

This was apparently in the apostle’s mind when he chose the word *naos*.

⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1990, p. 857.

⁹ Erickson, p. 857.

Proven by His Attributes

(1) Omniscience.

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 combines both the personality of the Spirit as one who knows and thinks, and His omniscience. The Spirit could not possibly know the thoughts of God who is omniscient and omnipresent unless He too possessed these attributes. This shows the Spirit fully comprehends the depth of God's thoughts and plans of grace. Who but God could comprehend the thoughts of God?

(2) Omnipotence.

Regarding this attribute of the Holy Spirit, Erickson writes:

In Luke 1:35 the phrases "the Holy Spirit" and "the power of the Most High" are in parallel or synonymous construction. This is, of course, a reference to the virgin conception, which must certainly be considered a miracle of the first magnitude. Paul acknowledged that the accomplishments of his ministry were achieved "by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:19). Moreover, Jesus attributed to the Holy Spirit the ability to change human hearts and personalities: it is the Spirit who works conviction (John 16:8-11) and regeneration (John 3:5-8) within us. It should be borne in mind that Jesus had elsewhere said with respect to this ability to change human hearts: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26; see vv. 16-25). While these texts do not specifically affirm that the Spirit is omnipotent, they certainly indicate that he has power which presumably only God has.¹⁰

(3) Omnipresence.

Psalms 139:7-10 Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, 10 Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me.

(4) Eternality.

Hebrews 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The eternity of the Holy Spirit is affirmed in Hebrews 9:14 which states that Christ offered Himself "through the eternal Spirit." Some have suggested that this is a reference to the human spirit of Christ, but it is more consistent to see this as a reference to the Holy Spirit since, from the standpoint of

¹⁰ Erickson, p. 858.

His humanity, Jesus Christ always lived His earthly life under the control and leading of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 12:18-28).

Proven by His Works

(1) Creation.

Genesis 1:2 And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Psalms 104:30 Thou dost send forth Thy Spirit, they are created; And Thou dost renew the face of the ground.

Erickson writes:

He was and continues to be involved with the creation, both in the origination of it and in the providential keeping and directing of it. In Genesis 1:2 we read that the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters. Job 26:13 notes that the heavens were made fair by the Spirit of God. The Psalmist says, "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they [all the parts of the creation previously enumerated] are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground" (Ps. 104:30).¹¹

(2) Inspiration of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

2 Peter 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are told all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable (literally, "God-breathed"). This verse declares the fact and value of the inspiration of the Bible. In 2 Peter 1:21 we are given the how of inspiration: men were moved by the Holy Spirit, borne along like wind in the sail of a ship. Here again the titles *God* and *Holy Spirit* seem to be used interchangeably of the person of the Spirit.

(3) Regeneration, Illumination, and Sanctification.

Considering the nature and condition of man, these are things which are miraculous and which only God can do as stressed by the Lord in Matthew 19:26.

John 3:5-8 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

¹¹ Erickson, p. 858.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

Ephesians 3:16-19 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.

Proven by Equal Association

Concerning this evidence, Ryrie writes:

One of the strongest proofs of the deity of the Spirit is the identification of the Spirit with Yahweh of the Old Testament. This is seen in passages where the Old Testament records that Yahweh said something and the New Testament quotation of that same passage is attributed to the Spirit as the Speaker. That would seem to say clearly that the Spirit, like Yahweh, is fully divine (Is. 6:1-13 and Ac 28:25; Jer 31:31-34 and Heb. 10:15-17).¹²

Along these same lines, we find another line of evidence in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit is associated equally with the Father and the Son.

(1) The Great Commission.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, the word “name” which refers to all three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is singular. There is one God, and yet, in some mysterious way, three distinct persons who are equal.

(2) The Pauline Benediction.

2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

(3) Declaration Regarding Spiritual Gifts.

As Paul discusses spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he equally associates and coordinates the three members of the Godhead:

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

¹² Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1972, p. 70.

(4) Peter's Salutation in 1 Peter 1:2.

In the salutation of his first epistle, Peter links all three persons of the trinity together, pointing to their respective roles in the process of salvation.

1 Peter 1:2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

Clearly, all of these instances argue that the Holy Spirit is not only a person, but God, the third member of the Trinity. Now that we have some idea of who the Spirit is, we need to consider what the Spirit does for and in believers since He is God's special gift and resource for living the Christian life.

The Advent and Age of the Spirit

Understanding the uniqueness of this age as the Age of the Spirit is crucial for our ability to correctly interpret the teaching of the New Testament on the Spirit and His ministry for today. The Church Age is often referred to as the Age of the Spirit because of His distinctive ministry during this time.

This truth needs to be stressed because the Holy Spirit is God's special gift and means of power to experience Christ's life in ours. In fact, there is no aspect of the Christian life, Bible study, prayer, witnessing, growth, etc., that is not vitally dependent on the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit of God. Though God gives us spiritual gifts and a new capacity for life through the Spirit's work of regeneration, it is the Holy Spirit, as our divine Enabler, who empowers our lives for both worship and service.

The Promise of the Spirit as God's Special Provision

That God would one day do a unique work through the Holy Spirit in His people is not new revelation. Rather, the Holy Spirit is the object of many marvelous promises in both the Old and New Testaments in anticipation of what God would do through the Spirit for His people.

Ezekiel 36:24-27 For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Ezekiel 37:14 "And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.

Isaiah 44:3 For I will pour out water on the thirsty land And streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, And My blessing on your descendants;

Joel 2:28-29 And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream

dreams, Your young men will see visions. 29 And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

John 7:37-39 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

Acts 1:4-8 And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

The Fact of the Spirit's Coming

When we come to Acts 2 and the events that follow in the book of Acts and in the rest of the New Testament, we have the declaration that the Holy Spirit has come to indwell believers with an explanation of His new and distinctive role. No longer is His coming an anticipation; it is a blessed fact.

Acts 2:1-4 And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Acts 2:14-17 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. 15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams;

Acts 10:44-45 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.

Acts 11:15-17 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used

to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?

1 Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

Ephesians 1:13-14 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

An Explanation of the Age of the Spirit

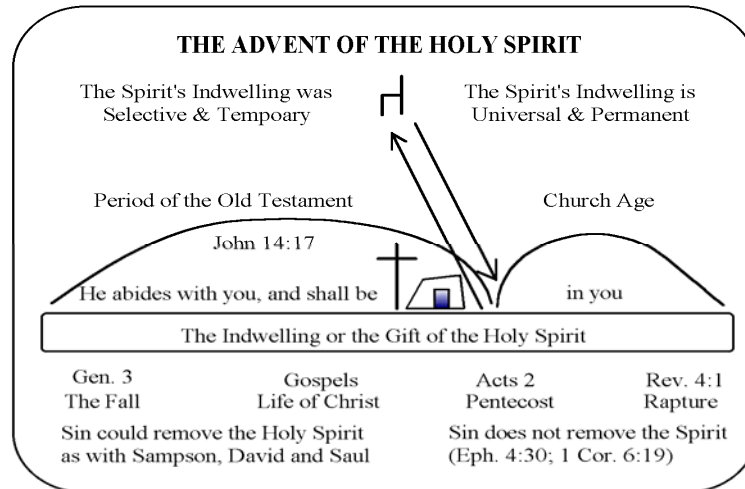
The following chart illustrates the change in the ministry of the Spirit from the Old Testament to that of the New Testament. From Acts 2 onward, the Spirit's ministry took on a new and distinctive change beginning with the events of Pentecost as promised both in the Old Testament and by the Lord. From this point on we have the formation of the body of Christ, the church, and the universal indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is when the church began and when the Spirit began to indwell all who believed in the Savior. This is proven by the following:

(1) In Acts 1:5, the Lord gave the promise of the baptizing ministry of the Spirit. "For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

(2) Baptism is a form of identification. "With the Spirit" may also be translated "by the Spirit" and should be in view of 1 Corinthians 12:13. First Corinthians 12:13a describes what the baptizing work of the Spirit consists of. It is the work by which the Holy Spirit joins every believer into union with the body of Christ so that the believer becomes identified with the body of Christ and with Christ Himself. This occurs simultaneously with the indwelling of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13b). When we trust in the Savior, the Spirit joins us into union with the body of Christ, the church (Rom. 6). As a result, we become identified with Christ in His person and His work.

(3) In Acts 11:15-16, Peter equated the coming of the Spirit on the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius with that which had occurred to them as Jews in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost. But he also equated Acts 2 with the fulfillment of the promise of Christ regarding the baptism of the Spirit in Acts 1:5. In other words, Acts 2 began the indwelling and baptizing work of the Spirit for the body of Christ. This began the unique age of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The following chart illustrates the difference.



The Primary Ministry and Purpose of the Spirit

The Principle of Focus

As we may need light to bring the printed page into focus, so we need the illumination of Scripture to shed light on the primary ministry of the Spirit in connection with all His ministries. Getting the Spirit in focus means (a) thinking rightly about Him and (b) thinking rightly about our relationship to Him: what He is to believers, and how this relates to Jesus Christ. Great emphasis is often given to the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, but unfortunately, it is very often not in accord with the clear teaching of the Word.

Scripture's Focus on the Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Some see the chief purpose of the Holy Spirit as power, some as performance, some as unity, some as the administration of the gifts of the Spirit, some as teaching, some as His miraculous workings, and so on. All of these either are or have been ministries of the Spirit and are important to the body of Christ. However, to emphasize any one of these while minimizing the others and ignoring the chief emphasis of the Word is to go off into error.

This is vitally important because Jesus Christ is our life. He is the hope of glory and the focus of the Bible.

Colossians 1:27-28 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Therefore, the chief focus given to us in the Word is that the Holy Spirit in all His ministries is given to mediate the presence of Christ. He is given to manifest the person and work of Jesus Christ, to make us aware of all He is to us, and to enable us to experience Christ's life in ours.

John 16:13-15 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.

Ephesians 3:16-19 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.

Galatians 5:16-25 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is our Enabler and the power for the Christian life, and we are to walk by faith in dependence upon the Spirit's control (Gal. 3:3; 5:5; 16-25 quoted above). However, Galatians 2:20 when considered in light of Galatians 4:19 and 5:1-5 gives us the primary focus—Christ living in believers or being formed in them by the power of the Spirit of God. Even when we are trusting in the Holy Spirit to empower our lives, our faith is ultimately in the Son because the Spirit proceeds from the Father through Jesus Christ at His request as one of His gifts to us. But the purpose is that we might share in the life of Christ.

John 14:16-20 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to

you. 19 After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. 20 In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

The ministry of the Spirit is Christ-centered. It is neither man-centered with an emphasis on our gifts, personalities, and experiences, nor Holy Spirit centered with an emphasis on Him and His miraculous activities or ministries, as important and rich as they are. This scriptural focus is seen in the following passages:

(1) John 7:37-39

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Concerning the promise of the Spirit, the text says He was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. The Spirit is promised as a gift from God to indwell believers, empowering and energizing them, but the focus here is on the glorification of the Savior. This is a reference to Christ at God's right hand following His finished work on the cross, the resurrection, and ascension into glory. The basis for the gift of the Spirit is the glorification of Christ. He proceeds from the Father, through the Son to believers because Jesus has accomplished our justification.

John 15:26 When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,

(2) John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 15:26 When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,

John 16:7-15 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. 12 I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.

In each of these passages the Spirit is called “the Helper,” (*parakletos*) which, due to the nature of His ministry, might better be rendered, “the Enabler.” *Parakletos* contains the ideas of comforting, exhorting, encouraging, interceding, advising, and strengthening. He strengthens or enables us through His various ministries. But in none of these four passages does the gift and ministry of the Holy Spirit overshadow the person and work of the Son, the Lord Jesus. Rather, the focus is on how the Enabler (a) is sent *in the name of Christ*, (b) brings to remembrance *what Christ taught* the disciples, (c) bears *witness of Him*, (d) is sent by the *Savior Himself*, (e) does not speak *on His own* initiative, (f) *glorifies the Savior*, and (g) takes of the *things of Christ* and discloses them to us.

The Holy Spirit calls attention to neither Himself nor to man, but focuses all attention on the Lord Jesus Christ and what God has done in and through His Son. His purpose via all His ministries is to develop our faith, hope, love, adoration, obedience, fellowship, and *commitment to Christ*.

This truth and this focus becomes a criterion by which we may judge any spiritual movement and its biblical authenticity. Swindoll writes:

Let me pass along something I hope you *never* forget. If you get involved in a ministry that glorifies itself, instead of Christ, the Spirit of God is not in that ministry. If you follow a leader that is getting the glory for that ministry, instead of Christ, the Spirit of God isn't empowering his leadership. If you're a part of a Christian school or mission organization or a Christian camping ministry in which someone other than Christ is being glorified, it is not being empowered by the Spirit of God. Mark it down: THE SPIRIT GLORIFIES CHRIST. I'll go one step further; if the Holy Spirit Himself is being emphasized and magnified, He isn't in it! *Christ* is the One who is glorified when the Spirit is at work. He does His work behind the scenes, never in the limelight. I admire that the most about His work.¹³

The Work of the Spirit

As a matter of clarification and in preparation for what the Spirit is to believers, it would be helpful to note the following facts:

Negatively: The believer is never told to seek or commanded to be (a) baptized with or in the Spirit, (b) or to be indwelt with the Spirit, (c) or to be anointed with the Spirit, (d) or to be sealed with the Spirit, (e) or in our age to even pray for the Spirit (Luke 11:13 was pre-Pentecost). Rather, these are all presented by the New Testament as accomplished facts during the Church Age.

Positively: The only commands in the New Testament given to believers in relation to the Holy Spirit deal with the filling of the Holy Spirit or with walking by means of the Spirit who already indwells us. There are only four direct commands that relate to the Spirit and the believer's life. Two are positive and two are negative.

(1) The Positive Commands: We are commanded to be “filled with the Spirit” and to “walk by the Spirit.”

¹³ Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, Multnomah Press, Portland, 1986, p. 188.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

Galatians 5:16 and 25 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ... 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

(2) The Negative Commands: We are commanded to “grieve not the Spirit” and to “quench not the Spirit.”

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit;

In addition, the following are some passages one might view as commanding the filling of the Spirit indirectly or by implication because the need of His ministry in the issue involved.

John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Ephesians 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Philippians 3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Romans 8:4-13 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

What the Spirit Is to Believers in His Indwelling Presence

In anticipation of the coming of the Spirit, in John 14:17 Christ spoke of the unique change that would occur in the Spirit's relationship with believers when He said, "... because He abides **with** you (Old Testament economy) and will be **in** you (New Testament economy)." Through this universal indwelling of all believers, the Spirit becomes a seal, an anointing, a pledge, and our enabler. All of this stems from the fact of His indwelling presence from the moment of salvation.

(1) A Seal

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

Ephesians 1:13-14 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

According to 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, God the Father (the subject of the verb) does the sealing. The Holy Spirit is the seal, and believers are those who are sealed with God's seal (the Spirit). The seal suggests the ideas of **ownership** and **security**.

A further consequence of the Spirit's presence is the **seal of ownership** (cf. Eph. 1:13-14) which also is accomplished at the moment of faith. A seal on a document in New Testament times identified it and indicated its owner, who would "protect" it. So too, in salvation, the Holy Spirit, like a seal, confirms that Christians are identified with Christ and are God's property, protected by Him (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20). It was probably this thought that caused Paul to describe himself as a slave of Christ. (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1).¹⁴

(2) An Anointing

1 John 2:20 and 27 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. ... 27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

Again, God the Father, as the subject of the verb in 2 Corinthians 1:21, does the anointing; the Holy Spirit, as 1 John 2:20 and 27 make clear, is the anointing; and we as believers in Christ are the ones who are anointed.

Persons and things were anointed, in the OT, to signify holiness, or separation unto God: pillars (cf. Gen. 28:18); the tabernacle and its furniture (Ex. 30:22ff.); shields (2 Sa. 1:21; Is. 21:5: probably to consecrate them for the 'holy war,' see Deut. 23:9ff.); kings (Jdg. 9:8; 2 Sa. 2:4; 1 Kgs. 1:34); priests (Ex. 28:41); prophets (1 Kgs. 19:16). ... Fundamentally the anointing was an act of God (1 Sam. 10:1), and the word 'anointed' was used metaphorically to mean the bestowal of divine favour (Psa. 23:5; 92:10) or *appointment to a special place or function in the purpose of God* (Ps. 105:15; Is. 45:1). Further, the *anointing symbolized equipment for service, and is associated with the outpouring of the Spirit of God* (1 Sa. 10:1, 9; 16:13; Is. 61:1; Zech. 4:1-14). This usage is carried over into the NT (Acts 10:38; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27).¹⁵ (Emphasis mine.)

The identification of the Spirit as our anointing is a portrait of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as an act of God which separates us, appoints us, and equips us for ministry in the purpose of God. Strictly speaking, then, it is doctrinally incorrect to ask God to anoint a believer today with the Spirit in

¹⁴ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1985, p. 557.

¹⁵ *New Bible Dictionary*, quoted from Logos CD.

preparation for a particular task. A more accurate prayer would be that the one involved in the task at hand be truly under the power of the Spirit, or that he or she might experience the work of the Spirit in a marvelous way because the Spirit is already present as God's anointing.

(3) A Pledge

The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence in believers' lives is also viewed by God as His personal pledge (i.e., earnest or down payment) that God will fulfill His promises to believers and that our salvation will be consummated (Eph. 1:14). Note how the NIV translates 2 Corinthians 1:21-22:

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (NIV)

Present redemption is only a foretaste of what eternity holds (cf. Rom. 8:23), and the presence of His Spirit in our hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 5:5) is like a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. These last seven words are a translation of one Greek word *arrabona*, a down payment which obligates the payer to make further payments. The same Greek word is used again in 5:5 and Ephesians 1:14 (cf. "the first fruits of the Spirit," Rom. 8:23).¹⁶

(4) An Enabler

John 14:16 and 26 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ... 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 16:7 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

In these passages the Lord promised the disciples He would give them "another Helper." "Another" is the Greek *allos* which means "another of the same kind." This is a reference to the Holy Spirit who, as the third person of the trinity, is of the same essence and power as the Lord Jesus Christ. In His absence, there would be no lack. In fact, it would be for their advantage (John 16:7) that He leave so the Holy Spirit could come in His place and indwell their lives.

The Spirit is called "Helper." This is the Greek *parakletos* and refers to one who is called alongside on behalf of another as an intercessor, mediator, helper. It is translated variously, "helper," "advocate," "counselor," and "comforter." In view of the purpose and ministry of the Spirit along with the meaning of this word, perhaps "Enabler" is a better translation. He comes not just to give help, as a servant might help his employer or as one person helps another. Rather He comes and indwells us to enable—to empower us for the Christian life in witnessing, in prayer, in obedience, etc. The title "Enabler" not only teaches us what the Holy Spirit is to us, but what we are apart from His control and ministry—without ability or enablement.

¹⁶ Lowery, p. 557.

What the Spirit Does For Us

There is no part of the believer's life for which the Spirit is not needed. The following illustrates just how complete is the work of the Spirit who is our Enabler.

(1) He convicts and reveals Jesus Christ to men.

John 16:8-11 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

(2) He restrains sin in the world.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

(3) He regenerates to new life.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

(4) He baptizes into Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

(5) He empowers and reproduces the character of Jesus Christ in those who submit to Him by faith.

Galatians 4:19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Galatians 5:16-23 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(6) He promotes spiritual maturity. (Cf. also Gal. 5:1-5; Heb. 5:11-6:6.)

Galatians 3:1-3 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to

find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

(7) He teaches: gives understanding in the Word. (Cf. also 1 Cor. 2:9-16; John 16:11-15.)

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Ephesians 3:16-18 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

(8) He applies truth to our experience. (Cf. also John 14:26; Eph. 6:18.)

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

(9) He gives power to our prayer life.

Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit;

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

Psalms 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

(10) He promotes meaningful worship. (Cf. also John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:18-21; Isa. 59:1-2.)

Philippians 3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

(11) He gives capacity, burden, and direction for witnessing.

Acts 1:8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

(12) He gives capacity for ministry. This refers to gifts of the Spirit which are to be exercised in the power of the Spirit from the motive of love—which is also a work of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 1:12-14 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.” 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

The fact that the Holy Spirit is our Helper, indeed, our Enabler for these varied ministries demonstrates just how tremendously important the Spirit is to our daily walk. It shows how necessary it is that we walk by means of the Spirit, i.e., by constant dependence upon Him (Gal. 5:5, 16; Eph. 3:16-17). The lessons that follow are devoted to more biblical principles and promises that teach us more about the ministry of the Spirit and how to walk in His power.

Lesson 5:
The Spirit-Filled Life
(Part 2)

The Walk by Means of the Spirit

The Difference Between Indwelling and Filling

The Indwelling of the Spirit

As shown in the previous lesson, a number of New Testament passages call attention to the fact and nature of the Spirit's indwelling of New Testament believers. Some examples are:

John 7:37-39 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Romans 5:5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 8:9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

In the ministry of indwelling, the New Testament describes the Holy Spirit as an anointing, a seal, a pledge, and our Helper or Enabler. Regarding indwelling, Ryrie writes,

The indwelling ministry of the Spirit is the heart of the distinctiveness of the Spirit's work in this Church Age. It is also the center of our Lord's promises to His disciples concerning the ministry of the Spirit after His departure from earth. Too, the doctrine of the indwelling is foundational to the other ministries the Spirit performs today.¹

Indwelling is, however, distinct from the filling of the Spirit and the two should not be confused. There are a number of biblical facts which demonstrate this distinction.

(1) Indwelling is a distinctive ministry that is true of only believers in Christ. The only condition for indwelling is the obedience of faith in Christ (John 7:37-39) whereas the filling of the Spirit is dependent upon faith in the Spirit for His control.

¹ Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 67.

Ephesians 1:13-14 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

(2) Though all believers are indwelt regardless of their spiritual state (even when living in carnality as seen in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), all believers are not filled with the Spirit.

(3) This indwelling is declared as permanent and a declaration of a believer's security. It is described as "forever" and "unto the day of redemption." Romans 8:9 teaches us that indwelling is a proof of the believer's salvation, "... if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Compare also John 14:16-17 and Ephesians 4:30.

The indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit is that ministry wherein the Holy Spirit comes to make the new believer His permanent dwelling place, the place of His personal presence as the foundation for all the various ministries He will have within the life of the believer.

The Filling of the Spirit

While believers are never commanded to be indwelt with the Spirit, they are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. Because our perception of the word "filling" suggests the intake of something, many have equated the filling of the Spirit with getting the Spirit within, or getting more of the Spirit. They have confused the filling of the Spirit with His indwelling. This is false and leads to erroneous ideas about the filling of the Spirit.

After the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, we have a number of references in the New Testament which refer to the filling of the Spirit using such words as "full" or "filling" or "filled." A sample of these verses are Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3-5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 52; and Ephesians 5:18. The question is, what does the concept of "full" or "filled" mean?

In the Acts passages only two Greek words occur, the noun *plerēs*, "full," and the verb *pimplēmi*, "fill, be filled." The noun form is also used of "wisdom, rage, envy, power, grace," etc. As a noun it looks at a state or condition which, however, refers to what takes control and possesses the person so that it becomes the dominating force. When a person is full of rage, they are clearly out of control and the trait which characterizes them is rage. A person who is full of the Spirit as mentioned in Acts 6:3 and 5, is one whose life is animated and controlled by the Spirit.

The use of the verb form in Acts as it pertains to the Holy Spirit seems to refer to a special filling that is a sovereign work of God in contrast to the normal filling of the Spirit that is commanded in Ephesians 5:18. Several things support this idea:

Pimplēmi always occurs in the aorist tense and generally in the indicative mood (emphasizing an historical event and not a state). Acts 4:8 is an aorist participle and could be translated, "And Peter, having been filled by the Holy Spirit, said ..." The same idea applies to Paul in Acts 9:17 and 13:9.

It is always in the passive voice (pointing to a sovereign work of God). No conditions of filling are mentioned, only that the recipients were filled by the Spirit.

The filling was for a specific task and was temporary. This can be seen by comparing Acts 2:4 with 4:8 and 31. Acts 4:8 seems to refer to Peter's normal walk under the control of the Spirit, but in the other two passages, a special filling occurred for a special task.

But because of the analogy and comparison used, and because it is the one passage where believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, the meaning of “filled” is best seen in Ephesians 5:18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”

“Filled” is the verb *pleroo*, “to fill, make full, fill to the full.” It is used of things such as sounds and odors (Acts 2:2; John 12:3), and of persons with powers or qualities like joy, righteousness, wisdom (Acts 2:28; 13:52; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:9). But how do we understand the word “filled” with regard to the Spirit? Is He the **content** with which one is filled, or the **means** by which one is filled?

Some understand the Spirit as the content with which one is filled like water in a jar, but grammatically this is very unlikely. It is better to understand the Spirit as the means by which one is filled, not the content. Greek is an inflectional language that uses various cases that determine how a word is being used in a clause or sentence. And it is a rule of Greek grammar that a verb may be used with more than one case in order to distinguish certain ideas or to make ideas clear.

In the Greek text, “with the Spirit” represents the preposition *en* plus the noun *pneuma* in the dative case (*pneumati*). To interpret this construction to refer to the Spirit as the content with which one is filled is grammatically suspect since normally a verb of filling takes a noun in the genitive case to express the idea of content, not the dative. Such a genitive is called a genitive of content.² Let me illustrate it this way.

- With the genitive case, the noun in the genitive refers to the material, the content of filling, as when the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus (John 12:3).
- With the dative case, the noun in the dative refers to the agent or instrument that causes the filling, i.e., “be filled by means of the Spirit.”
- With the accusative case, the noun in the accusative refers to the thing filled, as when grief fills the heart (John 16:6).

In Ephesians 5:18, the contrast with wine shows that the obvious idea in “filled” is that of spiritual control by means of the Spirit who already indwells and is present in believers. The analogy with a drunk person is designed by the apostle to make the issue crystal clear: to be drunk with wine means to be controlled, brought under the influence of wine. Visible behavior characteristics begin to take place as a person comes under the influence of wine.

In contrast, to be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit so the filled believer does things that are unnatural for him under the control of the Spirit even as the drunken individual does things that are unnatural for him under the control of the spirits.³

The comparison is in the matter of control. A drunken person is controlled by the liquor which he has consumed. Because of this he thinks in ways normally unnatural to him. Likewise, the man who is Spirit-filled is controlled, and he too acts in ways that are unnatural to him. This is not to imply that these ways are erratic or abnormal, but

² Daniel B. Wallace, *Selected Notes of New Testament Greek*, 4th Edition, p. 65.

³ William D. Lawrence, Class Notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993, p. 11-14.

they are not ways which belong to his old life. Thus being filled with the Spirit is simply being controlled by the Spirit.⁴

The issue is not getting the Spirit within, but of allowing the indwelling Spirit to take charge and move into every area of the believer's life.

Reduced to its simplest terms, to be filled with the Spirit means that, through voluntary surrender and in response to appropriating faith, the human personality is filled, mastered, controlled by the Holy Spirit. The very word *filled* supports that meaning. The idea is not that of something being poured into a passive empty receptacle. "That which take possession of the mind is said to fill it," says Thayer, the great lexicographer. That usage of the word is found in Luke 5:26 (KJV): "They were filled with fear," and in John 16:6: "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." Their fear and sorrow possessed them to the exclusion of other emotions; they mastered and controlled them.⁵

The Nature and Purpose of the Filling of the Spirit

What exactly is the nature and purpose of the filling of the Spirit? Is it enablement for service, or is its design the sanctification of the believer? In Acts the filling of the Spirit is clearly seen as God's enablement for service and for witness and proclamation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. also Acts 4:8; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52).

Acts 1:8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

In the book of Ephesians, the filling of the Spirit produces worship, submission, and changed relationships in the home and on the job (cf. Ephesians 5:18-6:9).

As in other similar situations the question arises, why make a choice? There is an evident connection between the character of the witness and the impact of the witness; furthermore, the call to be filled with the Spirit comes in a context of concern for the lost and the impact of believers on the world. There is a call for moral purity in Eph. 5:1-14 and a call for careful commitment in Eph. 5:15-16 followed by the command to be filled with the Spirit, which results in the worship, submission, and relationships mentioned above.⁶

⁴ Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 93-94.

⁵ Oswald J. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1986, p. 101.

⁶ Lawrence, pp. 11-13.

It is evident that these results from the filling of the Spirit in Ephesians 5 occur in a setting of witness and testimony on the part of the church. As a result, the most effective way to resolve the issue is to answer that the filling of the Spirit is both **an endowment of power for sanctification and service**, and that there is a direct relationship between service and sanctification, since character confirms witness (note particularly the relationship between unity and witness in John 13:34-35 and John 17:21-23).⁷ (Emphasis mine.)

The Walk by Means of the Spirit

Is there any difference between the command to be filled with the Spirit and the command to walk by means of the Spirit? Though they would seem to be basically synonymous, there does seem to be a difference in focus or emphasis.

Walking by the Spirit Described

Galatians 5:16 commands Christians, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.” It is an imperative of the daily life—not an option. The verb “walk” is in a tense (continuous present) that stresses a continuous, moment-by-moment responsibility and need. In essence, all believers are responsible to walk by the Spirit. Failure to do so constitutes a sin of negative volition to God’s grace, an act of failing to walk by faith in God’s resources. Just as a person who walks with the aid of a cane, leans on and depends on the cane so to walk by the Spirit is to be faith-dependent on the Spirit for each step of one’s daily life. The promised result that comes from walking by the Spirit is simply that the believer begins to experience behavioral changes: growing deliverance from the control of the flesh or from the reign of sin, but also the positive production of the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 stresses that the alternative to walking by the Spirit is the control of the flesh. Unless the believer walks by the Spirit, he will fulfill the desires of the flesh. In essence, then, the believer is either controlled by the Spirit or controlled by the flesh. That which he depends on as his resource for daily living determines who or what controls his life and the direction his life will take.

Walking by the Spirit Defined

Walking by the Spirit is a Spirit-dependent walk which means a conscious determination to trust or rely only on the resources of the indwelling Spirit for strength to obey God and overcome the desires of the flesh. It is negative, a turning away from, and positive, a turning to, i.e., the believer chooses to turn away from self and turn to the Holy Spirit for ability to live the Christian life. This is accomplished through faith (cf. Gal. 5:5). But vital to an attitude of moment-by-moment dependence is the study of the Word, prayer, worship, fellowship with others, and keeping short accounts with God through bonafide, honest to God confession that seeks to maintain a right relationship with God. The results will be the fruit of the Spirit rather than the works of the flesh.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-14.

Galatians 5:18-26 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Distinction Between the Filling of the Spirit and Walking by the Spirit

The filling of the Spirit initiates the Spirit's control through submission, whereas walking by the Spirit maintains the Spirit's control through step-by-step dependence. In filling we submit or yield to the Spirit—in walking we depend on the Spirit. As we saw, to walk by means of anything is to depend on that element in order to walk. In that sense, walking by the Spirit means depending on the Spirit for daily living. However, in the Greek text, both commands are present imperatives of continuous action; both are the products of faith and obviously occur simultaneously. The main difference is in the meaning of the verbs and in their voice.

“Filled” is the passive voice while “walk” is active. The idea of “filled” meaning “control” and the passive voice suggest the concept of submission or being yielded. We are volitionally to continue to release control of our lives to the Spirit. He is allowed to take control and make Christ at home in the believer's life (Eph. 3:16-17). In the filling of the Spirit, we give up the right to run our lives; we submit to Him. The filling of the Spirit is very much parallel with Romans 6:12-13.

Ephesians 3:16-17 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

Romans 6:12-13 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

The active voice plus the basic meaning of the word “walk” places stress on actively choosing to take each step by faith in the Spirit as the means of walking. The goal is to maintain the Spirit's control along with an attitude of submission or yieldedness. In reality, the two commands are just two ways of saying the same thing, but with a different focus.

Why We Must Be Filled With and Walk by the Spirit

1. It is commanded in the Word

God would not give us these commands if they were not necessities. The fact God has commanded it, settles it. This is not a matter for debate nor an option that can be ignored without serious consequences.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

2. There can be no production without it

Since the flesh (our human resources) profits nothing and gives no capacity for real spiritual life, we desperately need God's resources—the filling of the Holy Spirit. The great necessity of the filling (control) of the Spirit is evident by the many ministries He alone can accomplish in our lives. As the Lord reminds us, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63).

Romans 7:15-25 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good.¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me.¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.¹⁹ For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. ²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, ²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Romans 8:3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

3. We cannot please God without it

The opposite of the filling of the Spirit is to be fleshly minded. To be fleshly minded is to have a flesh-dominated life, one that is concerned with **self-centered pursuits**, with the **earthly**, and with the **temporal** at the expense of the spiritual, the heavenly, and the eternal. We are in the world, we can use the world and enjoy the blessings God gives, but this is not to be our focus or that which controls us. Take time to read and think on Matthew 6:19-33; and 1 Timothy 6:6-19 as well as the passage below.

Romans 8:5-8 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

4. There is no spiritual growth without it

A casual reading of John 16:7-15; 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:3; Galatians 3:1-3; Ephesians 3:16-19 show how involved the Holy Spirit is in our ability to understand and apply the Word and, as a result, grow in Christ. After all, He is the Spirit of Truth.

John 14:17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

Sin in a believer's life grieves the person of the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quenches His power (1 Thess. 5:19). Fellowship and submission to the Spirit is broken. The Spirit is still present and at work in the believer's life, being grieved, the control of the Spirit is hindered, quenched. The solution for known sin is confession (1 John 1:9) which is basically synonymous for repentance. When we truly confess sin with the goal of spiritual change and the Spirit's control in mind, the control of the Spirit is restored as is fellowship with the Lord. This truth is evident in two passages that deal with growing in the Word. Note 1 Peter 2:1 dealing with sin (which must include confession) precedes the exhortation to hunger and growth through the Word in verse 2. The same emphasis can be seen in James 1:21a when compared with 1:21b.

1 Peter 2:1-2 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

James 1:21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

5. We cannot glorify God without it

When we walk by the Spirit, we are walking by faith in God's resources and will be concerned with God's purposes. This is true even more so as we grow and mature in the Lord (1 Cor. 6:19-20). When we walk by the flesh, we are arrogantly walking by our own resources. This is a lack of trust in God and amounts to seeking to handle life apart from Him (Jer. 17:5). This obviously dishonors God, even if we are involved in religious activity or works. Glorifying God always begins with the Spirit-filled life.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD."

6. We are powerless without it

This should be obvious, but since the Spirit is our divine Enabler, to walk without the control of the Spirit is to walk in the weakness of our own resources (cf. also Rom. 7:15-25; 8:3-13; Gal. 5:16-25).

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the prepa-

ration of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

7. We cannot know joy and peace without it

Note this clear emphasis in the following passages:

Romans 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Psalms 32:4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. 5 I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah.

Psalms 51:12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit.

How to Walk by or Be Filled With the Spirit

The commands to be "filled with the Spirit" or "walk by the Spirit" are commands for believers to get in proper adjustment to the Holy Spirit through faith so they are brought under the control, enablement, and direction of the Spirit who already indwells them. It is a spiritual state where the Holy Spirit is free to fulfill all that He came to do in the heart and life of believers.

Note the following five points by way of clarification and review:

(1) All believers, whether babes or mature, may enter into all the ministries and blessings of the Holy Spirit when properly related and adjusted to the Spirit through faith.

(2) The filling of the Spirit is not a matter of securing more of the Spirit, nor of gaining the presence of the Spirit again after some sin. The Holy Spirit comes to permanently indwell the believer from the moment of personal faith (John 7:17-39; 14:16). The presence of the Spirit is a proof and guarantee of salvation (Rom. 8:9). Though any known sin grieves His person and quenches His power, it does not remove His presence which is promised "unto the day of redemption," a reference to glorification at the return of the Lord (Eph. 4:30).

(3) The filling of the Holy Spirit is a matter of submitting to and being properly adjusted to the reality of His blessed presence through faith so that He is free to enable and take charge of the believer's life—mind, heart, and will.

(4) The filling of the Holy Spirit is a moment-by-moment relationship with the Spirit that may be hindered at any time by failing to actively trust and live by those principles and promises of Scripture that tell us how to be properly adjusted to the Spirit's presence.

(5) The Spirit-controlled walk seems to have both an absolute and a relative aspect. As to fellowship **either** we are under His control, enjoying His fellowship, **or** we are controlled by the flesh, grieving the person of the Spirit. Romans 8:4-7 shows that either we are walking according to the flesh, minding the things of the flesh, or we are walking according to the Spirit, minding the things of the Spirit. But in another sense, there are degrees depending on one's growth, and this is somewhat related and maybe a little confusing. On the one hand, the element of degrees is related to maturity wherein believers learn to surrender and depend more completely on the Holy Spirit for strength as they more and more come to realize their total inability to handle their lives. So even when in fellowship with no known sin unconfessed and walking in dependence on the Spirit, because of the matter of maturity, no one is totally under the Spirit's control. If they were, there would be sinless perfection, a state impossible in this life. Paul makes this clear in Philippians 3:12, "Not that I have already obtained it or *have already become perfect*, but I press on ..." (Italics mine.)

Furthermore, it seems clear that the Spirit may empower a person more at certain times than at other times, but if we are in fellowship and walking with Him, this then becomes more a matter of His sovereign purposes than of our fellowship (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-12). As explained earlier, this was the case in several instances in Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31). It is certainly not a matter of receiving more of the Spirit.

As we have seen, there are four simple commands in the New Testament with regard to the ministry of the indwelling Spirit. As commands to believers, these undoubtedly point out the issues involved with being controlled by the Spirit of God. The two negative commands clearly show us that there are things which may hinder His control just as the two positive commands point out definite positive conditions we must meet (by faith) if we want to be controlled by the Spirit and experience His power.

It would seem logical that there is a relationship between these four commands. How can believers be filled with the Spirit if they are grieving the Spirit? By the same token, how can believers be walking by the Spirit if they are quenching the Spirit? It is theologically and scripturally sound to conclude that if we deal with that which grieves and quenches the Spirit, we are then in a position to submit to and walk by faith in the Spirit.

That this is scripturally correct is clear from the following considerations:

(1) The ministry of the Spirit is vital to fellowship with the Savior, i.e., to sharing in His life so that Christ is literally "at home" in the believer's life.

Ephesians 3:16-17 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

(2) Walking in the light and fellowship are synonymous. To walk in the light is to have fellowship with the Lord and to have fellowship with the Lord is to walk in the light (1 John 1:7). By the same token, to walk in darkness is to be out of fellowship (1 John 1:6). To walk in darkness is to live in disobedience. Since the Spirit is crucial for fellowship and obedience, the Spirit must be both grieved and quenched so that His ministry is clearly hindered, stifled.

1 John 1:6-7 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The Negative Aspect: Hindrances to His Control and Ministry

(1) Sin Grieves the Person of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:30 warns “grieve not the Holy Spirit.” “Grieve” is the Greek *lupeō* which means “to make sorrowful, grieve, pain, offend.” That sin is the cause of the pain or grief or of what is offensive is clear from the context and the use of the adjective “holy” to describe the Spirit. In both the preceding and following context, the apostle is encouraging believers to put off old sinful patterns and to replace them with patterns of righteousness.

Ephesians 4:24-32 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. 25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Further, that known sin is the issue is obvious in that no person can intelligently deal with unknown sin, and only known sin directly constitutes overt rebellion or disobedience. Of course, all sin is ultimately the result of our rebellion and failure to appropriate God’s grace.

Known sin in the life of a believer grieves, pains, and offends the heart of the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit is holy and abhors sin. In the interest of God’s glory and His purpose to indwell us, He longs to control or empower us for God’s service, and to transform us into the character of Christ. When He cannot, He is grieved because He is offended by the sin, particularly by the sins of self-reliance and rebellion which hinder His purpose in indwelling us. Note James’ comment on this, “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely?” (James 4:5 NIV)

(2) Sin Quenches the Power of the Spirit. First Thessalonians 5:19 warns, “Do not quench the Spirit.” “Quench” is the Greek *sbennumi* which means literally “to put out a fire, extinguish.” It is used of extinguishing fiery arrows (Eph. 6:16), a smoldering wick (Matt. 12:20), and of the unquenchable fire of hell (Mark. 9:44). Since the Holy Spirit is sometimes likened to fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts 2:3), Paul used it figuratively in the sense of stifle, resist, or suppress in relation to the ministry of the Spirit. This does not, however, suggest the Spirit may be extinguished or removed.

In the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, the command “do not quench the Spirit” comes as part of a series of exhortations which end Paul’s message to the Thessalonians. The epistle praises the Thessalonians for their spiritual walk and witness (1:2-9), but it also challenges them to continue to live obediently, orderly, and in harmony with one another and with those in leadership. These praises and challenges are given in the light of the rapture and the imminent return of the Lord mentioned in every chapter of the book.

Verse 20 warns against despising prophetic utterances which entailed direct revelation from God (1 Cor. 14:29-32). Prophetic utterances in Paul’s day are comparable to the Bible in our day since the primary function of the prophet was to speak forth God’s revelation in a day when God’s Word was not yet

complete as it is today. To despise prophetic utterances is the same as despising or treating God's Word with contempt by resisting or refusing to obey it. To refuse to obey God's Word is to walk independently according to the flesh; it is to think and act as though one has the ability to guide his own life (cf. Jer. 10:23).

To quench the Spirit, then, ... is to act consciously and willfully against God's written word, to deliberately disobey a known command of Scripture, and to do so in such a way that the promptings of the Holy Spirit are silenced in the conscience of the disobeying believer.

It is evident, once again, that such a believer cannot be depending upon the Spirit in such a response so he can neither be filled nor walking by the Spirit. As in grieving the Holy Spirit so in quenching it is inevitable that the flesh will be controlling such a believer and sin will be accomplishing its purpose in that person's life.⁸

Writing regarding what he called the second condition of true Spirituality, Chafer wrote:

The Spirit is "quenched" by any unyieldedness to the revealed will of God. It is simply saying "no" to God, and so is closely related to matters of the divine appointments for service; though the Spirit may be "quenched," as well, by any resistance of the providence of God in the life.⁹

Just what is the difference between grieving and quenching the Spirit?

In grieving the stress is on the person of the Spirit who, being Holy, is pained and offended by known sin in the life of any believer. Why? Because He longs to make us holy, separated unto God and His will. Grieving brings out the concept of fellowship and focuses our attention on what sin does to that fellowship with the Lord and the Spirit. Though a believer's relationship as a child of God remains secure, fellowship is broken. There is a barrier that stands in the way (cf. Isa. 59:1-2). I am reminded of Amos 3:3: "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" (KJV)

Grieving the Spirit points to the need of readjustment to the Spirit or restoration to fellowship through confession of all known sin. Grieving occurs because of sin, because of disobedience. While obedience does not produce the filling of the Spirit—obedience is a product of the Spirit's control over the flesh—disobedience does grieve because it constitutes unyieldedness and a failure, at that point, to depend, rely on the Holy Spirit.

In quenching the Spirit the stress is on resisting the enabling ministry of the Spirit who longs to enable and lead believers in obedience to God's will. Quenching is directly related to yieldedness or the dedication of our lives to God. Writing in connection with "quench not the Spirit" in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, and in a section dealing with the yielded life in Romans 12:1-2, Chafer wrote:

What greater evidence of the fall do we need than that we must struggle to be yielded to Him? ... It is because our daily life will be helpless and a failure apart from the leading of the Spirit, and because the Spirit has come to do this very work, that we cannot be rightly adjusted to Him, or be spiritual, until we are yielded to the mind and will of God. ... A full dedication of our bodies to be a "living sacrifice" is the

⁸ Lawrence, pp. 12-13.

⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That is Spiritual*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967, p. 86.

“reasonable service” and is an issue of first importance for the child of God. ... There is no mention here of some particular service that might be made an issue of willingness. It is only self-dedication to whatsoever God may choose for us now, or ever.¹⁰

The opposite of quenching is the positive presentation or dedication of one’s life to God for His control as an act of faith that reckons on the reality of our new life in Christ.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

Romans 6:8-11 and 13 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ... 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

The believer simply will not experience the control of the Spirit without this yieldedness on a day-by-day, moment-by-moment basis. But our yieldedness, as with all of the Christian life, is really a matter of trust or faith. The unyielded person is the person who thinks he can run his own life, who believes his way is best, and who therefore is trusting in his own ability and wisdom. Yieldedness grows with the realization of I can’t, but He can, and therefore, with faith in God and in the fact His will is always perfect.

Romans 12:1-2 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The word “present” in Romans 12:1 is the same Greek word, *paristemi*, used by Paul in Romans 6:13 of presenting, offering, or yielding one’s life and members to God as those alive from the dead. Note the following translations:

Romans 6:13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (NASB)

Romans 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (NIV)

Romans 6:13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (KJV)

Note several things that work against the Spirit-controlled walk:

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

(1) The two pulls—legalism and license. *Legalism* is man, operating in the energy of his own resources, seeking to do good deeds or religious works, and then thinking this somehow merits standing with God, or makes him better than others. In legalism, man's faith is in his own ability. Christianity is reduced to a set of rules and laws without the inner heart relationship of faith and trust reaching out to God's mercy. *License*, on the other hand, is the tendency of those who may know God's grace and freedom in Christ, but abuse it for self-centered reasons in the pursuit of their liberty. This is the opposite of love and an evidence that this person is really not controlled with the Spirit but by his or her own self-centered desires. Galatians deals with both of these pulls (cf. Gal. 5:1-15 with Rom. 14-15; and 1 Cor. 8).

(2) The three powers vying to control us—(a) the **world** around us (Rom. 12:2), (b) the **flesh** (self-dependent living) within us (Gal. 5:16-17), and (c) the **devil** who is always against us (Eph. 6:10-18).

1 John 2:12-17 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. 15 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

(3) Four problems hindering growth and spiritual change by the Spirit—(a) ignorance of God's Word (Rom. 6:1f), (b) bias: preconceived ideas from one's background that blocks out the truth of Scripture (Mark 7:6-13), (c) unbelief or a spirit of self-trust (Jer. 17:5; cf. Gal. 3:3, 5; with 5:1-5), and (d) dishonesty with ourselves, our proneness to rationalize our sin rather than confess our sins in a truly biblical manner (Psa. 32:3-5; 51:6, 10, 16).

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

(4) There are a number of crucial lust patterns through which man typically seeks to find happiness in the form of satisfaction, significance, and security—desires for position, possessions, wealth, power, praise, and pleasure. These are the killers. But they are also idols—gods of man's making that he thinks will meet his needs and satisfy his longings. Each of these desires represent false sources of faith, things we depend on rather than the Lord and the ministry of the Spirit. They are the products of Satan's and the world's delusions—the lies people believe.

The Positive Aspect: The Spirit-Controlled Walk

This aspect revolves around two positive commands of the New Testament. As mentioned earlier, these are Galatians 5:16, “walk by the Spirit” and Ephesians 5:18, “be filled with the Spirit.” There are other relevant passages like Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20, both of which call on believers to pray in the power of the Spirit. They show our prayer life must likewise be dependent on the ministry of the Spirit.

Ephesians 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit;

But what do we do when we have grieved and quenched the Spirit through some form of sin? What exactly is the process to both re-establish and maintain fellowship and the Spirit’s control in the life?

The first step of faith necessary to walk by the Spirit in submission to Him is honest confession of all known sin. This restores fellowship so the process of the Spirit’s control can continue if we immediately deal with our sin. Or, if we have been out of fellowship for a period of time (like David in the Old Testament who refused to deal with his sin until confronted by Nathan the prophet) confession restores the Spirit to control again (cf. also 1 Sam. 12:1-13; Psa. 32:3-4; 1 John 1:9).

Proverbs 28:13-14 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. 14 How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Again, let me repeat, the first step of faith, submission, and positive volition to walk by the Spirit, where known sin has occurred, is confession, deep down honest to God acknowledgment of our sin and its effects on our walk with God and the ministry of the Spirit. But our understanding and confession need to go deeper!

The need is to see what is at the bottom of our behavior, namely, faulty sources of trust, as well as false perceptions of what we think we need for happiness or security. Remember, this too is a matter of trust and biblical insight. Until we see this as the real issue, the Spirit will leave us floundering in our own weakness. But why? To bring us to the end of ourselves and self-trust because at the core of our lives is faith in the wrong things. Here again we see the element of growth. This is the issue we need to see and that we must confess.

Further, confession needs to be done with a view to establishing the Spirit’s control so the flesh can be controlled and God glorified.

Included here is the need and the issue of brokenness wherein we come to the end of ourselves and our sources of self-trust. So, while on the one hand we may think we are submitting to the Spirit by faith, on the other hand we may still be trying to manage our own lives, and in reality we are walking by faith in our own machinations.

Once we have confessed known sin with a view to yielding our lives to the Spirit’s control and God’s glory, what else is needed for the Spirit-controlled walk to be consistent and continuous? Well, obviously, believers need a continuously yielded life of faith-dependence on the Spirit as the source of strength and guidance. After all, in reality, the failure to walk dependently is the bottom line cause of all known sin. But how is this maintained and developed? That’s a key question!

Keys for Maintaining the Control of the Spirit

Comprehending the Truth of Identification (Rom. 6)

We dare not miss the importance of our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection to the Spirit-controlled walk. That it is basic, vital, and motivational for walking by faith in the Spirit's control should be clear from the fact Paul placed the identification truth of Romans 6 before the ministry of the Spirit in Romans 8.

Why is Romans 6 important to the walk of faith in the Spirit's control? Because it declares the believer's liberty and assures us we do not need to "continue in sin" (Rom. 6:1). "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." We have the glorious potential of walking in newness of life because of our identification with the Savior in His death unto sin's reign and with His resurrection unto newness of life. But as with all aspects of the Christian life, we must know, believe, and apply the truth we know.

Let's note briefly the structure and truth of Romans 6:

The Foundation: Things to know and comprehend (Rom. 6:1-4). Because believers have been identified with Christ in His death and resurrection that they might also walk with Him in newness of life, it is inconceivable, a moral contradiction, that they would continue allowing sin to reign in their lives.

The Implication: The resulting certainty (Rom. 6:5). Union or identification with Christ in His death also necessitates identification with Him in His resurrection. The "if" in verse 5 represents a condition in the Greek text which assumes the reality of the condition. In this context, it can be translated "since." "Certainly" represents the Greek *alla*, the strongest conjunction of contrast in the Greek New Testament. It emphatically declares that if the first clause and fact is true, and it is, then so is the second clause a fact.

The Application: Truth to believe, count on as true, and obey (Rom. 6:6-14). The application of the truth of verses 1-5 is seen and expressed in four key words:

(1) **Know** (vss. 6-10): Knowing we are identified with Christ in His death and resurrection, we believe that we too may have the fruit of both in our experience.

(2) **Consider or Count on as true** (vs. 11): With this knowledge as a foundation for faith, we are to count ourselves as dead unto sin's reign and alive to God in Christ Jesus. "Consider" (NASB), "count" (NIV), or "reckon" (KJV) is the Greek *logizomai*, "calculate, count on as true." It was a mathematical term used of calculating a row of numbers to come to the exact sum. By adding up the truths of verses 1-10, we are to think and believe accordingly. This reckoning is not a "make believe" kind of response, nor simply positive thinking, but the reckoning of reality. Here are spiritual truths that must be seized by faith. The verb is a present tense of continuous action. Here are spiritual facts that must be seized and applied moment by moment as the foundation for deliverance, yielding by faith to the power of the Spirit.

(3) **Yield, Present, Offer** (vss. 12-13): Note in these verses the emphasis on our personal responsibility for obedience is presented both negatively ("do not let sin reign," "do not go on presenting") and positively ("but present yourselves to God"). While deliverance is supernaturally wrought in us by the power of God, it is our responsibility to appropriate God's deliverance through presenting or yielding our

lives to God. This is dramatically brought out in the Greek text. In these verses we have both a present imperative of prohibition which means “stop presenting,” followed by what grammarians call an ingressive aorist imperative meaning “but start presenting.” We accomplish the negative by the positive. Putting off is accomplished by putting on through the yielded life.

But what does it mean to “present yourselves to God as those alive ...”? “Present” is the Greek *paristēmi*, “to place beside, to put at one’s disposal, present, offer.” It was used as a technical term in the language of sacrifice. This is the word the apostle uses in Romans 12:1 where he exhorts us to offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices. There is, therefore, an active concept of presenting ourselves to God, but this is followed by the passive idea of yieldedness because in presenting ourselves to God we also place ourselves at God’s disposal for His power and will to be wrought in our lives.

(4) **Obey** (vs. 14): The concept of obedience is explicitly brought out in verse 12 and implicitly in verse 13, but that this obedience is not the product of human will power, but the grace of God working in the heart of the believer by faith, is made clear in the declaration of verse 14. Under the Law, we are left to our own strength while under grace we are brought under the power of God through our identification with Christ, and as chapter 8 teaches, through the ministry of the Spirit. But the point must also be made that if there is no obedience, then there is no corresponding reckoning on our union with Christ and no dependence on the Spirit.

Comprehending the Truth of Brokenness (Rom. 7)

We might title Romans 7 “Powerless Sanctification.” In it we see that the death of Christ delivers us from the Law as a rule of life (vss. 1-6), and that the life of Christ delivers us from the old nature as a hindrance to life—the two natures of the believer in conflict (vss. 7-25).

The Theme: The Law cannot produce sanctification in the life of believers and believers cannot produce sanctification in their life by depending on the desire of the new nature to try to keep the Law.

(1) **The Believer’s Deliverance From the Law.** Using the illustration of marriage under law and freedom through death, Paul shows believers are freed from the jurisdiction of the Law because of their co-identification with Christ in His death and resurrection (7:1-6).

(2) **The Purpose of the Law** (7:7-13). Being holy, the Law reveals sin (vs. 7). Being sinful ourselves, the Law provokes or arouses sin in us (vss. 8-9). The Law, though designed for man’s blessing, becomes a killer because of our sin (vss. 10-11). The Law, being holy and good, reveals the sinfulness of sin (vss. 12-13).

(3) **The Inability of the Law and the Struggle with Sin** (7:14-25). The Law, because of the power of sin, cannot change us (vs. 14). The Law, because of the presence of indwelling sin, cannot enable us to do good (vss. 15-21). The Law, though holy and good, cannot set us free because of the law of sin dwelling in our members (vss. 22-24).

In Romans 7:24, “wretched” is a Greek word which means “enduring toils and troubles, afflicted, wretched.” It was used of a person who is exhausted after a battle.

The suggestion here is that we will not find true deliverance until we come to the point and place of Paul’s cry in verse 24. This is the place of brokenness, the place of giving up so that we will turn to our resources in the Savior, not only our position, but God’s provision of the indwelling Spirit of God. Compare Psalm 51:1-17, but in particular, verses 16-17. “Broken spirit” and “contrite heart” are basically synonymous. Both verbs mean “to be broken, crushed.” As verse 16 suggests, it is not religious works

that God wants or that we need. Rather it is coming to the end of ourselves, becoming crushed, broken by the load of trying to run our own lives or attempting to deal with our sinfulness apart from God's provision of grace and the ministry of the Spirit.

Comprehending the Truth of Being More Than Conquerors (Rom. 8)

In answer to the cry of Romans 7:24, "Who will set me free," one of the keynotes triumphantly played in Romans 8 is that of freedom or emancipation. Even though the Christian still faces the conflict of the sinful nature or indwelling sin (Rom. 7:23), he can overcome the ruling power of sin through the control of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In fact, this chapter is the believer's emancipation proclamation that expands the length, breadth, height, and depth of life.

Borrowing from Ryrie's Study Bible, Romans 8 can be outlined as follows:

- Emancipated Living: living victoriously by the power of the Spirit (8:1-11)
- Exalted Living: living as mature sons of God (8:4-17)
- Expectant Living: living joyfully in the midst of suffering (8:18-30)
- Exultant Living: living gloriously as super-conquerors through Him who loved us regardless of what life may bring (8:31-39)¹¹

For the Christian, there is:

- (1) Freedom from judgment because for the believer in Christ, there is no condemnation (8:1-3).
- (2) Freedom from defeat, no more under bondage to sin if we will but walk by the Spirit (8:1-17).
- (3) Freedom from discouragement even in the face of the sufferings of life because of the glory to be revealed and the prayer ministry of the Holy Spirit (8:18-30).
- (4) Freedom from anxiety because, as super-conquerors, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:31-39).

The revelation of this passage concerns the marvelous ministry of the Spirit of God as God's perfect supply for living the Christian life. Building on the identification truths of Romans 6, the great obligation of Romans 8 concerns the Christian's need to put to death the sinful deeds of the body by walking according to the Spirit (cf. 8:4-6, 12-13).

Comprehending the Consequences of Carnality

The American Heritage Dictionary (electronic version) defines "carnal" as: (a) Relating to the desires and appetites of the flesh or body; sensual. (b) Worldly or earthly; temporal. [ME < Lat. *carnalis* < Lat. *caro*, flesh.] carnality (*karnalite*). Scripturally, the term comes from 1 Corinthians 3:3 which is translated variously:

For ye are yet **carnal**: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not *carnal*, and walk as men? (KJV)

¹¹ *The Ryrie Study Bible*, NASB, Moody Press, Chicago, 1976, 1978, pp. 1712-1714.

For you are still **fleshly**. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not **fleshly**, and are you not walking like mere men? (NASB)

You are still **worldly**. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not **worldly**? Are you not acting like mere men? (NIV)

for you are still **influenced by the flesh**. For since there is still jealousy and dissension among you, are you not **influenced by the flesh** and behaving like ordinary people? (NET)

In the Greek text, the word translated above as “carnal,” “fleshly,” or “worldly” is *sarkikos* from *sarx*, meaning “flesh.” *Sarkikos* means “fleshly, adapted, fitted to the flesh” and thus controlled by the flesh. Words ending in *ikos* denote an ethical or dynamic relationship.¹² This word is equivalent to *kata sarka*, “according to the flesh” in Romans 8:4, 5. In 2 Corinthians 10:4 the apostle wrote, “for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh” (*sarkikos*).

The “flesh” may be defined as that strong and rebellious disposition in people to operate out of their own human resources to meet their needs and wants, the things they perceive they must have for security, satisfaction, and significance. Rather than trust in God, “flesh” as an ethical term, represents a spirit of independence, a commitment to do one’s own thing, in one’s own way, and from one’s own resources. Thus, to be carnal means to adapt our lives to the flesh way of life, to use fleshly resources or weapons to manipulate and handle life rather than the spiritual resources given to us by God such as the indwelling Spirit, the Word, and prayer.

Scripture is full of warnings concerning the disastrous consequences of carnality, the pursuit of life apart from faith in God, living independently of His direction and power, or pursuing our own way. For instance, compare just the small sampling of the following verses:

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD, “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD.”

Isaiah 50:11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with fire-brands, Walk in the light of your fire And among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand; And you will lie down in torment.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.

(1) Loss of Fellowship. The first consequence is the loss of fellowship with the Lord plus the absence of the control of the Holy Spirit and His fruit in one’s life (cf. 1 John 1:5-7). When the Spirit is grieved and quenched (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19), we are hindered in prayer (Ps. 66:18), in witnessing (Acts 1:8), in Bible study (1 Cor. 2:10-16; Eph. 3:16f), i.e., in all the ministries of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. To trust in one’s self is to fail to trust in the Spirit.

¹² Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key To The New Testament*, edited by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., Regency, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 393.

The ministry of the Spirit when He is grieved and quenched must of necessity be turned from His positive ministry of enabling to one of pleading and convicting concerning sin. As the one who convicts the world of sin (John 16:8), so the Holy Spirit pleads and works to convict believers to bring them to repentance and a return to fellowship. In this condition, there is the consequence of misery and the loss of joy and the blessedness of fellowship with the Lord. This pleading, reproving ministry is obviously also connected with the message of the Spirit in the Word. The letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, with the exception of one, were letters of rebuke designed to convict and restore these churches. Each is concluded with “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Psa. 32:3-4).

(2) Dissipation of Resources. When believers are controlled by the flesh, another consequence is dissipation or wastefulness of their spiritual, mental, and physical resources (Eph. 5:18). Included in this are the works of the flesh with their awful destructive consequences to health, integrity, human relationships, and society as a whole.

Galatians 5:15, 19-21 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. . . . 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

(3) Divine Discipline. Because God is our Father and the Vinedresser of His vineyard, carnality will eventually result in divine discipline—the heavy hand of God designed to train and restore His people to Him (cf. also Heb. 12:5-11).

Psalms 32:4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

1 Corinthians 11:29-32 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

(4) Loss of Testimony. Another consequence of not walking in fellowship is the loss of our testimony in the world and dishonor to the Lord (cf. also 1 Pet. 3:15-17; 4:15-16).

1 Peter 2:12-17 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

(5) Loss of Rewards. Another consequence is the loss of rewards at the Bema (Judgment) Seat of Christ (cf. 1 John 2:28-3:3). See Part 1, Lesson 7 for a study on the Bema.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

In addition to the above, if we continue to live in open rebellion and refuse to get right with the Lord, the following consequences may occur:

(6) Increased discipline from the heavy hand of God.

Psalms 32:4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

Hebrews 12:6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.

(7) Continuation in rebellion may require the church to take action even to the point of ex-communication. The church today often fails to exercise church discipline or it is done in the wrong manner (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Cor. 5).

Matthew 18:17 And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

(8) Divine discipline to the point of physical death may also occur.

1 Corinthians 11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

Other Truths Important to Maintaining the Control of the Spirit

As expressions of faith and as further acts of yieldedness, believers need:

(1) Bible study and the hearing of the Word.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

James 1:21-25 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

(2) Scripture memory.

Psalm 119:11 Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.

Proverbs 3:3 Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.

(3) Prayer (cf. Ps. 119). Almost the entire Psalm is addressed to the Lord and concerns sanctification.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

(4) Fellowship with believers, and public worship.

Acts 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Hebrews 10:23-24 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

Such are all to be done in the power of the Spirit, but they are nevertheless vital to one's spiritual walk, to faith, and to a Spirit-dependent life. These biblical disciplines are designed by God to promote and cultivate a dependent walk with Him through faith. Though they are never to be done out of a spirit of legalism, when we neglect these things, we are quenching the Spirit by an unyielded life and by a life of unbelief. We are in essence seeking to live by the light of our own man-made firebrands, leaning on the arm of our flesh (our human resources), and building our own cisterns (Isa. 50:1-11; Jer. 17:5).

The author of Hebrews shows us the vital relationship between daily hearing the voice of the Spirit of God from the Word of God, and having a yielded and believing heart—a heart of faith that is so vital to walking by means of the Spirit. He shows this relationship in Hebrews 3 and 4.

First, there is the warning against failing to hear the voice of the Spirit which leads to a hardened heart of unbelief. Faith comes from hearing the Word.

Hebrews 3:7-8 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the

wilderness, ..." 15 while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me."

Hebrews 3:12 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Second, as a protection against an unyielded, hardened heart of unbelief, there is the encouragement for fellowship with believers (vs. 13 and 10:23-24), and the need for the Word of God itself which is always the place where the voice of the Spirit of God is heard.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

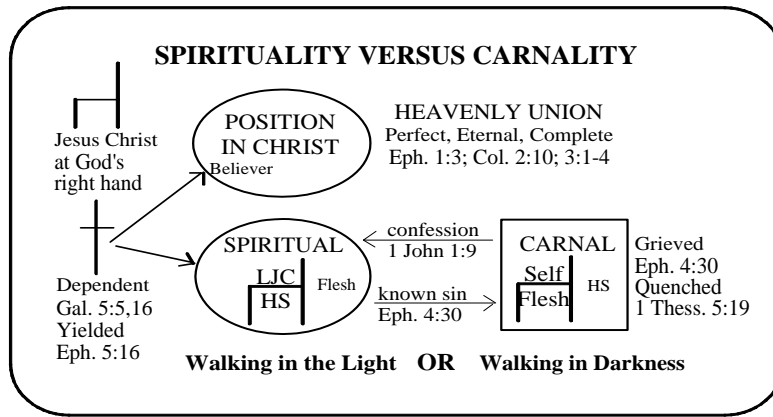
Peter implicitly gives us the same emphasis in 1 Peter 2:1-2, "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation."

Peter speaks of growing "in respect to salvation." Since the word "salvation" can refer to any kind of preservation or deliverance depending on the context (cf. Acts 7:25; 27:34; Phil. 1:9; Heb. 11:7), it should always be understood from the context. For instance, in Hebrews 11:7 it is used for the deliverance of Noah and his family from the waters of the flood.

Here in 1 Peter 2:2, Peter is not writing about gaining eternal life or an entrance to heaven. Rather, he is writing about experiential sanctification (phase 2 of salvation), specifically, deliverance from the fleshly patterns mentioned in verse 1. And while deliverance is through the power of the Spirit, as the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit never operates independently of the Word of Truth.

There is the need, then, of a healthy appetite and a regular diet of the "pure milk of the Word," a clear evidence of a yielded life versus one that quenches the Spirit through a spirit of independent living. Remember, the command "quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19) is followed by "do not despise prophetic utterances," a reference to the proclamation of God's truth, which for us today, is equivalent to the Word. The truth of 1 Peter 2:2 can also be found in James 1:21f.

Keeping in mind the element of growth or maturity, the following chart illustrates the Spirit-dependent life:



The studies that follow will focus on those faith disciplines of the Word (Bible study, prayer, worship, etc.) that will enhance and develop yieldedness and faith in the indwelling presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit and His direction in the believer's life.

Lesson 6:
The Word-Filled Life
Developing the Mind of Christ

Introduction

The Bible is the Christian's resource book, his manual for living, the light to his path, and the index for faith and practice. The Bible is God's Word—His special revelation by which man is to cleanse and direct his way. As God's revelation to man, it teaches man things he absolutely cannot learn about life and death apart from this very special revelation as Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Psalms 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. 10 With all my heart I have sought Thee; Do not let me wander from Thy commandments. 11 Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.

This revelation includes things such as the truth about God as a triunity or trinity (His essence, character, purposes, and plan); things about man (his origin, make up, fall, sin, and need); about the physical world and its true origin as the creation of the Creator and its future redemption; about Satan and the forces of evil in the world; about God's plan of salvation for man through faith in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ (salvation from sin's penalty, power, and one day from its presence); the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit; and about things to come. Because of man's finite limitations, his natural spiritual blindness, and his spiritual condition in sin, the Bible is (as the late Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote) a book that man could not write if he would and would not write if he could.

Because of what it is and does, the Bible is the most important book of the Christian's life. Note the following sampling of verses:

Matthew 5:18-19 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:18-21 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no

prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Christians not only need to know their Bibles, but they need to know about their Bible. It is important to be *carefully* informed as to its value that they may be more motivated to use it and use it properly in view of its character, purpose, and origin. Because spiritual understanding, faith, practice, and obedience to God is dependent on the Bible, the doctrine of the Bible (bibliology) is one of the most important doctrines of Scripture that a person can know.

David wrote, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: *for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name*" (Ps. 138:2, KJV) (emphasis mine). The NASB renders the second portion of this verse "For Thou hast magnified Thy Word according to all Thy Name." The NIV has "for you have exalted above all things your name and your word."

"According" or "above" (KJV) represents in the Hebrew text, the *hiphil* stem of the verb *gadal* plus the preposition *al*. This would normally mean "above" as translated by the KJV, but all these are possible translations. Regardless of which translation one accepts, the text is declaring the importance of God's Word to both the knowledge and worship of God. Knowing God, which the mention of God's name includes, is dependent on knowing God's Word. As it is sometimes said, "a man's name is as good as his word," so God's name and knowing God is dependent on the truth, faithfulness, and accuracy of His Word and one's knowledge of the Scripture. With this in mind, let's consider what the Bible is.

The Attributes of the Bible

Psalm 19:7-14 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. 13 Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

It Is God-Breathed: Inspired Revelation From God

A proper definition of inspiration must naturally be formed on the basis of the teaching of Scripture. With this in mind, Ryrie gives the following definition and explanation:

... God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings.

Notice carefully some of the key words in this definition. (1) The word "superintend" allows for the spectrum of relationships God had with the writers and the variety of material. His superintendence was sometimes very direct and sometimes less so, but always it included guarding the writers so that they wrote accurately.

- (2) The word “composed” shows that the writers were not passive stenographers to whom God dictated the material, but active writers.
- (3) “Without error” expresses the Bible’s own claim to be truth (John 17:17).
- (4) Inspiration can only be predicated of the original writings, not to copies or translations, however accurate they may be.¹

The following data presents the testimony of the Bible concerning itself as the inspired revelation of God. This is testimony which needs to be heard, but should one not want to listen to this testimony—and many do not—they not only ignore the testimony of the Bible, the witness of the defendant to itself, but they also ignore a large amount of other evidence which has tremendous weight and substantiates this testimony of the Bible.

This evidence includes the inexhaustible depth of the Bible; its marvelous continuity from Genesis through Revelation; its world-wide circulation, the purity and ethics of the Bible; its unrelenting faithfulness to present truth and its refusal to hide the sin of its heroes; its relevance in all generations; the testimony of archeology; the fulfillment of prophecy; its prevailing power to change not only individuals, but whole societies; and its preservation and survival in the face of one attack after another to either destroy or discredit it.

This is particularly significant when we compare the Bible’s preservation with all the other writings of antiquity.²

The greatest testimony to the authenticity of the Bible as God’s Word is the Lord Jesus. Why is His testimony so important? Because God authenticated and proved Him to be His own divine Son by the resurrection (cf. Acts 2:22-36; 4:8-12; 17:30-31; Rom. 1:4). Christ clearly confirmed the authority of the Old Testament and promised the New Testament.

Note what Christ taught about the Old Testament:

- Its Authority (Matt. 22:43)
- Its Reliability (Matt. 26:54)
- Its Finality (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10)
- Its Sufficiency (Luke 16:31)
- Its Indestructibility (Matt. 5:17-18)
- Its Unity (Luke 24:27, 44)
- Its Clarity (Luke 24:27)
- Its Historicity (Matt. 12:40)
- Its Facticity (scientifically) (Matt. 19:2-5)
- Its Inerrancy (Matt. 22:29; John 3:12; 17:17)
- Its Infallibility (John 10:35)³

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1987, electronic media.

² For a thorough explanation of such evidence and as a sampling of what has been written on this subject, see *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell, Lewis Sperry Chafer’s *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, and *When Skeptics Ask*, by Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, pp. 141-161.

With this in mind, let's look at the testimony of the defendant itself. In any just court of law, the defendant has the right to be represented and heard.

The Fact of Inspiration

2 Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

All Scripture is inspired, literally, "breathed out (*theopneustos*) of God." We could translate it, "all Scripture is God-breathed." This points to the means and source of inspiration. Our English word "inspire" carries the idea of breathing into something. The Greek word, however, teaches us God breathed out the Scripture. Though God used human authors to record His message, the Bible has its source in God who breathed it out through the human authors. He used their vocabularies, experiences, and personalities, but He was the ultimate source and they were but the human instruments. More will be said on this below when we consider "the how of inspiration."

The Extent and Nature of Inspiration

All Scripture, the entire Bible, Genesis through Revelation, is inspired and profitable. This points to the extent of inspiration. It is all inspired. Theologians often refer to this as *plenary* inspiration. The result is that the whole Bible is "true, tried, perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, more desirable than gold, and sweeter than honey" (Psa 19:7-9; 119:140). Such descriptions point to the verbal, plenary, unlimited inerrancy and infallible nature of the Bible (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-13). Note the following verses where the argument hinges on one word (Gal. 3:16, "seed"; Matt. 22:31-32, "am").

Matthew 5:17-18 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

Matthew 22:31-32 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 'I **am** the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Galatians 3:16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your **seed**," that is, Christ.

Regarding the true nature of inspiration and the attack that has gone on for years over the truth of inspiration, Ryrie writes:

While many theological viewpoints would be willing to say the Bible is inspired, one finds little uniformity to what is meant by inspiration. Some focus it on the writers; others, on the writings; still others, on the readers. Some relate it to the general message of the Bible; others, to the thoughts; still others, to the words. Some include inerrancy; many don't. These differences call for precision in stating the biblical

³ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1990, p. 143.

doctrine. Formerly all that was necessary to affirm one's belief in full inspiration was the statement, "I believe in the inspiration of the Bible." But when some did not extend inspiration to the words of the text it became necessary to say, "I believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible." To counter the teaching that not all parts of the Bible were inspired, one had to say, "I believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible." Then because some did not want to ascribe total accuracy to the Bible, it was necessary to say, "I believe in the verbal, plenary, infallible, inerrant inspiration of the Bible." But then "infallible" and "inerrant" began to be limited to matters of faith only rather than also embracing all that the Bible records (including historical facts, genealogies, accounts of Creation, etc.), so it became necessary to add the concept of "unlimited inerrancy." Each addition to the basic statement arose because of an erroneous teaching.⁴

The Value of Inspiration

Since all Scripture is God-breathed, being the product of an all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful and loving God, the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16 goes on to state that the entire Bible is profitable for four things: for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

(1) Teaching—"Teaching" is the Greek *didaskalia* and means "doctrine" or "teaching." It is used in both the active sense (i.e., the act of teaching), and in the passive sense (what is taught, doctrine). In the pastoral epistles, Paul uses it of the act of teaching (1 Tim. 4:13, 17; 2 Tim. 3:10), and of what is taught as in sound doctrine (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; 4:6, 16; 6:1, 3; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1; 2:7, 10). As many of these passages show, especially Titus 2:1, our teaching must be in accord with sound doctrine. And for doctrine to be sound, it must be in accord with the inspired Word. Ultimately, teaching or doctrine—the content—refers to God's fundamental principles for man's life, both eternal and abundant, the basics, the fundamentals upon which life is to be built.

(2) Reproof—This is the Greek *elegmos* which means "proof, conviction, reproof." The *mos* ending shows this is a passive noun which looks at the **result** of the process of the convicting ministry of the Spirit through the Word—personal conviction through exposure to truth. One might compare *elegmos* to another Greek word, *elenxis*, an active noun which looks at the **process** of reproof or exposing. Both need to go on in the life of a believer. The goal, however, is not simply the process. It's the result—personal conviction. Like the light it is, the Bible reproofs and exposes us to the various ways we violate the plan and principles of God in all the relationships of life, with God and with people such as in one's family, in the church, and in society. Once we have been reproofed and experience conviction (reproof) to the violations, we each face a very important decision. We can move toward God and **respond** to His correction and training, or we can **rebel** and **resist**. If we resist, then, as a Father, He disciplines us to draw us back to Him.

(3) Correction—This is the Greek *epanorthōsis* which means "setting up straight, setting right." It stresses the restorative nature and capacity of Scripture and points to the more immediate work of the Word to set our feet back on course. The Psalmist wrote, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul" (Psa. 19:7a).

(4) Training in righteousness—"Training" is *paideia* which basically means "training, instruction, discipline," not in the sense of punishment, but in the sense of the disciplines that train and develop char-

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1986, p. 67.

acter, strength, skill, etc. This is undoubtedly more long range and refers to those truths that develop godly character and spiritual strength—growth truths and procedures like Bible study, meditation, and prayer.

The Purpose of Inspiration

The purpose is that “the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). The Bible offers us God’s comfort and His peace as it reveals His love, care, and mercy, but this is always in the context of conforming us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29) and equipping us for a life of good works (Eph. 2:10). Equipping us is designed to produce righteousness and ministry rather than self-indulgence.

The word “adequate” is the Greek *artios* which means “fit, complete, capable, sufficient: i.e., able to meet whatever is needed.” Being “fit” looks at the result or the intended result of a process, the aim in view. I think the process itself is seen in the word “equipped.” Note these three points about this word:

(1) “Equipped” is the Greek *exartizō* which means “to outfit, fully furnish, fully supply” as in fitting out a wagon or a ship for a long journey. It was actually used of outfitting a rescue boat.⁵ We might compare our Coast Guard vessels and their crews that are so well equipped to go out and rescue ships in trouble.

(2) “Equipped” is an adverbial participle which points us to the mode or the means of becoming “adequate,” “capable,” or “competent.” We might translate the verse as “that the man of God may be capable, by having been thoroughly equipped.”

(3) Finally, the verb is in the perfect tense which, in Greek, often looks at the results of preceding action or a process. In the context, the process is that of studying, knowing, and applying God’s inspired Word while the result is ability for ministry through spiritual growth.

God’s goal, in giving us His Word and our goal in studying and knowing God’s Word, is to thoroughly fit us out that we might become fully competent servants of God for every kind of good work in the midst of a dark and needy world, like thoroughly equipped rescue vessels on missions of mercy.

The How of Inspiration

2 Pet. 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

No passage of Scripture tells us as much about the *how* of inspiration as does this passage in 2 Peter. Though all of 2 Peter 1 does not deal with the how of inspiration, there are four important things that it would be well to note about this first chapter and its context.

First, there is the context and purpose of this passage. Since God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the great and precious promises, i.e., the Word of God, Peter was writing to challenge his readers to diligence in becoming fruitful in their knowledge of the Savior (1:3-11). In other words, faith must not stand still; it must grow. Further, he wanted to remind them and us that our faith

⁵ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, edited by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., Regency, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 647.

does not stand on the shifting sands of man's cleverly devised fables or human ideas. Rather, it is grounded in the marvelous revelation of God in the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the written Word, the prophetic Word of God to which we do well to pay close attention.

2 Peter 1:12-21 Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. 13 And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind. 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

In the process of setting forth this focus, Peter mentions his personal experience of seeing the majestic glory of the transfiguration of Christ when he heard from heaven, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" (vss. 16-17). But He goes on to teach us something that is tremendously important, especially in our day when so much is made regarding personal experiences which often take precedence over Scripture. Note that in verse 19 Peter writes, "And we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention ...". We need to ask, "More sure than what?" More sure than even his experience of seeing Christ's transfiguration. Now that which Peter, James, and John saw has become a part of the record of the Word and provides important revelation of the person of Christ. But the point is, our experiences, as bonafide as they may be, never take precedence over the authoritative Word of God because it is more sure, steadfast, and reliable. The Word is our authority and it alone must judge our experiences and determine faith and practice.

The NIV's translation of verse 20 is much closer to the original Greek, more in accord with the preceding and following context, and clearly expresses the truth to be gleaned here. It reads, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation." This simply declares that whatever the prophets wrote or whatever we find in the Word, it was not the product of the author's own ideas or human opinion. In verses 16-19, the issue being discussed is the source of the apostolic message. Was it human fable, or was it from God? Verse 20 answers the first part of this question. It was not from man. The second part of the question is found in the next verse. Note the connecting and explanatory "For" of verse 21.

Verse 21 teaches us that both God and man were involved in the production of the Bible, but in such a way that God was not only the ultimate source, but He both directed the writing and guaranteed the accuracy of the product. The human authors actively spoke God's Word and they were more than dictation machines, but to insure the accuracy of what was spoken, the human authors were moved and carried along by the Holy Spirit. "Moved" is *pheromenoi*, a Greek passive participle meaning, "to be

carried, be borne along.” This word was used of a ship being carried along by the wind in its sail in Acts 27:15, 17.

Catching the import of this, Ryrie writes:

Though experienced men, the sailors could not guide it so they finally had to let the wind take the ship wherever it blew. In the same manner as that ship was driven, directed, or carried about by the wind, God directed and moved the human writers He used to produce the books of the Bible. Though the wind was the strong force that moved the ship along, the sailors were not asleep and inactive. Similarly, the Holy Spirit was the guiding force that directed the writers who, nevertheless, played their own active roles in writing the Scriptures.⁶

This verse, then, teaches us two things regarding the “How” of inspiration: (a) The will of the human authors never directed the writings of the Bible and (b) the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source ensured the accuracy of what they wrote in every way.

The Breadth of Inspiration

2 Pet. 1:3-4 Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

It is clear from verse 4 and the reference to “His precious and magnificent promises” that Peter has the Word of God in view in these two verses. First, there is the declaration that God “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.” Second, life and godliness come through the knowledge of God and the Lord Jesus, but such knowledge comes through the Word, the precious promises. In essence then, this points us to the breadth of what God’s Word covers, “everything pertaining to life and godliness.”

While God does not reveal everything that He could reveal, many things He has chosen to keep to Himself (Deut. 29:29), the Bible does cover all that man needs for life and godliness through its revelation of God and of Jesus our Lord. We have everything we need, nothing is missing. Consequently, being God’s inspired Word, the following is also true ...

It Is Alive and Powerful

In this attribute of the Bible, we see the quickening and energizing power of the Word of God to regenerate and change or transform the lives of men as it reveals the very wisdom of God and brings men into a vital relationship with Him through its truth.

1 Peter 1:23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.

⁶Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 69.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It Is Perfect, Without Defect

(1) It is without blemish, complete, pure, tried, and thus truth, true.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

(2) It is uncontaminated, flawless.

Psalm 12:6 The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.

(3) It is thoroughly tested and found flawless by testing.

Psalm 119:140 Thy word is very pure, Therefore Thy servant loves it.

(4) Scripture declares its own inerrant and unadulterated character, unblemished by the myths and fallacies of man.

Psalm 19:8-9 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

It Is Sure and Trustworthy

The testimony of God's Word is sure, that is reliable, trustworthy, with the inherent capacity to impart God's wisdom to the simple, to those who come to him in childlike openness rather than depend on their own human wisdom.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

It Is Right (Righteous)

As the righteous revelation of God, Scripture enlightens and brings men into a right relationship with the God for whom man was created. Nothing can give joy to the heart like knowing God through His righteous Word.

Psalm 19:8-9 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

**It Is Great and Precious,
More Valuable Than Gold, and Sweeter Than Honey**

In these pictures we see the inherent value of the Bible and our need to evaluate our priorities and pursuits.

2 Peter 1:4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Psalm 19:10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

It Is God's Channel of Faith and Deliverance

It is through the Scripture that God builds our faith and is able to bring us into the power of His life through the person of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

2 Peter 1:4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Psalm 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. 10 With all my heart I have sought Thee; Do not let me wander from Thy commandments. 11 Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.

It Is Inexhaustible

No matter how deep we dig into the rich treasures of the Word, we barely scratch the surface. This is only to be expected since it is the revelation of an infinite God to finite man. Have you not said or heard others say, "You know, I have studied that passage for years, but I never saw that truth until today."

Ephesians 3:2-8 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which

was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the *unfathomable* riches of Christ, (italics mine).

Actions of the Word (What It Does)

Picture 1: A Sword

The Greek word for sword is *machaira*, the short, two-edged sword of the Roman soldier. With this weapon a soldier was never left off balance, nor was he as vulnerable to the thrusts from the weapons of his enemy because it was easier to use.

Passages:

Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Principles Portrayed:

(1) The fact of our warfare or conflict: This is the emphasis in Ephesians 6. The Word of God is our offensive and defensive weapon against all of our enemies—the *World* with its anti-God influences, the *Flesh* and its many strong desires, and the *Devil* with his devilish schemes. With this picture God is warning us that without the Word we cannot defeat any of these enemies. The Scripture is our sword, a sharp two-edged sword, one we can wield effectively and actively without being thrown off balance as with the weapons of the flesh. It is significant that when the Lord was tempted by the Devil, He repeatedly parried the thrusts of Satan’s temptations with “It is written” (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

(2) This picture also portrays penetration: It portrays the capacity to cut deep and penetrate into the innermost part of our being and meet our innermost needs, the spiritual needs of the soul. This is the emphasis in Hebrews 4:12. The Word has the capacity to deal with our deep-seated problems of guilt, fears or anxieties, wrong motives, angers, frustrations, and our need for significance, meaning, and purpose.

Problems We Face—Use and skill:

In Ephesians 6:17 Paul is telling us we need to take up our armor. This means learning to know our sword and how to use it by daily practice.

In Hebrews 5:12 the author is dealing with the problem of negligence. Because of the amount of time these believers had been saved, they should have been teachers of the Word. They had neglected the assembling of themselves together to hear the Word, however, and were woefully unskilled in the use of Scripture.

Hebrews 5:11-12 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be

teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Picture 2: A Critic, Judge

Passage:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Principles Portrayed:

This teaches us that the Word is God's personal analyzer of our lives. It is a critic, a judge of what is right and wrong. It tells us how we are doing, where we are going wrong, why, and how to correct it. Just as a performer has critics of his performance, so the Word is a critic of both our attitudes and actions, our performance, our inner life, and our overt behavior.

Problems We Face:

We must be a people who have ears to hear and submit to the judgment of the Word on our lives. We need to be a submissive people, but as John R. Stott accurately writes,

Seldom if ever in its long history has the world witnessed such a self-conscious revolt against authority. ... What seems new today, however, is both the world-wide scale of the revolt and the philosophical arguments with which it is sometimes buttressed. There can be no doubt that the twentieth century has been caught up in a global revolution ... All the accepted authorities (family, school, university, State, Church, Bible, Pope, God) are being challenged. Anything which savors of 'establishment,' that is, of entrenched privilege or unassailable power, is being scrutinized and opposed.⁷

Questioning what people say, if we use God's Word as our index, is not always bad and is even commended by Luke in Acts 17:11. But if we are not careful we can be caught up in the mood of the day and become insensitive and unresponsive to the preaching and teaching of the Word. We treat it as though it were merely someone's opinion and we can become too impressed and filled with our own opinions. Stott continues,

Now everybody has his own opinions and his own convictions, and considers them just as good as the preacher's. 'Who does he think he is,' people ask—silently if not aloud—'that he should presume to lay down the law to me?'⁸

But the issue is does the message (whether in a book, on a tape, or from a pulpit) reflect the truth of Scripture? Is it based on Scripture and sound exegesis according to grammar, context, and the analogy of Scripture, or is the preacher or teacher abusing the Word? Is he guilty of eisegesis, reading into it his own ideas to promote his own agendas?

⁷ John R. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Picture 3: A Lamp, Light

Passages:

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Isaiah 50:10-11 Who is among you that fears the LORD, That obeys the voice of His servant, That walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. 11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with firebrands, Walk in the light of your fire And among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand; And you will lie down in torment.

Psalms 36:9 For with Thee is the fountain of life; In Thy light we see light.

Psalms 119:105 Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.

Psalms 119:130 The unfolding of Thy words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light; And re-proofs for discipline are the way of life,

Principles Portrayed:

The purpose of a lamp is its light-bearing capacity. In Scripture, light has a three-fold use and significance:

(1) **The Operational Use:** This use of light emphasizes the *action of light*. Light gives illumination or sight. Light shines in our lives to dispel darkness, to illuminate our path or our walk step-by-step. Light keeps us from stumbling and running into those things which can harm us. Light, as such, is *protective*.

(2) **The Intellectual Use:** This use of light stands for the concept of truth and is opposed to error and that which deceives and deludes. It is through the light of the Word that we are able to recognize and avoid the *myths* and *heresies* of a satanically-inspired and deluded world. A reporter asked a pedestrian if he knew what the two greatest problems in the world were. The man answered, "I don't know, and I don't care." The reporter replied, "You're right, how did you know?"

What we do not know about God's Word not only can hurt us, but in time it will. Why? Because throughout history people have fallen victim to lies—myths that become accepted as truth. Say it often enough and in the right setting and people will eventually begin to believe it—believe it or not! Where do these myths come from? They come from the brainwashing we receive daily from our cultural environment as well as the rationalizations (a nice word for the lies we often tell ourselves to get our own way).

Let me share a few myths:

- The myth that God is pleased with our religiosity—that all we have to do is put in our appearance at church once a week, sing a few hymns, get a rosy glow, and look interested in what the preacher has to say. But as one whose life was meshed with God's Word and speaking to the Pharisees, the Lord Jesus quoted Isaiah and said, "This people honors Me with their lips, but

their heart is far away from me, But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (Mark 7:6-7; 1 Cor. 11:17ff).

- The myth that we can ignore God’s Word and be okay. But the Word says, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me” (Hebrews 3:7-8a). The author is showing us that if we do not listen to the Spirit of God daily, we are going to be influenced and hardened by sin.
- The myth that temptation is some overt, momentary solicitation to evil and that our strength lies in what we do at that moment—when the truth is that victory is based upon growing in faith, in attitudes, conditioning, and patterns, that have been forming for weeks, months, even years.
- The myth that because we hear thunder and don’t see the immediate wrath of God that we are getting away with sin and can neglect spiritual priorities.

Note the following illustrations:

Because they wanted to settle east of the Jordan where they could pasture their herds, Moses warned the tribes of Reuben and Gad concerning failure to help the rest of the nation drive out the inhabitants of the land,

Numbers 32:23 But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

In Galatians Paul wrote,

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, ...

In Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 we read these words,

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

(3) The Moral Use: In this use we see the final product of light is righteousness. In Isaiah God reminds us that our ways are not His ways—and they are not because our thoughts are not His thoughts. Righteousness and morality simply cannot exist in a doctrinal vacuum where God is not known in truth because it is the truth, it is the light of Scripture which sets us free (Isa 55:8f).

Problems We Face:

No lamp is useful unless it is switched on and directed to one’s path or on the details of one’s life (cf. Matt. 5:14f). Being a light to others begins by living in God’s light (the Word) ourselves. We must know how to use our lamp. It is not really *our* lamp until we have studied it and are willing to apply it. The world is full of darkness, but the lamp of the Word—God’s truth—dispels the darkness of the world. It is instructional for us to note Paul’s warnings and commands in Ephesians 5 where he warns us that it is all too easy for us to walk in darkness even though we are children of light. It requires an active response and commitment to the Word before we will expose our lives to the light of Scripture.

Jeremiah 10:23 I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.

In Philippians 1:10 the word *sincere* is the Greek *eilikrinēs*. While the etymology and derivation of this word has been questioned, one suggestion is that it is composed of *heilē*, sunlight, and *krinō*, to judge. It means to judge or see by the light and describes what can stand the judgment of the light of the sun. It refers to a man whose life is free from falsehood and deceitfulness. In ancient times the word was used of the practice of shoppers concerning articles in the marketplace. Ancient shops were dark and imperfections in a piece of furniture or a vase could easily be hidden and covered over with wax or paint. Because of this practice, shoppers would take the article out into the sunlight to see if the merchandise was free from flaws, to see if it was *eilikrinēs*. Friends, this is what we all need. We need to daily and weekly expose ourselves to the sunlight of God's holy Word.

Philippians 1:10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

Picture 4: A Mirror

Passages:

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

James 1:22-25 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

Principles Portrayed:

A mirror is a reflector of one's likeness. It reflects our image. Fortunately, unless it is twisted or deformed in some way, a mirror does not lie. The Bible is a perfect mirror—it reflects reality, the reality of what we are. A color photograph can be touched up here and there to hide a mole, wart, wrinkle, or scar, but a mirror shows us exactly what we are. But fortunately the Bible, as a mirror, has a dual purpose or a dual reflection.

When a little boy stands in front of a mirror with his dad, he sees himself and his dad whom he would like to be like when he grows up. It provides him with a model for how he would like to look. God's Word is like that. It not only shows us who and what we are, but it also shows us the Lord Jesus—our example and goal. But this only happens as we learn to focus on Him in the mirror of His Word and walk by the Spirit.

Problems We Face:

Like the other pictures of the Word, a mirror must be used properly or it has no benefit. By the non-use or misuse of our mirror, we can fail to benefit by this marvelous gift of God for our transformation and healing. I am reminded of the morning miracle my beautiful wife performs daily in the presence of a

mirror. In fact, think about what most people would look like if they gave no heed to what they saw in the mirror each morning before they washed, brushed, curled or used a little makeup.

The emphasis in James 1:19-25 is that we cannot afford to be superficial believers who take just a casual look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Word. It is too easy for each of us to do that through mere religious activity like going to church and Sunday school or spending ten minutes in a daily devotional booklet. Contextually, James is talking about having a faith that is active and productive so that it results in spiritual deliverance and practical demonstrations of righteousness in transformed living.

Note James 2:21 where James asks the question, "Was Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" James is not contradicting Paul. When Paul talks about justification by faith he is referring to justification before God, but James is writing about justification before men, the practical proof and manifestation of real fellowship with God in contrast with mere religiosity.

The Greek word for "justified" is *dikaioō*. This word has two main uses. (a) It may mean "to declare, pronounce righteous or treat one as righteous." In this sense it means to declare guiltless, to acquit of a charge. Paul uses *dikaioō* or the idea of justification in this sense. Because of the work of Christ and through personal faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven, the penalty of sin is removed, and we are declared or pronounced righteous in Christ. (b) But *dikaioō* may also mean to show or exhibit or prove that one is righteous.⁹ This is the sense in which James uses the term. With this in mind, read James 1:19-21.

The subject here is the positive production of God's kind of character, positive righteousness or transformed living accomplished through faith in our new regenerated life in Christ. As regenerated people who have faith in Christ, our lives should be different.

James 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

But if our faith in the living Christ is to actively appropriate His life in ours in a consistent life-changing way that demonstrates our justification, the new life must be brought into a right relationship with the living Word, which, like seed that is planted, germinates and takes root, grows and produces (another picture), resulting in spiritual deliverance. This is the thrust of verse 21.

In James 1:22-25, James tells us that unless we are carefully using God's Word to bring about personal deliverance and spiritual change, we are deceiving ourselves and circumventing (bypassing) God's purpose and design.

"Prove" in the NASB is a present imperative of the Greek verb, *ginomai*. It means "become" and refers to a process of learning to apply the Word consistently. The KJV reads, "But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only ..." "Doers" is *poiētēs* and refers to productive action according to a design.

"Not merely hearers" is literally "and not hearers only or alone." "Only" or "alone" is the Greek *monos* which means "to be without a companion." Bible study and religious activity must be married to application and positive righteousness and ministry or it leads to deception.

⁹ Abbot-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 116.

“Who delude themselves.” “Delude” is *paralogizomai* from *para*, “along side” or “by, past,” plus *logizomai*, “to think, reckon, calculate.” James is warning against thinking in such a way that one passes by the truth and its design or purpose and thus becomes deceived.

How do we deceive ourselves? We deceive ourselves when we think one thing while the opposite is true (cf. vs. 26). In this way we actually circumvent the truth and annul its design. Scripture is designed to bring Christlike change. If this is not happening, then, we become further deceived by remaining dupes and pawns for Satan’s tricks and the world’s deceptions because we refuse to get with God’s Word (cf. vs. 27). If we don’t live deeply and reflectively in the Word, we are going to be affected deeply, even subliminally by the world. So what is God’s design?

- *Reading and Hearing* the Word which should lead to ...
- *Reflection* as in meditation on the Word, contemplation which should result in seeing our image and His (revelation from God).
- *Response* (positive response to God) should lead to ...
- *Reformation* (transformation and production through personal application).

But

- *Revelation* without an adequate response (meditation and application) leads to ...
- *Rebellion* through misconception, deception, pretense, indifference, and betrayal, etc.

Or we face the alternatives:

- *Rote*—catechistic religion, mechanically learned religion (Isa. 29:13). This is the mere memorization of rules and regulations or doctrines and precepts. It looks at a fixed course or routine and repetition without attention to meaning and application. This leads to:
- *Rut*—mere religious habits, going through the motions without spiritual reality. Rut is walking in a religious routine of ritual and memorized sayings and ideas, but without spiritual and personal appropriation—failing to become hearers and doers. This leads to:
- *Rot*—failure to produce. Christians who are basically nonproductive and may eventually experience God’s discipline. Rot can of course be caused by the spiritual deadness of religious unbelievers, like the Pharisees of Christ’s day—white washed tombs. They were painted white on the outside, but rotten and dead on the inside. The concept is also applicable to carnal Christians who, though saved, fail to abide in the Vine (John 15) and thus fail to produce.

Picture 5: Rain, Snow, Water

Passages:

Isaiah 55:10-11 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. (KJV)

Jeremiah 17:5-8 Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant. 7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. 8 For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit."

Ephesians 5:26 that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

Principles Portrayed:

(1) The Picture of Cleansing: The word "prunes" in John 15:2 is the Greek word, *kathairō*, literally, "to cleanse." It was used of pruning useless branches. Read Matthew 15:1-20 and 12:33-35. Do you get the picture? The Pharisees were meticulous about their external religious activities, but they were filthy inside because they were neglecting the water of the Word which would cleanse their hearts and fill them with what was good.

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word.

John 15:2-3 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

Scripture reveals what is wrong with us and provides the proper motivation for change. But it also provides us with the power for change through the truth that it reveals to us in Christ, thus, cleansing our lives from sin and the defilement of this world.

(2) The Picture of Refreshment, Renewal: Like a cool drink of water on a hot day, the Word refreshes and renews the inner man.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

(3) The Picture of Production: Apart from the Word of God, we are like a man wandering in the dry, parched desert, exhausted, sapped of energy and spiritual strength, dried out by the heat of life as he is faced with its pressures and his own inability to count for God. Without the Word to guide, renew, refresh, and inspire us, we will invariably end up expending our energy for the husks of the world.

We may gain much of the world and its riches, or perhaps spend life in its pursuit, but, either way, *if God's Word is not the wellspring of our lives*, we will waste our lives as far as God's purposes are concerned. But with the Word as the river or wellspring of life, we become like the man who trusts the Lord in Jeremiah 17:5-8 and Psalm 1:2-3.

Jeremiah 17:5-8 Thus says the LORD, “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant. 7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. 8 For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit.”

Psalms 1:2-3 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Problems We Face:

We tend to be like a man in the desert who sees a mirage and thinks it is the means of quenching his thirst. Similarly, men often pursue what they think will give them happiness and fulfillment, and the pleasures and possessions of the world. *But it is a mirage.* It is an illusion placed there by Satan which men believe because they aren't properly rooted by the streams of the Word. Such have sought to live their lives by trusting in their own resources and have cast themselves out into, as it were, a wasteland of human solutions and delusions. They haven't learned to recognize the difference between true happiness and mere pleasure.

A man may commit adultery or fornication and experience sexual pleasure, but by no means does he experience true happiness. And, as it is true in sexual fornication, so it is equally true with every form of spiritual fornication where men prostitute themselves to the world and turn away their ears and hearts from their God. Are you a tree planted by the streams of living water? Or are you like a tumbleweed without stability being tossed about by every wind of influence and temptation?

Picture 6: Food, Bread

Passages:

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.

Jeremiah 15:16 Thy words were found and I ate them, And Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

Ezekiel 2:8 Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.

Ezekiel 3:1-3 Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” 2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3 And He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach, and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

Principles Portrayed:

(1) Sustenance, Strength, Endurance: Just as man needs physical food to sustain his health and life and give him strength, so God has created us that our spiritual life must be fed and nourished on the spiritual food of the Word. The following are two passages that attest to this.

Job 23:12. “I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.” In answer to the accusations of Eliphaz, Job declared he had faithfully followed the path of God. How? Because of his relationship with God’s Word. To him it was like the necessary food of life.

Jeremiah 15:16. “Thy words were found and I ate them, And Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts.” Jeremiah found strength in the midst of his persecution by the nation because, unlike the nation who had repudiated God’s Word, Jeremiah eagerly welcomed it like food and enjoyed it as the nourishment of his soul.

These two passages demonstrate the necessity of a life fed and sustained on the resources of God’s Word in order to run the race that is laid out before us—God’s plan and purpose for each of us in the midst of the ups and downs of life.

Under this same picture of the Word as our necessary food, these verses demonstrate the importance of God’s Word for motivation, courage and strength, and capacity for ministry. Living on the Word, because it tunes our ear into God’s voice, produces the burden, the willingness, and the courage necessary for ministry regardless of our fears or the obstacles we face. Scripture brings us in touch with the heart of God.

See Appendix 1 for a short exposition of Ezekiel 2:8; 3:1-3, 14.

When we aren’t living in the Word and allowing it to saturate our hearts and minds, we will either (a) fail to minister or, (b) we will minister for the wrong reasons and always without a sense of God’s purpose and without the joy of the Lord.

One of the things which hinders our response to God, to His Word, and the ministry God wants us each to have as He works and leads in our lives is slavery to the details of life or preoccupation with the “good life.” The parable of the sower, the soil and the seed illustrates this in Mark 4:18-19:

Mark 4:14-20 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

(2) The Insufficiency of the Details of Life: This picture of the Word as our necessary bread is also designed by God to portray and teach the fact of the **insufficiency** and **futility** of the so-called details of life, or even the normal physical necessities of life. It teaches us that man cannot (and was never de-

signed to) live by bread alone. Bread stands for the normal necessities and details of this life by which man attempts to find happiness, fulfillment, or strength.

Deuteronomy 8:3 And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

“He humbled you and let you be hungry.” God led Israel into the desert where they had no alternative but to trust Him or murmur against Him. In the desert they could not produce their own food: they had to depend entirely on the Lord. This was both humbling and instructive. But God had a special purpose—“that He might make you (and so also us) understand that man does not live by bread alone ...” This meant that their food, their clothing, everything (vs. 4) was the result of the decree or command of God and His sovereign provision.

God speaks and our needs are either provided or withheld. Man is dependent not just on bread, but on God who makes our bread available. But that’s not all.

This also included God’s purpose for Israel as a nation. The Word that proceeded out of God’s mouth not only set forth His decree as to provision for the physical needs of life, but it included His purpose for Israel to function as a nation of priests to the nations of the world. Remember, the nations had, under Satan’s lies and delusions since the garden of Eden, turned away from God. They had sought to live, in essence, by bread alone, independently of God. They sought to act as though God did not exist (Gen. 3:11). It was because of this that God called Abraham out of Ur through whom would come the nation of Israel who in turn would be: (a) God’s representative to the world, (b) the custodians of God’s Word, and (c) the channel of the Redeemer (Ex. 19:5, 6; Deut. 4:4-8; Rom. 9:4-5).

One of the great motivations and reasons for living is an awareness of God’s purpose, to know life has meaning and goes beyond the day-to-day details and routine. For life to have meaning, men need to sense the destiny and hand of God on their lives. Life without that is a life of futility, as the book of Ecclesiastes makes clear.

Man is totally dependent on God and His Word—on that which proceeds from His mouth. We are dependent on His commands, promises, and purposes, not just for our daily bread, but for an adequate sense of living. Since this is so, shouldn’t we be living in constant dependence on the Lord by living in His Word? God’s Word is our source of faith and our means of occupation with the Lord and His heart.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

We were not created to simply make a living and luxuriate on the physical blessings of life independently of God, or even in dependence on God. We were created to function according to God’s purposes, to live through Him and for Him. Anything other than that is utter futility. It’s the picture of the gerbil on the proverbial wheel—constantly on the go but going nowhere. To drive this picture home more convincingly, let’s look at a few more passages.

The place where the events of Numbers 11 occurred was called *Kibroth-hattaavah*, “graves of craving.” Craving the details of life led to the untimely death of a large number of the people. But more importantly, the people were nostalgically yearning for Egypt and their past in the world rather than focusing on getting into Canaan and God’s purpose for the nation. The complaining of verse 4 started with the rabble, those who were not Israelites and had come with Israel out of Egypt. But as verse 10 shows, this was like leaven, soon spreading throughout the camp.

As Americans with the abundance of food and variety of choices we have, we might be tempted to sympathize with the complaints of the Israelites, but neither God nor Moses did (cf. vss. 1, 10). Please note that with this complaining and these nostalgic remarks concerning the past, the people were actually expressing their opposition to God's purposes: (a) to bring Israel into Canaan so they could accomplish His priestly purposes for the nation, and (b) to learn the lesson of Deuteronomy 8:3—that they must learn to live in joyous dependence on the Lord, His holy purposes, and in what He was doing (cf. 11:20).

Psalm 106:14-15 But craved intensely in the wilderness, And tempted God in the desert. 15 So He gave them their request, But sent a wasting disease among them.

Luke 12:23 For life is more than food, and the body than clothing.

(3) The Principle of Hunger: As Deuteronomy 8:3 and Numbers 11:4f show us, God often has to let us experience trials and the emptiness and the indigestion of the world's diet before we will become hungry for His truth and dependent on Him.

Numbers 11:4-6 And the rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."

(4) The Principles of Mastication and Digestion: We need to slowly chew the Word and thoroughly digest it. This means not only study, but careful reflection and meditation with a view to application. We need to ask questions such as: what does this mean? What does it mean to me? How should it affect my life?

Problems We Face:

Satan, the old serpent who deceived Eve (like the snake in the grass that he is) works night and day to deceive men into thinking they can live by bread alone, that man can get by without God and His Word. This is secularism—seeking to live without God in arrogant dependence on ourselves and the details of life.

Deuteronomy 8:11-20 Beware lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 12 lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 15 He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. 16 In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. 17 Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' 18 But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 And it shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God, and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before

you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God.

Today, for the most part, our nation has forgotten God. It has turned away from the absolutes of the Word to a secularistic outlook that seeks to live on the details of life and the husks of the world. Unfortunately, this outlook and condition is not limited to the unbelieving world, but like Israel of old, it has saturated the mindset of much of Christianity. Because of this, Israel failed in their ministry as a nation of priests to the nations, and like Israel, the Christian community is failing in its ministry of outreach to a lost and dying society. The following are some important questions we should ponder:

- Are we more hungry for the material goods of the world than for the spiritual food of the Word?
- Do we have time to eat our physical food daily, but no time for the spiritual food of the Word?
- Do we have time for the news, but no time for the Bible?
- Do we have time for our favorite TV shows, but no time for Bible class on a regular basis?
- How is our appetite? When the dinner bell is sounded, when it is time to assemble together to feed on the meat of the Word, are we eager to come and put our feet under the table of Bible study? Or are we ruining our appetites for the Word with the junk food of a secular society?

Picture 7: Gold and Silver

Passages:

Psalm 19:10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 119:72 The law of Thy mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Psalm 119:127 Therefore I love Thy commandments Above gold, yes, above fine gold.

Proverbs 8:10-11 Take my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold. 11 For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things can not compare with her.

Proverbs 8:19 19 My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield than choicest silver.

Principles Portrayed:

In none of these passages is Scripture actually called or directly likened to gold or silver, yet, because of the comparisons and contrasts with gold or silver, these precious metals form another picture with which we may liken God's Word.

(1) Supreme and Intrinsic Value: Two of the most valuable and precious commodities of the ancient near East were gold and silver. To compare God's Word with either formed an obvious picture that would dramatize the supreme and intrinsic value of His Word. The Word—like gold and silver—has value the world over. Both are rare and beautiful metals with intrinsic value—especially gold. While

other things may lose their value, the Word, like gold, is valuable any place and at any time. In fact, the biblical emphasis is that Scripture is much more valuable than gold, even the purest of gold.

Why is it so valuable? The Psalmist writes, “The Law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (Ps. 119:72). In Psalm 19:1-6 the Psalmist discusses the glories of the *creational revelation* of God and how creation reveals the fact of God and declares His glory. But then, he goes on in verses 7-14 to discuss the *inscriptural revelation of God*, the Scripture and its character and nature—what the Bible is and does. Because of the attributes and actions of the Word, in the midst of this the Psalmist exclaims, “They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold.”

Scripture is the supreme value of life because it is the Word of God’s own mouth. It is the very revelation of the living God. It is inerrant, infallible, true, tried, and completely trustworthy. It is God’s Holy Word and contains the words of life.

But there is even more that this picture portrays. This picture comparing Scripture with gold teaches us that the Bible, even more than gold, has a redemptive value and a purchasing power that gold or silver can never have.

(2) Redemptive Value or Purchasing Power: Because gold has value, it has purchasing power. Things can be acquired with gold. You can have possessions, land, houses, clothing, gadgets, jewels, furnishings, power, and pleasure with gold. But there is a limit to what money or gold can buy. That which actually counts the most, money or gold is unable to buy. For this we need a different kind of gold, the gold of the truth of the Word of God. In fact, a preoccupation with the gold of this world and what it can buy will keep us from the gold of God’s Word and from the blessings of God.

It is through the Word that we find the Gospel message of our redemption purchased for us, not by the gold and silver of the world, but by the precious blood of Christ. Money can buy neither salvation from sin’s penalty nor deliverance from sin’s power, only faith in the grace of God in Christ can give that. And it is the Word—more precious than gold that perishes—that produces faith.

1 Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

Further, as a part of the salvation which the Word gives, it is through the Word that we are able to redeem the time and acquire those things which the world cannot give like security, true happiness, forgiveness of sin, freedom from guilt, an adequate purpose for living, and insight for living. The wisdom of God’s Word is available for all. It is there for the taking, but only those who love her and seek her will find her. Proverbs 8:17 says, “I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me.” Only those who, recognizing the Bible’s value, will go digging for the gold and silver ore of the Word will be able to enrich their deposits of spiritual discernment and capacity for life.

Proverbs 2:4-12 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures;
5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, And discover the knowledge of God.
6 For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
8 Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
9 Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course.
10 For wisdom will enter your heart, And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
11 Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you,
12 To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things;

This picture of the Word as gold, indeed, as more valuable than gold, necessitates another action on our part—the reevaluation of our values and priorities.

(3) The Reevaluation of Our Values: What do we do when we find something valuable? Read carefully Matthew 13:44-46. This picture of the value of the Bible as gold and silver instructs us to seriously examine and evaluate our values and priorities in life. It challenges us to ask some heart-searching questions.

- What do I value most? If I say it is God, the Bible, my family, etc., do my actions and the use of my time demonstrate it?
- What am I pursuing and what am I expecting from the so-called good life?
- What are we expecting from the world? Are we expecting too much? Are we putting our trust in its gold rather than in the gold of the Word which teaches us about the Lord and draws us to Him?

Isaiah 55:1-3 Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David.

This Old Testament passage in Isaiah 55:1-3 has a very special message for us. It does three things: First, it issues a special *invitation* that God offers all men. Second, it challenges us to a careful *evaluation* of the places we have placed our trust, and of our values and pursuits. Finally, it calls us to an *investigation* of God's Word to find the real values of life. (See Appendix 2 for a brief exposition of Isaiah 55:1-3.)

Picture 8: Fire

Passages:

Jeremiah 23:29 "Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"

Jeremiah 20:9 But if I say, "I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name," Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it.

Principles Portrayed:

Fire is used for the concepts of warmth, for tempering and hardening metal, of the smelting process in the production of precious metals like gold and silver, of burning away stubble in preparing a field for production, of burning and consuming what is worthless and to be destroyed, and of cooking food for palatability and consumption. When God compares His Word to fire, what's the point? What does He want us to learn from this figure or picture? Fire is a picture of:

(1) Warmth: God has designed His Word to warm our hearts for Him, to change hearts that are cold or lukewarm to hearts that are on fire for God, that are burning with His truth, with His values, purposes, and concerns, and sovereign love, grace and control.

(2) Cleansing: The Word burns away and cleanses what is impure and superfluous (useless) in our lives as it is allowed to purify our values, priorities, purposes, attitudes, thinking patterns, and standards of right and wrong (Jer. 20:9).

(3) Judgment: In Scripture, fire is often associated with judgment. God's Word judges our lives but if we do not judge our lives by the Word, we will eventually be judged by the Lord through His fatherly discipline and eventually at the Judgment (Bema) Seat of Christ in connection with receiving or not receiving rewards. (For a study on the Bema, see Part 1, Lesson 7.)

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

"Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD? (Jeremiah 23:29). The context of Jeremiah 23 is that of false prophets who refused to spend time in the counsel of God listening to His Words, giving heed in personal obedience, and proclaiming His truth to the people (23:18, 21-22). Instead, they were pronouncing a vision of their own minds. They were rejecting the warnings of Jeremiah claiming there would be peace and prosperity and no Babylonian captivity. God, therefore, declares that His Word would be to them like a fire, efficacious and powerful and the basis of their own downfall or destruction. Just as a fire consumes chaff, so God's Word would consume the false prophets.

Problems We Face: We too often fail to judge our lives by God's Word. We fail to allow the Word to burn away the stubble of our own ideas, agendas, goals. If we fail to allow the Word to do its work, then we will face the consequences.

Picture 9: A Hammer

Passages:

Jeremiah 23:29 "Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

Acts 20:32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Principles Portrayed:

Besides being good for busting your finger, we all know that a hammer has two main uses—**construction** and **destruction**. But when God likens His Word to a hammer, what is He portraying by this picture? Again in the Jeremiah passage, the problem is the same as seen above, the problem of false prophets who were operating on the vision of their own minds. This meant they were rejecting God's Word through His true prophets, that they were trusting in their own viewpoints, and that this would ultimately result in their own destruction. They were refusing to build their lives on the sure and infallible truth of God. So what are the principles?

(1) Construction, building up: Only the Word, combined of course with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, has the power to build us up in Christ and to develop spiritual maturity and stability (cf. Acts 20:32). We must be constantly building and erecting the spiritual structures of God's truth into our hearts and minds or we will be building carnal and worldly structures of the false and destructive and humanistic ideas of man. All such humanistic and arrogant ideas first exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. They are ultimately anti-God and anti-man. They hinder our capacity to be what God has designed us to be as His people. In addition, man's ideas, the visions of man's own heart, always result in his ruin. They leave us at the mercy of the spiritual elements—the storms and winds of the world just like a man who builds his house on the sand rather than on the rock, Jesus Christ as He is revealed in Scripture.

(2) Destruction, tearing down: Often, in fact generally, before we can build, we must first do demolition work. We must tear down old structures, the human viewpoint, that stand in the way of new construction.

The Problem We Face:

A "fortress" is something arrogantly raised up against the knowledge of God and what that knowledge means to man in its implications, blessings, and responsibilities. It is anything that hinders authentic Christianity. These include anything that works against the application of the knowledge of God and its impact on the life of man. This would include all forms of selfism, humanism, religionism, emotionalism, secularism, cultism, materialism, etc. But it would also include wrong mental attitudes that simply fail to act on the promises, principles, and purposes of the Word.

In other words, the fortresses or strongholds are the arguments, attitudes, and designs which present an obstacle to a proper impact of Scripture and its revelation of God. Through prayer and accurate study of the Word, we should be accomplishing two things: (a) the destruction of any attitude, viewpoint, or thinking that is opposed or is contrary to the viewpoint of Scripture, and (b) in its place, we must be building God's viewpoint as both the foundation and superstructure of our thinking and living.

Picture 10: Seed

Passages:

Mark 4:14 The sower sows the word.

Mark 4:26-28 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed

sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.”

Colossians 1:5-7 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,

Principles Portrayed:

- (1) The Need of Cultivation: The preparation of the human heart for the Word.
- (2) The Goal of Production: The capacity to produce spiritual fruit for God.
- (3) The Fact of Automation: The capacity to work automatically, spontaneously.

In Mark 4:28, the words, “by itself,” are the translation of the Greek *automatos* from which we get our word, automatic. It means “self moved, spontaneously, without external aid, and also beyond external control.” This word is used only one other place in the New Testament, Acts 12:10. There the gate of Peter’s cell opened of its own accord, automatically, without human intervention.

The stress here is that the earth, really the seed planted in the earth, produces fruit automatically. It does so because it is within its nature as created by God to do so. Without the living seed, all the other ingredients, the soil, sun, rain, and cultivation would be futile. These are all cooperative factors, but the life principle, the power for reproduction, is in the seed.

This parable is about the power of the Word of God and how God brings about production and harvest in the lives of men. The Word of God, when sown in the hearts of men, produces fruit. The soil needs cultivation and the seed needs watering, but without the Word, nothing happens. The all important ingredient is the Word which is alive and powerful, the very power of God unto salvation.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

In witnessing God may use our lives and often does to prepare the soil of the hearts of others for the seed of the Word, but ultimately it is the Word that men must hear, the message about Christ.

In our own lives, God may use many things for our spiritual blessing and to aid our growth—singing, encouragement, and the love and fellowship of other believers. But ultimately, it is only the Word sown and cultivated in the heart and mind that results in true and complete spiritual change and fruitfulness.

We each need to ask ourselves some questions: How is my attitude toward God’s plan and will for my life, for the things happening to me, for the ministry God has for me now or in the future? Am I cold, depressed, wanting to run away? Do I lack incentive, motivation, vitality, excitement with what God has for my life? If so, then clearly, my spiritual furnace needs stoking with the hot coals of the Word through daily time in God’s Word.

Am I lacking in stability? Do I tend to fold every time I come under pressure? Is my life and understanding of God’s Word and what He wants for my life marred by bad mental attitudes, preconditioned

ideas, background, human tradition, or past ways of doing things? Then again, I need to start both a demolition and a building program.

How is my response to the Word? What kind of soil am I? Am I like a beaten path or like rocky soil with no depth? Or am I like a patch of earth filled with weeds and briars which choke out the growth of the seeds of God's truth? If so, I need to prepare the soil of my heart. And how can we do that? Let me make some suggestions:

(1) **Be in fellowship**—we must come to the study of the Word having confessed all known sin.

1 Peter 2:1-2 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

James 1:21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

(2) **Be prayerful, dependent, and expectant** of God to teach us and make His truth clear—we need to be like the Psalmist who prayed, “open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Thy Law” (Psa. 119:18).

(3) **Be open, teachable**, but objective—allow the Word to speak for itself according to the facts of the passage so it is free to teach us the truth. Otherwise, because of our background or prejudice, we will be forcing our ideas on the text and what we end up with will be only error.

(4) **Be studious**—learn and apply yourself to the principles of methodical Bible study.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

(5) **Be diligent**—in applying and judging our lives with the Word by faith.

Picture 11: Honey, Honeycomb

Passages:

Psalm 19:10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 119:103 How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalm 81:16 But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat; And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.

Proverbs 24:13 My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;

Ezekiel 3:1-3 Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” 2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3 And He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach, and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

Principles Portrayed:

(1) Honey portrays the Bible as one of the greatest blessings and sources of sweetness and joy in life. Fifty-eight verses in the Bible contain the word “honey.” Some of these verses may refer to a syrup made from boiled down grape juice called *dibs* and may well be what was called *honey* in many places in the Bible.¹⁰ The honey that “flowed” in the land may refer to this syrup. Though the Egyptians kept colonies of bees in hives, this was not developed by the Jews until Roman times. One reason, however, may be that the reference to the land being full of the honey was a reference to the honey of wild bees rather than to the syrup. Honey could be found in a hollow tree (1 Sam. 14:25-27), in a hole in a rock (Ps. 18:16; Deut. 32:13), and even in an animal carcass (Judges 14:8-9).

Honey was a symbol of blessing, of prosperity, value, luxury, and was viewed as one of the basic commodities of life. It gave sweetness to food and was even used as food itself. To stress the value and blessing of the land which the Lord was giving Israel, He described it over and over again as a land flowing with milk and honey.

(2) Like honey, the Bible has its ultimate source in God alone.

Despite extensive scientific research, modern man has been totally unsuccessful in finding a way to synthetically fabricate anything that even remotely resembles the properties of honey. Only God can handle the highly complex process of hatching honey through buzzing bees and honeycombs. Nutritionists agree that God has uniquely hand crafted honey as one of nature’s purest and most complete foods. It contains some of every nutrient required to maintain good health. In the same way only God could craft and preserve His completed Word, the Holy Bible. It is a supernatural book that man can neither better nor imitate, refine, take away from, nor add to in any way. It is pure, spiritual food containing every spiritual vitamin and nutrient we need in this life concerning our walk with God.¹¹

(3) Like honey, the Bible is given through instrumentality.

When God created the earth He gave bees the exclusive contract for honey. They alone are licensed to make and market honey to the world. No birds, buffaloes, or bugs, just bees. Technically, bees don’t really make honey. They’re simply the airborne cargo ships that transport flower nectar to the warehouse division of the hive, called honeycombs. The process of pure nectar becoming honey is a total mystery to man. Though its constituents come directly from nectar, bees neither add to nor take from the nectar they ferry from flower to comb. The color, flavor, and aroma of honey however, depends directly on which kind of flower nectar the bees predominantly draw from. Similarly, the human authors of Scripture were simply conduits of pure revelation without negating their own peculiar style and personality. The emphases, word choice, and style of each author depended on their particular background, education, and knowledge.

Like bees, human authors were God’s exclusive agents for writing, collecting, and preserving the Bible. These human authors of Scripture, somehow, through God’s

¹⁰ Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 108.

¹¹ Emmett Cooper, “Sweeter Than Honey,” *Kindred Spirit*, Dallas Seminary, Autumn, 1991, p. 14.

sovereign superintendence, in no way corrupted the precise revelation He was giving through them.

The parallel to God's mystery of honey is striking. Agricultural scientists have tested honey produced from plants heavily sprayed with pesticides, and found it never contains even a trace of any foreign chemical.¹²

(4) Like honey, God's Word and the revelation it gives us is selectively chosen.

Bees don't reap every flower they see. In fact, they are very particular about what brand of nectar fills their tanks. They're connoisseurs, specializing in certain flavors only.

Once they find what suits their fancy, they lock 'n load. Over two million round-trip nectar-gathering bee flights are required to produce just one pound of honey! They carefully store their hand-picked honey in one central place, the honeycombs. It's always fresh and ready to eat for quick get-up-and-go. Just think, eating only one teaspoon of honey is tapping into the best energies of the lifework of hundreds of bees.

God too is a specialist. He hasn't given us the whole ball of wax. He's selective, revealing only the essentials securing our salvation through Christ and growth in Him. John, at the end of his Gospel, says it best. "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written."

I can't wait to one day read and browse in the great library of heaven. But for now, God has personally and painstakingly chosen one Book to be enough. Like honey, His Word is conveniently stored in one central place, the canon of Scripture, ready to eat for quick spiritual energy. Eating even one little devotional nugget from the Bible is tasting some of God's most exquisite spiritual revelations, brought to us by hand-picked human authors. Just holding a copy of the Bible is an act of receiving the best energies of tens of thousands of people who gave their very lives to its careful preservation down through the centuries.¹³

(5) Like honey, God's Word is delicious, attractive, and invites us to come and eat, but it is only beneficial if personally eaten and used for the specifics of one's life (Psalm 19:9-10).

When a boy first went to school in New Testament times, he went down to the synagogue while it was still dark to listen to the story of how Moses received the law. Then he was taken to the teacher's house for breakfast, where he received cakes with letters of the law written on them. In school, the boy received a slate with passages from the Scriptures written on it. The slate was smeared with honey. He had to trace the letters through the honey with his pen, and it was natural to lick the nib of the pen as he proceeded. The idea was that he would realize that the purpose of his going to

¹² Ibid., p. 15.

¹³ Ibid., p. 15.

school was to absorb the Scriptures. This learning practice seems to have been based on an old custom that David refers to in the Psalm.¹⁴

Perhaps this custom was also designed to communicate how God's Word adds sweetness to life as it reveals God and His grace. The Psalmist encourages us to taste and see that the Lord is good in Psalm 34:8. Where do we taste of God's goodness but in God's Word? Similarly, using the analogy of milk, Peter implores us to desire the pure milk of the Word of God, and then, as a motivation, he adds, "if (or "since") you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

Problems We Face:

(1) Proverbs 5:3, "For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, And smoother than oil is her speech," reminds us that Satan and the world system have their counterfeits, that, like honey, are used to allure us away from the Lord and into sin. Thus, there is the need for constant diligence to pay attention to God's Word (cf. Pro. 5:1-2).

(2) Proverbs 27:7, "A sated man loathes honey, But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet," similarly warns us that, just as when we become full we lose our appetite, so we can become so satiated with the details of the world that we can lose our appetite for the things of God.

(3) Proverbs 25:16, "Have you found honey? Eat *only* what you need, Lest you have it in excess and vomit it." This can only apply to the Word when we fail to properly digest it and apply it to our lives.

**Attitudes Toward the Bible
(How We Should View It)**

We Should View It as Sufficient and Authoritative

The Bible is our final authority for belief and practice and is absolutely sufficient to deal with the non-organically caused spiritual and emotional problems of life (cf. also Ps. 19:7-14).

1 Thessalonians 2:13 for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

James 1:21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness [confession] and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save [deliver] your souls.

1 Peter 2:2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

2 Peter 1:3-4 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

¹⁴ Gower, p. 86.

2 Peter 1:19-21 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

However, there are other sources of authority people use which often nullify the Scripture's authority on their lives. Some of these are human tradition (including history), institutionalism, reason or rationalism, mysticism, emotionalism, empiricism, moral conscience and situation ethics, human philosophy, psychology, and fan clubs (cf. Mark. 7:6-13; Col. 2:16-23; 1 Cor. 3:3-5).

We Should Guard Against Other Sources of Authority

Human Tradition

First we need to distinguish between biblical tradition and human tradition. Biblical tradition is that which is handed down through the teachings and writings of the apostles and prophets and this, of course, is authoritative because it is inspired revelation from God. Human tradition, however, consists of the mere teachings of men. This is not authoritative and must never be allowed to take precedence over and so nullify the Word of God. We see the two types of tradition in the verses below.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Where there is conflict or disagreement, the Scripture must be our authority. But so often church or religious tradition, family tradition, and various forms of secular tradition are given priority over the Holy Bible. Many times the Scripture is simply ignored. People often give lip service to the Bible while treating their tradition as though it had its foundation in the Word and was scriptural when in reality it is not. Whenever that happens, we make void or invalidate the authority of the Word.

Matthew 15:1-6 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 And He answered and said to them, "And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 **For God said**, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.' 5 **But you say**, 'Whoever shall say to his father or mother, "Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God," 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (emphasis mine).

All traditions are not bad or contrary to the Word. Our need is to distinguish human tradition from biblical truth by examining our beliefs and practices under the light of Scripture. We need to examine all the varied types of human tradition, not just some, under the light of our inspired authority, the Bible.

Some illustrations or sources of traditions are:

(1) Church Councils: The formulation and definition of Christian doctrines did not all occur at one time or at an equal rate. Sometimes the spotlight would focus on one doctrine and then another as issues and questions arose through various movements or teachings that began to occur. To establish what the Bible actually taught on these varied issues, councils were held by church leaders to examine and establish what the church should believe on various doctrines. Some illustrations are the councils of Nicea (318), Constantinople (381), Chalcedon (451), and the Synod of Toledo (589). Such decisions must be investigated in light of the Word. Many times their decisions were in accord with the clear teaching of the Word of God. The point is our authority is the Word—not the councils.

(2) The Pope: We are referring to that which has been set down by the various Popes over the centuries and then handed down from generation to generation as law and gospel. The pronouncements or teachings of the Pope (or any man) should never be our authority—only the Bible.

(3) Denominational Creeds and Church Doctrinal Statements: This consists of creeds or statements of denominations or individual churches concerning their doctrinal beliefs. These are designed to present what they believe the Bible to teach, but since only the Bible is inspired, these statements must never be viewed as a substitute for the Bible or as its equal.

(4) Church Programs or Structure: In practice, these often become traditions that are treated as though they were written in stone like the Ten Commandments. Try to change the program or the way things are structured and it is like denying the faith. Many times these programs become virtual “sacred cows” and more important than anything else. We hear statements like, “That’s not the way it ought to be done. We have never done it that way before.” I remember hearing about a deacon who was upset with the pastor one Sunday morning when they were about to enter the pulpit area in the auditorium for the eleven o’clock service. They had a visiting speaker and when the pastor decided to enter through a different door, the deacon remarked to the pastor they shouldn’t enter from that door. Perhaps he was thinking it would be too big a surprise to the people who were expecting them to come in from a different entrance. At any rate, the deacon muttered under his breath, “Highly irregular, highly irregular.” We laugh, but this sort of thing happens in a thousand different ways—many of them involving things much more serious.

(5) The Talmud, Mishna: Jewish writings which contain Jewish tradition.

(6) Political or Scientific Theories as Evolution: Evolution is, of course, nothing more than man’s theory based on a strictly secular interpretation of certain geological data and man’s bias against the knowledge of God. But evolution has become a tradition that permeates our society regardless of the data that stands against it. As such, it often colors man’s interpretation of the first chapters of the book of Genesis.

(7) Church Constitutions: Church constitutions have their place, especially if they were framed with the Word as the guiding authority. But they can become straight jackets that hinder biblical goals, actions, and ministry if they are treated with the same authority as the Bible. For instance, let’s say that the bylaws or constitution of a church states that it must have a certain number of elders. What happens if there are not that many men in the church who are truly qualified according to the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? Does the church follow the Word and wait until the Lord raises up qualified men to serve? Or, does it ignore the Word and select the number called for by the Constitution regardless of their qualification? The answer should be obvious, but I have known churches that ignored the Word and followed their Constitution.

(8) Church History: We can learn much from history, and we should never ignore it. Church history and the thinking of those who have studied the Word before us represents the work of God among His people in ages past. Regardless of the value, however, what God's people thought and taught in times past was not inspired. We should not ignore their voice, but neither should we make it our authority for only the Bible is inspired. This historical argument sometimes becomes a straw man that is used to argue against certain doctrinal positions no matter how clearly they may line up with the sound exegesis of Scripture. The straw man goes something like this:

If something was taught by the early church, then it must be true. If a teaching is more recent, then its truthfulness is at least suspect, if not untrue. ...

The antiquity or recency of a teaching and the number of people who are for or against it make for interesting study, but neither factor proves or disproves the truth of that teaching.

The charge of newness was leveled against the teachings of the Reformers. With characteristic straightforwardness, John Calvin responded to it this way:

"First by calling it 'new' they do great wrong to God, whose Sacred Word does not deserve to be accused of novelty. ... That it has lain long unknown and buried is the fault of man's impiety. Now when it is restored to us by God's goodness, its claims to antiquity ought to be admitted at least by right of recovery."¹⁵

(9) Numbers: In the quote above, Ryrie calls our attention to another straw man and another form of authority that can nullify the authority of the Bible. It is very similar to the straw man regarding history. It goes like this:

Not only does the antiquity of a view make it truthful but the number of people who held or hold it makes it true. The more the better, to substantiate its truthfulness.¹⁶

Ryrie shows the fallacy of this:

Of course, the smoke screen this straw man and its mate throw up can be easily dispelled. The fact that something was taught in the first century does not make it right (unless taught in the canonical Scriptures), and the fact that something was not taught unless, of course, such teaching is clearly unscriptural. Baptismal regeneration was taught in the early centuries, but it is wrong. The majority of the church believes in nonimmersion. Does that make immersion wrong? The majority of the church is not premillennial. Does that make that doctrine wrong?¹⁷

(10) Fan Clubs: This issue here is too often people place more stock in what their favorite preacher says than in the Word itself. Luke reminds us that the need is to search the Scripture as to whether the matter taught is true (Acts 17:11).

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1989, pp. 32-33. Quoting John Calvin, "Prefatory Address to King Francis," *Institutes of Christian Religion*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

1 Corinthians 1:11-14 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Self or Subjectivism

This also takes a number of forms:

(1) Reason or Rationalism: This refers to:

The theory that the exercise of reason, rather than the acceptance of empiricism, authority, or spiritual revelation, provides the only valid basis for action or belief, and that reason is the prime source of knowledge and of spiritual truth.¹⁸

As is obvious from this definition, human reason becomes one's authority or criterion which governs what one believes or thinks. Human reason is the absolute criterion. If truth is to be found it must be found by human reason alone; faith is excluded on the grounds it is not reasonable or scientific.

(2) Empiricism: This is the view that experience, especially of the senses, is the only valid source of knowledge.

(3) Scientific and Psychological: Scientific empiricism is the:

... philosophical doctrine holding that all knowledge is derived from experience, whether of the mind or of the senses. Thus it opposes the rationalist belief in the existence of innate ideas. A doctrine basic to the scientific method, empiricism is associated with the rise of experimental science after the 17th cent. It has been a dominant tradition in British philosophy, as in the works of LOCKE, HUME, and George BERKELEY. Most empiricists acknowledge certain a priori truths (e.g.,

¹⁸ *The American Heritage Dictionary and Electronic Thesaurus*, Houghton Mifflin, 1986, 1987.

principles of mathematics and logic), but John Stuart MILL and others have treated even these as generalizations deduced from experience.¹⁹

Obviously, such a system makes the experience of experimentation, or what one learns or observes through sense phenomena—touch, taste, smell, sight, etc., the criterion or authority for what one believes or accepts as true. Again, such a system is very subjective, obviously limited, and dependent on man’s powers of observation. This is the system of science and social studies. It has its place and use in society, but the God who is eternal, all-wise and knows all things has given us His Holy Word and this must remain our authority where God has spoken.

(4) Religious Experience, Mysticism: This is the system of authority whereby the criterion for one’s religious convictions or ideas is based primarily or solely on feelings, emotions, or someone’s personal religious experience.

Several years ago when the Neo-Pentecostal movement was just beginning on the west coast one of the movement’s leaders, Father Dennis Bennett, was speaking on Ezekiel 37 to the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship in Portland, Oregon. He told the people, “There are many different interpretations of this passage, but I believe that this passage is a prophecy of the present *glossalalia* movement. This is a vision of the rise of the gift of tongues in our day. But because the interpretation of Ezekiel 37 is so diversified between so many people; because there is not agreement as to what Ezekiel 37 means, I will therefore give you *my experience* and then we will have something *solid to base our thinking on*”²⁰ (emphasis mine).

Those were Bennett’s words. His statement—as ridiculous as it may seem—is not all that unusual in contemporary evangelicalism. A person has an experience and regardless of what the Word of God says, their experience is the final authority for them. They judge the truth or interpret the Bible by their experience rather than judge their experience by the Word of God. Remember Peter’s declaration in 2 Peter 1:16-19.

2 Peter 1:16-19 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

(5) Practical Experience: Many people today depend more on what they think they have learned by practical experience than on the Bible. But what if one’s experiential knowledge seems to contradict Scripture? Some would then elevate their experience to the level of Scripture or even above it. If you are following the teaching of Scripture in raising your children and one of them becomes rebellious, do you then turn from the authority of Scripture to follow the ideas so prominent in the world today? Or do you,

¹⁹ *The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia*, Columbia University Press, 1989, 1991.

²⁰ This account was taken from a booklet entitled “Controversial Spiritual Gifts” by Dr. Earl Radmacher who at that time was president of Western Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary in Portland.

recognizing the inspired and infallible nature of Scripture, evaluate your understanding and application of the Bible as it applies to raising children, or look for and evaluate other factors that could be involved? Does the problem lie with the Scripture or with my understanding and application of the Scripture?

(6) Moral Conscience or Situation Ethics: Here again, the authority is not the Bible but the situation. In this system the authority or criterion is that we must do the most loving thing. But what is that? In this system, there is no absolute guide for the most loving thing, only the narrow, and very often the self-centered viewpoint of the person.

We Should View It With Love, Value, and Respect

We should view the Bible with the kind of love, value, and respect that leads to desire and a diligence to know and apply it.

Psalm 119:72 The law of Thy mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Psalm 119:140 Thy word is very pure, Therefore Thy servant loves it.

Isaiah 66:2 “For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

Axioms (Principles) For Using the Bible

One Needs the New Birth

People need spiritual regeneration to understand and relate to the spiritual truth of Scripture. First Corinthians 2:14 says that a natural (i.e., the unregenerate) man does not accept (welcome) the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Understanding the spiritual truth of the Word requires the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Prior to salvation, the Spirit of God works to enable the unbeliever to understand the issues of salvation and to bring people to faith in Christ.

John 16:8-11 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before salvation, however, and the new spiritual capacity it provides, the unsaved person cannot open up the Bible and personally understand and relate to even the simplest truth. To the unsaved person, it is foolishness. This is not to imply the unbeliever cannot use the Bible in a moral way such as a code of ethics. Many do this very thing. They use certain parts of the Bible like the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount to establish their own righteousness or gain a standing with God, but miss the truth of man's depravity and need of the righteousness that comes only by faith. The Pharisees did this very thing. They were blind leaders of the blind and did not truly understand the truth of the Scripture and their need of a suffering Savior.

Matthew 15:12-13 Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" 13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up."

Romans 10:1-4 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

John 16:8-11 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

John 16:8-11 teaches us the Spirit's work of illumination for the unbeliever is primarily restricted to overcoming the unregenerate person's blindness to those truths that are pertinent to salvation through faith in the person and work of Christ. When a person trusts in Christ, however, they are regenerated, given new spiritual life, and their innate spiritual blindness is removed. This seems to be what the apostle has in mind in Ephesians 1:17-18,

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (RSV).

In verse 17, Paul prays for the Ephesian believers to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Verse 18 gives us either (a) the *reason* why Paul can pray for their understanding, "the eyes of their heart having been enlightened" through spiritual regeneration so they may know and truly grasp God's truth, or (b) he is looking at the *results* of his prayer in verse 17—enlightened hearts for the purpose of understanding. Either way, he prays for them because they are new spiritual creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) who can now grasp spiritual truth. Literally, the Greek text reads, "the eyes of your heart having been (or being) enlightened, that you may know ..." "Enlightened" is a perfect participle which looks at past completed action with present results. The Greek perfect participle may focus on the completion of the action, on the results, or both. In the first view mentioned above, the focus is on both through spiritual regeneration, while in the second, the focus would be on the results anticipated through the apostle's prayer.

One Needs to Be in Fellowship

The Spirit of Truth is a special title of the Spirit because of His ministry of teaching us the Word of Truth (John 4:24; 15:5; 1 Cor. 2:15-3:3; Eph. 3:16-19).

Spiritual illumination to the Word of Truth is always a work of the Spirit of Truth. The born again believer, though now spiritually alive and possessing a new spiritual capacity, still needs to be under the control of the Spirit if he is to experience the teaching ministry of the Spirit. The disciples were regenerated men, yet they faced the need of the indwelling and controlling ministry of the Spirit. Christ told them, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:12-13).

Compare also Paul's words to the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 3:16-19:

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Since known sin and spiritual apathy grieves the Spirit's person and quenches His power, it is evident that a carnal Christian (one in whom the Spirit is grieved and quenched) will not be able to understand the deeper things of the Word nor truly relate his or her life to even the simplest truth. "The appalling ignorance of many Christians concerning the things of the Word of God is directly traceable to their carnality and failure in seeking the blessings of a life filled with the Spirit."²¹

Both the Apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews wrote directly to this issue in 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3; and Hebrews 5:11-14.

One Needs to Read, Study, and Meditate With the Right Attitude

(1) We need to be expectant.

Psalm 119:148 My eyes anticipate the night watches, That I may meditate on Thy word.

(2) We need to be teachable.

Psalm 119:33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, And I shall observe it to the end.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.

(3) We need to be prayerful and dependent.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Thy law.

²¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, Dunham, Grand Rapids, 1958, pp. 220-221.

(4) We need to be believing.

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

One Needs to Handle God's Word Accurately

As skillful and accurate handlers of the Word, we need a method of study and interpretation that allows us to come away from the text with the true meaning and intent of the passage. This would necessitate an approach which allows Scripture to be authoritative and speak for itself.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

2 Peter 3:16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Our tendency is to read our own ideas and prejudices into Scripture. This means we need to study the Bible inductively (reasoning from the particular, the details of the text, to the general, the meaning of the text).

In our interpretation of Scripture we must *discover* the meaning of a passage, not *attribute* one to it. Luther wrote that "the best teacher is the one who does not bring his meaning into the Scripture, but brings it out of the Scripture." *Exegesis* is bringing the meaning of a text to the surface; *eisegesis* is reading our ideas into the text. Induction in exegesis means that the Scripture is allowed to speak for itself.²²

The method that best promotes induction or good exegesis is the literal or normal method of interpretation. We need to prayerfully and dependently investigate and observe a passage for details drawn from the context, cultural, and historical background, the normal meaning of words, grammar, and the analogy of the Bible as a whole, then based on these details, prayerfully seek to interpret the passage for its meaning. With this derived meaning clearly in mind, we then need to formulate biblical concepts and principles. (See diagrams at the end of this lesson.)

One Needs to Study With a View to Application and Internalization

The revelation of God's Word deserves a response that is in keeping with its character as God's Holy Word to man. The goal of all Bible study must always be the careful application of God's truth by faith, i.e., truly hearing the voice of God in Scripture. Spiritual growth and maturity—the right objective of knowing God's truth—is obviously impossible apart from its application and internalization to deepen intimacy with God, bring conviction where needed, develop faith and the obedience of faith, and display the character of Christ in one's life (cf. also 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 1:9-12; Luke. 8:21; 11:28).

Proverbs 20:27 The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, Searching all the innermost parts of his being.

²² Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, W. A. Wilde, Boston, 1956, p. 119.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

Psalm 119:59 I considered my ways, And turned my feet to Thy testimonies.

James 1:22-27 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

We must always remember that our goal in the study of Scripture is its application in obedience to the living God, however, there is a word of caution that is needed here. Zuck, who has an excellent chapter on applying God's Word today, writes:

Christians tend to make one of two errors in applying the Bible. Either they give too little attention to application or they give too much attention to it.

In the first error some feel interpretation is enough, that Bible study is complete when a passage has been interpreted. In the second error others tend to move toward application before fully and accurately interpreting the passage. However, application without interpretation leaves us open to applying the Bible improperly.

Neglecting to apply the Scriptures reduces Bible study to an academic exercise in which we are concerned only for interpretation with little or no regard for its relevance for and impact on our lives. It is wrong to think of the Scriptures as only a source book of information, as a book to be examined merely for the knowledge we can gain from it.²³

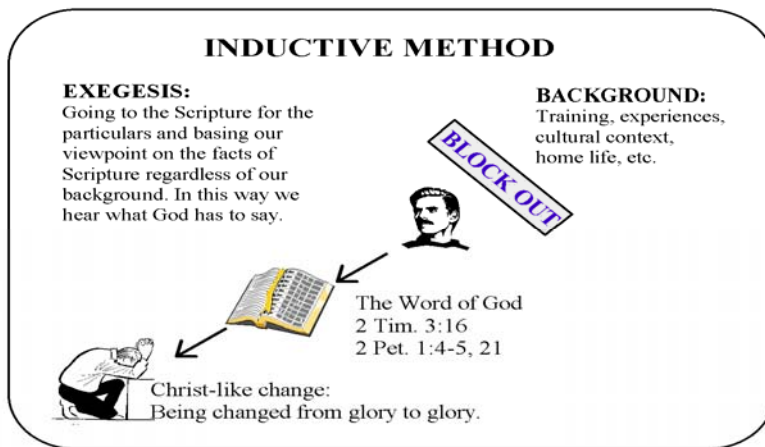
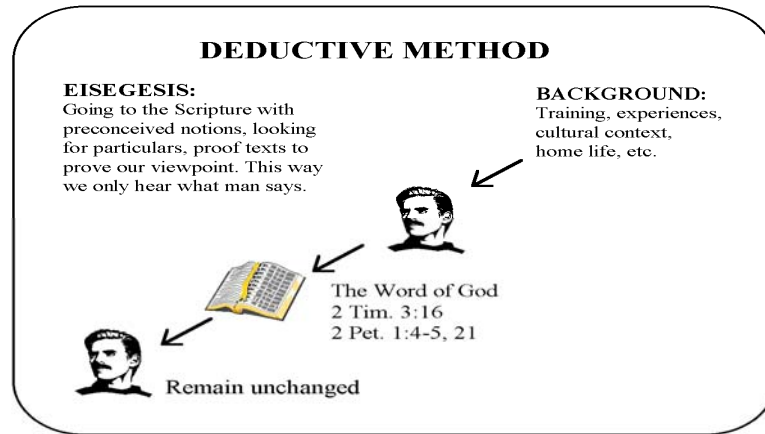
In addition to knowing God more intimately and loving Him more deeply, may we never forget that another of the crucial goals of the study of God's inspired Word, as Paul exhorts us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, is to become a people of God who are thoroughly equipped for good works of ministry. As a people for God's own possession, we are to be a people zealous for good works (Tit. 2:14).

While academics are an important part of a careful and accurate study of God's Word, it is also, of course, a spiritual exercise since the Spirit of Truth is our ultimate teacher who convicts and enables us to relate our lives to Scripture's truth. For some thoughts on preparing the heart to hear God's Word see Appendix 3.

May God bless you in your study of His most holy and powerful Word.

²³ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1991, p. 279.

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).



Lesson 7:
The Prayer-Filled Life
(Part 1)
Praying Biblically and Effectively

Introduction

One of my favorite portions of the Bible is Psalm 119. One reason is that in these 176 verses, the Psalmist points us to the irreducible. By this I mean he focuses on the two most basic elements of our spiritual life—the Word and prayer. Just a casual reading of this Psalm shows this, but note the following facts: (a) Except for verses 1-3 and 115, every other verse (172 verses) is a form of prayer addressed to the Lord. It provides us with a marvelous illustration of how to pray. (b) In addition, the Psalmist uses ten different terms for the Word of God and all but verses 90, 122, and 132 mention at least one of these terms. The large number of terms is designed to call our attention to the sufficiency of God’s Word and the number of ways God has designed it to meet our needs. Most study Bibles give a list of these with a basic explanation of each term in the footnotes to this Psalm.

Psalm 119 teaches us the truth that, regardless of what life brings, God has given us two sources that are totally sufficient and contain everything we need: (a) We have God’s holy Word that gives us wisdom from God, and (b) we have the awesome privilege of prayer that brings the power of God into one’s life for strength, courage, endurance, and deliverance along with spiritual growth and change.

Further, the Psalmist teaches us that the Word and prayer are like inseparable twins because, as the Word reveals God, His all-sufficiency, infinite goodness, love, mercy, and grace, it also reveals man in his insufficiency and total need. But in the process of this, God also offers man the opportunity (through His revealed plan of salvation in the Savior) to come humbly to Him in prayer for His direction and supply.

As I read this Psalm, I am further challenged by some other observations. First there is the way the Psalmist consistently turned his focus on the Lord rather than the problem he was facing at any given time, regardless of its nature. A second observation is his constant dependence on God to answer (lead, direct, sustain, deliver, etc.), but never just according to his own personal desires or wants. His prayer was that God would answer according to His Word. Let me illustrate:

First, in at least fifteen places we have a clear contrast where the Psalmist calls out to God regarding a particular problem, but he always turns his gaze immediately to the Lord and His Word. He gets his eyes off the problem by keeping his eyes on the Lord through the Word. Note the following illustrations from Psalm 119:23-24, 51-52, 61, 59-70, 78, 141-143, 161.

Second, though the concept of praying according to the Word is implicit throughout this Psalm, some 15 or more times the Psalmist specifically makes his requests dependent on the principles of God’s Word with phrases such as, “according to Thy Word.” Note the following examples in verses 25, 41, 58, 116, 145, 156.

What is the point? In view of the rest of this Psalm, the Psalmist was not simply praying, help me because you have promised in the Word to do so. For the Psalmist, prayer wasn’t just a matter of “naming and claiming.” Rather, he was praying that God’s purposes and plan might be accomplished in his

life. He wanted God's deliverance, of course, but in ways that would honor the Lord and produce spiritual change and growth in his own life. Psalm 119 is one prayer after another, but always according to the principles, purposes, and directives of the Word. Note in verses 59, 67, 71, 75 and 133 how the Psalmist was committed to what God was doing in his life and this commitment controlled and directed the way he prayed.

Third, repeatedly the Psalmist prayed for insight and ability to both understand and apply God's Word. He recognized his complete inability to properly understand and respond in faithful obedience apart from the work of God. Verses 17-19, 26, and 33-38 will illustrate the point.

Our last lesson was devoted to the Word-filled life and it is only fitting that we now focus on the prayer-filled life as another key element of God's gracious provisions that are so vital for our spiritual journey. For the most part, the first section of this study will be little more than an outline on some of the key principles of the Word on prayer. The verse references are self-explanatory when read in connection with the content of the outline. This will be followed by an exposition of a few key passages on prayer.

The Nature of Prayer: Worship and Service to God

The basic meaning of the English word "worship" (originally "worth + ship") is "to act in accord to the worth of something or someone." Worship is in essence anything we do which honors God, demonstrates devotion to Him, and acts in accord with who and what God is. In John 4:21-24, the word for worship is *proskuneō* which means "to kiss the hand, do reverence to." It referred to an act of obeisance or reverence whether to express respect and devotion or make supplication.

John 4:21-24 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. 22 You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

When we go to God in prayer, we are doing honor to Him in that we recognize Him as the all-sufficient one and ourselves as truly insufficient or inadequate. This is suggested in the primary and general words for prayer in the New Testament. These are *proseuchomai*, the verb found 85 times, and *proseuchē*, the noun found 37 times. *Pros* means "toward," and *euchomai* means "to make request, invoke." These two words are only used of God in the New Testament. The preposition *pros* adds the ideas of direction, closeness, or approaching God to make requests. Certainly as the general and primary New Testament words, *proseuchomai* and *euchomai* contain the idea of worship in the sense mentioned.

However, prayer, as a further evidence of reverence and honor for God, must also be seen as service and ministry. In Philippians 3:3 the word for worship is the Greek *latreuō* which basically means "to serve." "... for we are the true circumcision, who **worship** in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

When Satan offered the Lord Jesus the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down and worship him, the Lord Jesus responded by using both *proskuneō* and *latreuō*. This should broaden and give us some interesting insight into the concept of worship. True worship in spirit and truth, regardless of the

nature, includes service to God. Note Jesus' reply when Satan tempted Jesus to bow down and worship him in Matthew 4:10: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Begone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship (*proskuneō*) the Lord your God, and serve (*latreuō*) Him only.'""

Worship is not simply something we do in religious ceremonies and rituals in which we are supposed to be demonstrating devotion to God. Regarding several words in the New Testament which contain the idea of worship, Vine writes:

The worship of God is nowhere defined in Scripture. A consideration of the above verbs shows that it is not confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgment to God, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgment.¹

We might note how *latreuō* is used in the New Testament. (a) *Latreuō* was used of temple service in Hebrews 9:9, "which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper (literally, "the one who did the service") perfect in conscience." (b) *Latreuō* was used of any kind of service to the Lord in Hebrews 9:14, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve (*latreuō*) the living God?" (c) *Latreuō* was used of the service of one's life accompanied by reverence and awe as in Hebrews 12:28, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service (*latreuō*) with reverence and awe." (d) *Latreuō* was also used of the preaching of the gospel, "For God, whom I serve (*latreuō*) in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you" (Rom. 1:9).

Though prayer may take on various forms and roles, all prayer is clearly an aspect of worship in which we demonstrate both *reverence* and *service* to God as an expression of the believer's priesthood and ministry as an ambassador of Christ.

The Types and Role of Prayer as Worship

(1) Confession of sin. We can immediately see how confession is a form of worship or reverential fear in that it is a response to the holiness of God. It acknowledges not only that God is holy, but that unconfessed sin forms a barrier to fellowship and hinders God's answer to prayer. Obviously, if our prayer is to be effective, sin must be dealt with. Prayer, to be effective, needs to begin with confession where we acknowledge sin to the Lord (cf. Isa. 59:1-3; Psa. 66:18).

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah.

¹ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Fleming H. Revel, Westwood, NJ, 1966, p. 236.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(2) Praise.

Hebrews 13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

(3) Thanksgiving.

Ephesians 5:20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

(4) Intercession. Praying for others in specific requests in service to God as a ministry of the priesthood He has given us.

Hebrews 13:18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.

1 Peter 2:5 and 9 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

(5) Petition. Prayer for our own needs in acknowledgment of our inadequacy and His sufficiency.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

The Divine Order of Prayer

(1) We pray to the Father—our PROVIDER.

John 16:23-26 And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. 25 These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf;

James 1:17 Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.

Ephesians 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

(2) We pray in the name of the Son—our ACCESS. (Cf. also John 16:23-26 above.)

Ephesians 2:18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

(3) We pray in the power of the Holy Spirit—our MEANS.

Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit;

Categories of Prayer

Understanding that the Christian life is a spiritual warfare, the following, based upon praying according to military objectives, is suggested.

(1) Strategic—long-range goals.

Colossians 1:9-12 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Matthew 9:37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”

(2) Tactical—immediate goals and needs.

Colossians 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

(3) Logistic—physical and support needs (cf. also Jam. 5:13-20).

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Acts 13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Philippians 1:19 For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

It has been my observation that most people and most prayer meetings focus primarily on logistical needs, particularly as they relate to illnesses. Our prayers often lack in vision for the great strategic and tactical objectives for which the Lord has left us here on earth. In fact, when we pray for the logistical needs of food, clothing, jobs, health, etc., what is our motivation? Is it primarily our comfort and pleasure? Or is it for the provision of God so we can fulfill His purposes for the body of Christ in the Great Commission—evangelism and building people in Christ for ministry? The prayer life of the believer

ought to revolve around: (a) **who we are**—ambassadors of Christ, (b) **where we are**—on temporary assignment in the world, and (c) **why we are here**—to represent the Lord Jesus to a dying world.

Times of Prayer

(1) Private

Scheduled:

Psalm 5:3 In the morning, O LORD, Thou wilt hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch.

Psalm 88:13 But I, O LORD, have cried out to Thee for help, And in the morning my prayer comes before Thee.

Psalm 119:147 I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Thy words.

Matthew 6:6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

Spontaneous:

Nehemiah 2:1-4 And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. 2 So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. 3 And I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" 4 Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Psalm 56:3 When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing;

(2) Family

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Ephesians 6:4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

(3) Team

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Acts 16:25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

(4) Public

1 Timothy 2:8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

Prerequisites for Effective Prayer

There are prerequisites for prayer. We cannot just go dashing into the presence of a holy God in just any spiritual condition. I grew up on a small cattle ranch in East Texas and obviously, in the process of working in such an environment, our boots could become pretty filthy. My mother used to say, "You don't come into this clean house without either cleaning or removing your boots. This is not a horse stall!" She was right and to do otherwise was being inconsiderate of her and the place we lived in together. The Lord made a similar point in John 13 when He washed the feet of the disciples. When our feet are dirty, a picture of the sin that occurs as we walk down the streets of life, we cannot have fellowship with Him and prayer is a vital element of fellowship (cf. John 13:1-17). See Appendix 4 for a brief overview of the believer's need of daily cleansing from John 13:1-17.

Note the following important prerequisites for effective prayer:

(1) Personal relationship with Jesus Christ as one's Savior.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."

(2) Walking in fellowship: Sins confessed and Spirit-controlled.

Psalms 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Ephesians 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

(3) Living by the Word (cf. Ps. 119).

Proverbs 28:9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

(4) Praying in faith trusting in the will of God.

Matthew 21:22 And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

James 1:5-8 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

1 John 5:14-15 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Hindrances to Effective Prayer

(1) Failing to pray or ask.

James 4:2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

(2) False motives in prayer.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

(3) Broken relationships.

1 Peter 3:7 You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Mark 11:25-26 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. 26 (But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.)

Matthew 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

(4) Pretentiousness in prayer.

Matthew 6:5-6 And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

(5) Fainting, giving up, failing to wait on the Lord.

Psalm 27:14 Wait for the LORD; Be strong, and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD.

Psalm 37:7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

Reasons and Motives for Prayer

Because it is Commanded in Scripture

This alone is sufficient reason. God has spoken on the matter and it must be important or He would not have given us this privilege and responsibility.

Because of God's Perfect Provision

God has made perfect provision through the person and work of each member of the trinity which gives us access into the presence of God that we might tap in on the very resources of God's grace, wisdom, and supply.

(1) God the Father: As Christians, we have an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and father kind of God who cares for us with the heart of a father, but who, unlike earthly fathers, is infinite in His fatherly wisdom, love and care (cf. also Eph. 3:20).

Matthew 6:7-8 And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

(2) God the Son: Through the person and work of God the Son, we have perfect access into the presence of God. We have one who cares and feels for us as our Great High Priest, one who intercedes on our behalf, and one who is the perfect example of prayer. (Cf. Eph. 3:12; Rom. 8:34.)

John 16:23-24 23 And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.

Ephesians 2:18 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 7:25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

(3) God the Holy Spirit: Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we have one who, as the Spirit of grace and supplication (Zech. 12:10), assures us of our relationship with God as a child, guides us in our prayer life, helps and intercedes for us, and enables us to pray. In other words, with this kind of provision, what possible reason can we have for not praying? God has made perfect provision for us to come into His presence with our needs. (Cf. also Eph. 6:18; Jude 20.)

Zechariah 12:10 And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.

Romans 8:14-15 and 26 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 26 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

Because of Our Need

(1) The problem of our inadequacy: There is the need of prayer because of our great inadequacy versus God's perfect sufficiency and ability to meet our needs and provide for our lives. He is the all-sufficient one with whom nothing is impossible, while we are just the opposite. With man many things are impossible but with God nothing is impossible (cf. also Luke 1:37; 19:26; Mark 9:23; 10:27; 14:36; Luke 18:27).

2 Corinthians 2:16b And who is adequate for these things?

2 Corinthians 3:4-6 And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Matthew 17:20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you."

(2) The problem of demonic powers: There is the need of prayer because of the battle with demonic forces and powers who are many times stronger than we are. Prayer is needed to employ our armor and experience God's super-abundant power against the enemy (cf. Dan. 10:1f).

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the prepa-

ration of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

(3) Our inability to bear fruit apart from God: Prayer is needed for fruit bearing. Without the Lord we can do nothing. Prayer is one of the ways we bring the power of Christ to bear on our ministries and service.

John 15:5-9 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

(4) The issues of our total dependency on God: We need prayer because of our needs in general in the many details of life for which man is dependent upon God whether he realizes it or not. The earth is the Lord's and all it contains belongs to Him. It is He who gives to the sons of men (cf. Ps. 24:1 with 23:1; 50:10; 89:11; Acts 14:17; and 1 Tim. 6:17). Everything comes from Him—food, clothing, housing, travel, sickness, ministry, open doors for the Word, prepared hearts, laborers for the harvest, and on the list goes touching and encompassing every area of life—spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally, everything (Eph. 6:18f; Luke 10:1f).

Colossians 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Because of What Prayer Accomplishes

The prayer of faith accomplishes much and moves mountains.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Matthew 17:20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you."

Because of What Happens Without Prayer

Without prayer we faint and we fail.

Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

Because It Is Part of Our Service to God and Others

Prayer is a privilege and responsibility God has given us as believer priests to serve or minister to and on behalf of others in displaying the loving concern and care of God.

1 Peter 2:5-9 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone," 8 and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Hebrews 13:15-16 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Because It Glorifies the Lord

As stressed above, when we go to God in prayer, we are acknowledging things about God that glorify Him. We are acknowledging our insufficiency, and His all-sufficiency, love, fatherly care, and gracious provision.

John 14:13 And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 15:7-8 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Romans 15:6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Objects of Prayer: Things for Which We Should Pray

(1) Needs in general.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

1 Peter 5:7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

(2) Deliverance from temptation.

1 Peter 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

(3) Leaders in government

1 Timothy 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

(4) Our enemies

Matthew 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you

(5) The sick

Matthew 14:36 and they began to entreat Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured.

James 5:13-15 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

(6) A sinning believer

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

James 5:14-15 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

(7) Effectiveness in fulfilling the great commission: (a) for laborers in the harvest; (b) for open doors for the Word; (c) for clarity in giving the Gospel; and (d) for boldness and courage to speak.

Luke 10:2 And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Colossians 4:3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;

Ephesians 6:18-19 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

Ephesians 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

(8) The edification and growth of believers in the Word and in Christlike character (cf. also Eph. 3:14-19; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-14).

Ephesians 1:15-18 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Guidelines for Group Prayer

(1) Be conversational—use simple and direct language. Just talk to God as you would talk to a father, but also with reverence for who God is, the Lord of the universe.

(2) Be spontaneous—pray as God leads, not with vain repetitions and memorized phrases.

(3) Be clear—loud enough so others can hear, understand, and share in what is being said (1 Cor. 14:16).

(4) Show wisdom—do not use prayer to air sin—yours or others, or gossip in the name of a “prayer request.” Do not preach, exhort or answer or get back at someone in a prayer meeting through your prayer. I have seen this happen, but such ceases to be prayer.

(5) Silence—do not get nervous between audible prayers. Use that time to keep on praying silently.

(6) Focus—learn awareness of Him and not others.

(7) Team effort—prayer is for every believer, not just a few super-duper saints. Every believer is a priest and has access into the very throne of God (Heb. 4:16; 1 Pet. 2:4, 9).

Lesson 8:
The Prayer-Filled Life
(Part 2)
Principles of Prayer From Luke 11

Introduction

It has been rightly said, “the secret of all failure is our failure in secret prayer.” Not just our failure to pray, but our failure in prayer. In the story of the Pharisee and the publican the Pharisee is one who prayed long and often, but he was a miserable failure. His prayers were never heard by God because neither he nor his prayers were ever right with God.

I think it was Oswald Smith who said, “when we work, we work, when we pray, God works.” Throughout history, the men and women that God has used mightily have been people who knew how to pray and for whom prayer was both a priority and a necessity. As we study the gospels and the training of the disciples by the Lord, we find that prayer is to be a vital part of a disciple’s life. For a couple of illustrations compare the following verses:

John 14:12-13 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.
13 And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

An electronic concordance quickly shows the importance of prayer in the Word of God. Variations of the word “pray” such as “prayer” and “praying,” etc., occur 331 times in the NASB, 545 in the KJV, and 375 times in the NIV. The difference in numbers is caused by the fact some Greek and Hebrew words are translated differently in the different translations. For instance, the KJV might use the word “pray” while the NASB or NIV might use “ask.”

Most Bible believing Christians recognize and accept, at least intellectually, the need and importance of prayer. We read books on prayer, we talk about it, we ask for prayer from time to time, but somehow, the church today is anything but a praying church. We may have a few real prayer warriors, but the VISION AND DISCIPLINE of biblical praying as committed disciples of the Lord Jesus has somehow escaped the body of Christ. We talk of its necessity, but too often we fail to accomplish its reality.

The disciples had this same experience. They too fell short in their prayer life and they felt it deeply. In this lesson we want to look at Luke 11:1 and the request of the unnamed disciple who was probably asking on behalf of the entire group. Here is a very important passage for learning some of the key issues of prayer that are so crucial to our walk with the Lord and the fulfillment of His purposes.

Luke 11:1-4 and the parallel passage in Matthew 6:9-11 is sometimes called the Lord’s Prayer, but in reality it is the disciple’s prayer, a model prayer teaching them important principles of prayer.

The Plea of the Disciple (11:1)

Luke 11:1 it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”

The Motivation for the Question

The disciples had obviously heard that John had taught His disciples on prayer and they too wanted instruction (11:1). But was there not something more, something much deeper that provoked this request? It was Howard Hendricks who, several years ago in a message at a pastor’s conference, called our attention to the fact that if we were to open our Bibles and read starting with Matthew and were to read through John we would never find an instance where the disciples asked, “Lord teach us how to witness,” or “teach us how to perform miracles,” or “teach us how to teach.” But in this passage, we do find one of the disciples asking, “Lord, teach us to pray ...” Wow! How significant!

This was a very wise question, a very needed question, and from these disciples who were sometimes so slow about spiritual values, this question becomes extremely significant. What was the motivation behind this question, and why is this so important?

Again, I am reminded of something Professor Howard Hendricks once said. Can you imagine what life with Jesus Christ was like during His ministry on earth? One amazing experience after another! He was forever a source of joy and bewilderment, and I am sure people were constantly trying to explain Him to their own satisfaction with their own kinds of answers. (Cf. Mark 4:41.)

For a long time I can imagine they tried to explain Christ with typical human explanations—training, IQ, natural abilities, or whatever. At least at first. They regularly saw demonstrations of His power. They both heard His wise words and saw His wonderful works. They saw the lame walk, the blind see, the sick healed, the deaf hear, and the demon possessed dispossessed. Furthermore, they had all experienced the emptiness of the religion of their day and so, through all of this, you know they were watching the Lord and seeking answers to the miracle of His life.

As they studied His life one of their conclusions was that He was God incarnate (John 1:14). But is that conclusion what evoked this question? I don’t believe so. It was something else they constantly saw in the man Jesus that they began to suspect was part of the answer to His life. What was it? Our immediate response is of course, “It was prayer.” Right? Not exactly! It was not just prayer.

The Pharisees prayed and so did the disciples. It wasn’t just prayer; it was the way He prayed in relation to all that He was and all that He did in His life on earth. It was His manner and attitude in prayer that saturated His total being and living, His every step and action, and that manifested the intimacy of His relationship with and dependence on the Father. Prayer was never just a religious responsibility nor exercise Christ engaged in because He was obligated to do so.

Then what? Prayer for our Lord proceeded out of a basic attitude of deep dependence that resulted in a very intimate fellowship that He always had with the Father because, from the standpoint of His humanity, He was totally convinced He could do nothing of His own resources. It is this that undoubtedly brought deep conviction and longing in the lives of the disciples. They came to recognize that, while they could be believers in the Lord, they could not be true disciples who became like their teacher (Luke

6:40) unless they learned to pray to the Father like the Lord Jesus in the intimacy and dependency that He constantly demonstrated.

Christ's Attitude in Prayer

This incorporates one of the basic principles that governed the life of the Savior. In John 5:19 Christ said, "the Son can do nothing of Himself." Then, in John 8:28-29 and 14:10 He repeated the principle. The principle should be obvious for us. For Jesus Christ, prayer was a way of life, an absolute necessity: it was a means of communion with the Father and the means of bringing the power of God the Father to bear on the humanity of Jesus Christ moment by moment. We see this in Matthew 12:18 and 28.

Note that for the most part, it appears the Lord performed His works and spoke His words by the power of God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit whom the Father had given Him. Though God of very God Himself, Jesus generally did not perform His works independently of the Father nor the Spirit's leading (Acts 2:22). It was the Father working through Jesus, the man.

As we study the life of Christ in the gospels, we note a consistent pattern:

(1) In the midst of a busy schedule, when men were clamoring in their need for His attention, Christ retired to pray and to draw upon the resources of God the Father for He knew that "the Son can do nothing of Himself" (Mark 1:32-37).

(2) When it was time to choose the disciples we don't find Christ reviewing the qualifications of each of the disciples. Rather we find Him retiring to pray. This is clear in Mark 3:13 and Luke 6:12-13. Why? Because "the Son can do nothing of Himself." He needed the direction and provision of the Father.

(3) When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus He raised His eyes heavenward in dependence and thanksgiving for what the Father was about to do (John 11:40-42). The actual prayer of Christ is not given, only the fact of His dependence, thanksgiving, and confidence that His prayer had been heard. The words of verses 41 and 42 imply, however, that not only did He pray to the Father, but that He wanted all those standing around to know it as well that they might learn the secret of dependence. This teaches us that when performing miracles, though not always heard by men, Jesus the man was praying in dependence upon the Father from the standpoint of His humanity.

(4) When He fed the five thousand. The words "and looking up toward heaven" demonstrate the Lord's prayerful dependence (Mark 6:41). Also, "He blessed the food" which shows He thanked God the Father for it and for what He, the Father, was about to do through Jesus, the man, a God-dependent, God-approved man.

Think of Jesus Christ. He was the Son of God, God incarnate, the perfect man and the absolute Creator God who also as the God-man adequately and continuously fulfilled every expectation of God for man. He was the constant delight and joy of the Father's heart. He always pleased the Father. Now, thinking of Him as such, ask yourself this question. How much did He personally, as man, contribute to His mighty works, deeds, and ministry? NOTHING! Christ Himself gives us the answer, "... the father abiding in me does His works" (John 14:10). And how did that come about? Through prayerful dependence on the Father!

When we work, we work. When we pray, the Father works. So out of this conscious and constant sense of need, there arose a continuing attitude of prayer: a continual expectation in the Lord Jesus that if anything was to be done, the Father must do it both by way of initiative, and wisdom, and power. Now if

this was true of Jesus Christ, how much more shouldn't this also be true for us? Indeed, prayer according to the pattern of the Lord Jesus is to be a vital goal of true disciples.

The disciples saw in Christ's life, not only prayer, but a prayer life which demonstrated a dependency upon and intimacy with the Father unlike anything else they had ever seen and they wanted to know the secret of this.

What was the request posed by the unnamed disciple? It was, "teach us to pray." Not just how to pray, the MECHANICS, but how in the sense of the MOTIVATION. The how aspect is included by Christ in His answer in Luke 11:2-13.

(1) Prayer should demonstrate a total consciousness of our need, a sense of our complete inadequacy along with a sense of God's complete adequacy and willingness.

2 Corinthians 2:16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

(2) Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of God's ever present willingness.

(3) Prayer is not for emergency use only, when we get in a pinch and need someone to bail us out.

(4) Prayer is not an "Aladdin's Lamp" or a trip to a wishing well for our wants.

(5) By contrast, prayer is a means of intimate communion, fellowship, and dependence upon God the Father who has promised to work in and through us through His Son, just as God worked through Him.

(6) Prayer is for everyday living, moment by moment.

(7) Prayer is a means of claiming God's promises and knowing and becoming abandoned to God's will.

In John 14:10-14, note the relationship to prayer mentioned in verses 13-14 and the works we, as disciples, are to do in verse 12.

John 14:10-14 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves. 12 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. 13 And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

There is no activity in the life of a believer which does not require a prayerful attitude—a prayerful dependence on and an expectation that God is at work and will work according to His purposes and leading. In ourselves we can do nothing. Christianity is living by faith in the Creator God who dwells in us, and prayer is God's means for us to draw upon Christ's miraculous life. Christianity is as Paul expressed it in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in

me; and the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me.” Faith for a committed believer is expressed in intimate, prayerful living.

In practical terms what exactly does this mean?

- We can’t really handle the phone call we are about to make, at least not in Christ’s power and life, apart from prayer.
- The lesson we are preparing to teach, we can’t do effectively without prayerful dependence.
- It means that while we usually recognize our need of God’s enablement in things like witnessing, we nevertheless tend to take God for granted and operate in our own abilities in other areas because we think a task doesn’t seem too difficult or it is within our area expertise.

As an illustration let’s look at the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:5-11. What was Peter thinking in this passage? Probably something like, “Lord, you’re a great teacher, you’re the Son of God and Messiah, but we can handle this ourselves; we are expert fishermen. We have been fishing these waters for years. Besides, Lord, we fished these waters all night and we know the fish are simply not biting now.” But you see, biblical Christianity is living by faith and prayerful dependence upon God and under the power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ regardless of how things appear to us.

Biblical Christianity is never a matter of living by who and what we are—our insight, our background, our experience, our training, our giftedness, etc. Rather it is a matter of living by faith in God’s Word, biblical insight, and by faith in Jesus Christ, the Creator God and His availability to work through us as we are available and submissive to Him. But such only happens when we live by intimate prayerful dependence upon the Father through a life of prayer, a life of praying without ceasing, and a life devoted to special times of prayer alone with the Father and His Son in the power of the Spirit.

The Pattern for Prayer (11:2-4)

Luke 11:2-4 And He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

We have observed something of the prayer life of our Lord which undoubtedly was a large part of the motivation behind the request of the unnamed disciple in verse one, “Lord, teach us to pray.” For our Lord, prayer was the most natural and necessary aspect of His existence. In answer to this request of Luke 11:1, our Lord gave what is popularly known as the Lord’s Prayer. In reality, it was the disciples’ prayer and provides us with a model or pattern for biblical and effective prayer.

This is an excellent passage in teaching new believers about prayer because it covers a number of categories which are important to prayer.

Two things this prayer is not:

(1) It is not and was never intended to be a ritual prayer to be formally and liturgically recited. It was a model designed by our Lord to show the nature of prayer and what prayer should consist of by way of content. There is nothing wrong, of course, with reading or reciting it together as we would any passage of Scripture for a certain focus or emphasis or as a reminder of truth. I am convinced, however, it

was never meant to be simply recited as a prayer to God in place of personal prayer poured out to God from the heart. Compare the translation of the Living Bible: Luke 11:1b reads, “Lord, teach us a prayer to recite just as John taught one of his disciples.” In a footnote to this verse the translator has added the word “Implied.” But is it really implied, or is this translation a product of religious tradition that does not have its roots in what this passage was intended to teach?

(2) It was never intended to be used as an amulet or special words to protect someone when in danger. Perhaps you have seen films where people were in some kind of danger and they prayed the Lord’s Prayer in this fashion.

The prayer divides into two sections marked out by the pronouns “your” and “us.”

- The “your” section points us to God and concerns our relationship with Him regarding His person, character, being, purposes, and activity on earth.
- The “us” section deals with our needs as they are related to God and His activity and purposes in our lives here on earth.

This is no accident. First, we start with God and then we go to ourselves. Here is an important principle in all worship of which prayer is but one mode and means. In prayer, as in everything, our Lord teaches us to put God first. Why? Because this puts everything in the right perspective, it gives us the right viewpoint about life, one that sees beyond our own very limited scope. This is important so that we might genuinely focus our hearts and minds on the who and what of God, that we might seek first the rule and righteousness of God, and that we might walk with Him in obedience and under His enablement, direction, and protection.

As a tear magnifies sorrow and as laughter magnifies joy, so prayer (a form of worship wherein we count on the worth of God) must first magnify the Lord if our prayers are to have the proper result in our lives—confidence, faith, and direction into the will of God.

Prayer is a means of entering into the joy and confidence of God’s love, provision, direction, and presence. It is a way to focus on the **Who and What of God—God’s person, plan, principles, promises, and purposes**. This kind of praying glorifies the Lord and demonstrates our desire for relationship with God, along with obedience. It is comforting to our hearts because it brings God into our vision along with His purposes.

This first emphasis by our Lord exposes what is often a fatal weakness in our own prayers. We tend to begin with “us” rather than with “Your.” We rush into God’s presence pleading for “our” petitions, “our” needs, “our” problems and, as a result, we become problem oriented and frantic rather than God oriented and relaxed in His sovereignty (cf. Ps. 46:10, “Be still [cease striving] and know that I am God”).

We need to focus on the Lord first to get the perspective of Jeremiah 32:27. Concerning the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises to Israel and to keep the Prophet’s eyes on the Lord, we find this word to the Prophet: “the Word of the LORD came to Jeremiah saying, ‘Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is anything to difficult for Me?’” (Jer. 32:27).

We need the praise and focus of God in Psalm 100 before the petitions of Psalm 102.

When We Pray: The Time Element (v. 2a)

“When you pray say.”

It is significant, I believe, that no commands are given as to time or how often. Why? Because prayer is more than a mere religious routine we go through as it is in some religions in which worshippers recite certain words and bow in a certain direction specified times of the day. Scheduled prayer is certainly scriptural and a godly pattern to have as with Daniel (Dan. 6:10), and David (Ps. 55:16-21), but, as with both David and Daniel, it should always be the response of a heart which desires communion with God and depends on Him in the same way man naturally takes in oxygen through the process of breathing. This is seen in the cry of the Psalmist, “As the deer pants (heavy breathing) for the water brooks, So my soul pants for Thee, O God” (Ps. 42:1).

Two things about this cry of the Psalmist: First, his entreaty expresses our need. We need the Lord and we need to drink from His fountain of life through the Word and prayer—our means of hearing Him and responding to Him. But second, his entreaty also expresses what should be a recognized reality in each of us. As the Psalmist, we should long to communicate with our God. Prayer is to be an expression of our longing for intimacy with God and to enter into His strength and will.

Why We Pray: The Nature of Prayer (v. 2a)

“When you *pray say*.”

“Pray” is the Greek word *proseuchomai* from *pros*, stressing direction, closeness, and *euchomai*, “to ask, request.” The basic meaning of this word (along with its uses) looks at prayer as an avenue of drawing near to God in worship and dependence because we see Him as the all-sufficient one and ourselves as insufficient. Prayer becomes one of the means by which we draw near to the Lord and His sufficiency and submit to Him.

“Say” is the Greek word, *legō*. It gives prominence to the thought processes in choosing the words spoken because of their meaning. Originally, it meant “to pick and choose” and this is precisely what we generally do in speech unless we are talking gibberish. *Legō* reminds us of our need to carefully choose our words as opposed to praying as mere religious rote without careful thought. It should remind us of the conversational nature of our prayer or communication with God.

“Say” is what we call in Greek grammar, a present iterative imperative. As an iterative present it describes an event which is, as a command, to occur repeatedly, over and over again. The idea is when you pray, consistently pray in the following manner or example, but not repetitiously by rote, reciting these words as a mere repeated ritual, the problem Jesus addressed earlier in Matthew 6:7.

Reasons why it does not refer to a prayer to be merely recited.

(1) Matthew 6:5-7 is a specific warning against praying in a repetitious manner and the warning there is followed by this teaching which gives us a model for prayer. To view this as a prayer to be repetitiously repeated would be in conflict with the previous command.

(2) The parallel passage of Matthew 6:9 adds the words “in this way.” This is the Greek *houtōs* which could very well be rendered, “in this manner” or “after this manner.” In other words, what follows is to be taken as a model for prayer, not as a prayer to be memorized and merely recited.

(3) In the epistles of the New Testament, this prayer is never repeated though its pattern or principles are basically followed in one way or another.

(4) This understanding fits with the warning of Isaiah 29:13 which the Lord quoted against the religious externalism of the Israelites of His day.

Prayer is the thoughtful exercise of the heart and the mind through which we seek to draw near to God in worship and dependence on Him because of who He is as our sovereign God and support.

How to Pray (vv. 2b-4)

Pray as a Child

This command demonstrates the need of the new birth or spiritual regeneration. Scripture teaches us that prayer, other than the call to know God or for salvation, is really only applicable to believers in Jesus Christ who are brought into a relationship with God as His children through faith in Jesus Christ. This is accomplished by the new birth, the regenerating work of the Spirit of God (cf. John 1:12; 3:3-7; 14:6).

Our prayer is to be addressed to God using the term, "Father." The basic plan of prayer for the New Testament saint is not to Jesus, but to the Father. He is the one to whom we are to pray, THE GIVER, through the name of the Son, THE ACCESS into God's presence, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, THE MEANS (cf. John 14:6; 16:23-24; Eph. 2:18; 3:14; 1:17; 6:18; Jude 20; Col. 1:13; Heb. 7:25).

"Father" is a term of honor or *reverence* and *relationship*. Coming to God in prayer as "Father" is designed to demonstrate: (a) our attitude toward God as one of honor, respect, and trust, and (b) our understanding of the relationship we have with Him as a child; God is a father kind of God who cares for us as only a parent can care for a child.

How should this affect our prayer life?

(1) When we pray as New Testament believers, we are to talk with God as our Father, not simply about God in a theological monologue of high sounding and pious phrases and tones. True, we should exalt the Lord in our prayers through praise, adoration, and thanksgiving for His person, His essence, and His works in creation, history, and salvation. Our need, however, is to come to God as a child and talk with Him as our Father (Ps. 103:13).

(2) It means we are to talk with Him as a Father who loves and cares for us as His children. We will praise Him for His divine essence and being, and for His wonderful and mighty works, but ultimately it means praying with the frankness of a child while counting and resting in God as a Father who has a father's heart, love, understanding, wisdom, and strength. To pray to God as our Father means recognizing that He is a person who is intimately concerned about us more than we could possibly be concerned about ourselves. He is not a blind or impersonal force.

(3) Calling God our Father means believing Him to be so. Such a relationship and conviction could never really be expressed if we were to address God as simply, "Almighty God, the great and terrible one," or "Dreadful Creator and Ground of all Being." This kind of approach to God would actually betray one's ignorance of the nature and relationship of God to us in Christ, or one's unbelief in Him as a loving heavenly Father.

How easy would it be to pray or how confident would we be if we could only approach God as an impersonal "ground of all being" or as "the great and terrible one?" The word "Father" draws our atten-

tion to the nature of our relationship with God as a result of the new birth and our access to God through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus it emphasizes the ease and willingness with which we should come into His presence, boldly, with the confidence of a child who knows he or she is loved with an unconditional love (Heb. 4:16). By ease, however, I do not mean disrespectfully and without regard to His holiness and majesty or without concern about sin in our lives. We dare not ignore our responsibility to deal with our sin by confession (Ps. 66:18). Rather, by ease, I mean an awareness of this fatherly kind of care, the love of God, and our provision and access through the finished work of Christ.

Pray to honor God's name

In Scripture, much more so than today, names represent who people are and what they represent—their reputation. This clause means, “may your person be hallowed.” “Hallowed” is the verb *hagiazo* “to set apart, make holy, venerate, or treat as holy.” But how can we do this? As God’s children we bear His name and represent Him before the world. How we act affects His name and reputation before others.

Paul reminded the Jews of this very concept in Romans 2:23-24, “You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ just as it is written.” This is saying “let the whole of my life honor, venerate and be a source of delight to you and all that you are.”

To hallow God’s name or sanctify it means to turn my life over to Him for sanctification. This means opening up my life and all its closets to His work of making me like His Son. Surely this is to be a prayer of surrender or commitment for God’s name is never going to be hallowed (at least by us) as long as we are walking in rebellion and self dependence. Compare Ephesians 3:16-21 which expresses a desire and a request for the veneration of God’s person in general throughout society.

Pray for God's will on earth

This is a prayer for God’s reign on earth, that soon the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our LORD. It demonstrates a belief and recognition that this world is a fallen world that has rejected its Creator (Rom. 1:18f), that this world is not God’s ultimate goal, and that a new and glorious world is coming (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-8, 13-17; Rev. 11:15).

Praying for God’s kingdom also shows a longing and a hope for the return of Christ to earth and the fullness of our inheritance. It means living in view of the blessed hope as sojourners who love and pray for His kingdom (Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11).

It is also a prayer for the reign of God within us so that God’s will can be done now in and through our lives. It is a desire to fit into His plan no matter how small and in accord with what He is doing through the various trials, defeats, successes, provisions, and circumstances He brings. I am reminded of a line in a poem by Cowper which reads, “Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.”

In the parallel passage, Matthew 6:10, “Thy will be done” is added. This teaches us to pray as our Lord did when facing the cross. “Thy will be done” means help me to surrender my life to that which will further your kingdom, your will on earth, and your purpose for me. I am to prayerfully accept the truth that “out of darkness God calls forth light; out of despair, hope. From death comes resurrection.” It is often “by means of defeat the kingdom of God is born in human hearts.”¹

¹ Ray Steadman, *Jesus Teaches on Prayer*, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1975, p. 63.

Pray for daily, physical needs

In verse 4 the Lord deals with forgiveness and thus, the needs of the immaterial man, the soul and spirit. If you or I were giving these instructions we would probably have inverted the order to spiritual needs first and then we would turn to physical needs. So, why this order?

The Lord created our bodies—the body is important to the function of men. The body is not evil; it is a vehicle of service and of good. In another place he says in relation to the physical needs of the body, “seek ye first the kingdom of God ...” There He shows that the spiritual man is a priority and does take precedence over the physical. But this does not mean the physical man or the needs of the body are unimportant, that they are to be neglected, or that it is spiritual and more holy to neglect the body and to treat it carelessly. The Lord may have used this order to deal a blow against some of the pagan ideas of his day and to some of the imbalances believers can so easily slip into—and always have.

The Greeks regarded the body as evil and believed pure spirit was of greater value. Many rejected the idea of the resurrection because they believed all matter to be evil. They taught it didn’t matter what you did with the body. They either tortured it in various forms of asceticism, or misused it in licentiousness. This is why some of the Greeks at Corinth did not want to believe in the resurrection and part of the reason why Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15. Concerning their attitude about the body and resurrection, Ryrie writes: “In general they believed in the immortality of the soul, but not the resurrection of the body. To them, the body was the source of man’s weakness and sin; death, therefore, was the welcomed means by which the soul was liberated from the body.”²

Even today many Christians take their bodies for granted. We over-feed them, under-exercise them, often fail to give them enough rest, and in general, many times fail to take care of the body’s daily needs. In Philippians 3:21, the translation of the KJV could leave a wrong impression about the body. It reads: “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” The translation, “vile body,” can suggest the body is evil, but literally, the Greek text means “body of humility,” i.e., a non-glorified body. This body is mortal and subject to age, disease, death and decay—so it needs special care if we are to maintain it as a useful tool of God.

First Timothy 4:8 puts this into the right perspective, “...for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” It reminds us that bodily discipline is profitable for a little while. It keeps the old machinery in good working order as long as it is being exercised and cared for properly on a daily basis. But of course, godliness is profitable both for now and for eternity.

Man is a unity of body, soul and spirit. What affects one part affects the other. Neglect the body and it can affect the spiritual life. Neglect the spiritual life and it definitely will affect the body. So our Lord here teaches us balance—to care for both, to pray for both body and soul. The prayer for daily bread represents the whole concept of the needs of the body—food, clothing, shelter and whatever the human body needs to function effectively for the Lord. Our bodies belong to Him; He has bought them with the price of His Son (1 Cor. 6:19).

Note that He teaches us “give us *each* day our daily bread.” This is a prayer for daily supply to be made available to us for our physical needs. This is to be prayed daily. We should never take the Lord for

² *The Ryrie Study Bible*, NASB, Expanded Edition, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 1839.

granted. Compare Paul's emphasis in 1 Timothy 4:4 "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude."

This also teaches us that our primary concern is to be our daily needs—day by day living as sojourners rather than storehouse living like the rich fool.

Luke 12:16-21 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

1 Timothy 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

The purpose of this request is to get us to consciously place our security and our trust in the Lord's hands on a daily basis as a protection against: (a) false security, and (b) the wrong pursuits for life, i.e., living life with a view to one day at a time can help us maintain the right goals or purposes (cf. 1 Tim. 6:8-19; Matt. 6:19-34).

The prayer is designed to help us realize that the daily supply of the physical needs of life come from the Lord regardless of our resources or reserves, or how wisely we think we have planned for the future. Planning for the future has its place, but only as we keep such plans in proper perspective.

It is also designed to remind us that though God is the transcendent and sovereign God of the universe, He is also our personal and immanent heavenly Father who is concerned for and the Provider of even our daily physical needs. But wait a minute, didn't Jesus Christ also say, "your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask Him"? (Matt. 6:8, 32).

If He knows, why ask daily?

(1) Prayer is obviously not something by which we inform an omniscient God of our needs. Prayer is for us, to influence us and to keep us depending on Him.

(2) The principle of prayer is not that God needs to be told, but that we need to tell Him because of what true prayer does to us. It is a means by which we submit to God's will and learn to wait upon God as we delight our hearts in Him (Ps. 37:4-6).

(3) Prayer is a means by which we draw close to God so that He may draw close to us to bless us, not just with our needs as we may conceive them, which may not at all be what we need, but with the awareness of God Himself (James 4:8). What happens when we fail to praise and thank God and fail to bring our needs to the Lord? We begin to pull away from Him, to take Him for granted, and eventually we succumb to the delusion that we can handle life alone.

God is influenced by biblical steadfast praying, not because we have informed Him of something or because we have influenced God to change His mind, but because it has affected our lives, demonstrated our faith, obedience and submission to Him (Ps. 33:13-22; 34:4-9). God answers and honors trust.

Pray for spiritual needs

(1) Regarding personal sin—“and forgive us our sins,” (11:4a)

First of all this verse deals with the subject of the forgiveness of the child of God, not the forgiveness of the unbeliever. The unbeliever is not forgiven by praying this prayer or by confessing his sins as though that would win his forgiveness. Instead, the Bible reveals that he must acknowledge his sinfulness, that he is a sinner separated from God, helpless in himself, and in need of the saving grace of God through faith in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ.

The passage is addressed to disciples, to believers who can call God their Father as the regenerated children of God through faith in Christ. Judicially, for those who have trusted in Christ the penalty of sin has been settled by the cross (Rom. 3:21-24; 5:1-2; Col. 1:14), but as we see in John 13, we all face the problem of personal sins that we incur as we walk down the defiled streets of this world. Known sin hinders our fellowship with God, it quenches His power and control of our lives, and it hinders our ability to grow and be truly changed by the grace of God. Therefore, in this model prayer, the Lord shows us that we must deal with the problem of personal sin.

We must remember that this prayer gives us a pattern for prayer in its general content. Here, it deals with the subject of forgiveness as a very important part of our prayers if they are to be answered and significant in our lives and our walk with God. This passage does not give us an explanation of the mechanics or details by which the believer is to handle sin and experience forgiveness. For this, God expects us to turn to the rest of the Word for instruction and insight. Rather, this model of prayer reminds us of our sinfulness, shows us our need of cleansing for fellowship with God, and demonstrates our responsibility to deal with the problem of personal sin in all its many categories as:

- *Mental attitude sins*—resentment, envy, jealousy
- *Sins of the tongue*—lying, gossip, criticism, abusive language
- *Overt sins of every kind*—stealing, fornication, adultery, murder, substance abuse, fraud, etc.
- *Root sins*—failure to appropriate God’s grace and live dependently on Him, false values, false motives, and false patterns of thinking and dealing with life. This involves the defense and escape mechanisms and the independent strategies of self protection or self management that we all tend to use to control our lives and protect ourselves rather than trusting in the Lord.

Let’s look for a moment at Luke 11:4a “And forgive us our sins.” The verb, “forgive,” as it is first used in this verse, is a construction in the Greek text (an aorist imperative) which adds a note of urgency—undoubtedly because of the consequences of sin. The Lord spoke here of specific sins. The word *sins* has the article and is in the plural. In light of the analogy of Scripture, the Lord is talking about specific personal sins that we are responsible to acknowledge as sin because of what it does to our fellowship with the Lord and our capacity as believers to love and minister to others.

This means we are not to take this request, “forgive us our sins,” as just a broad all inclusive and sweeping prayer for forgiveness of sin in general, i.e., “Lord, forgive me of all my sins.” That would avoid specific conviction and acknowledgment of specific sin, and leave us with non-convicting generalities. Such a prayer would simply sweep sin under the rug. It would clean up the outside of the cup but ignore the filth on the inside.

Matthew 12:34-35 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man out of

his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.

Matthew 23:25-26 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

The verb is *aphiēmi* and means literally, “to send away, let go.” It comes from a preposition, “from” and a verb, “to be.” It had, however, a legal use and meant “to cancel, remit, or pardon.” It was used of a loan or debt and also of the guilt or debt of sin which, as a result of forgiveness, removed the penalty or consequences of sin. The consequence in view here is broken fellowship which is restored by honest confession. (See Appendix 5 for an overview of the key issues in forgiveness for the believer.)

(2) Regarding relationships with others—“For we ourselves also forgive everyone ...” (v. 4b)

Here and in Matthew 6:12b this is stated in the form of a principle rather than a request, but it deals with a subject which certainly needs to be a matter of prayer. It is an area we each need to turn over to the Lord for management. God holds us responsible for our relationships with others and the focus here is when we think we have been mistreated and would tend, then, to hold grudges and seek revenge.

In relation to forgiving others, there are always two dimensions involved: the **Godward** or **vertical** element, and the **manward** or **horizontal** element.

In relation to God: All sin against others is first of all a sin against God because it is a transgression against the law of God to love one another. Therefore, when we sin against another human being, we must first confess the sin to God.

In relation to men: In the horizontal relationship, we have a dual set of obligations: those of the offended party (the one sinned against), and those of the offending party (the one sinning against another).

THE OFFENDING PARTY	THE OFFENDED PARTY
Vertical responsibility—Confess to God the sin against the other party.	Responsibility—Forgive the offending party.
Horizontal responsibility—Ask forgiveness and seek reconciliation with the person offended. This can include making restitution.	Responsibility—If necessary for unity, healing, restoration, etc., go to the offending party to seek reconciliation and restoration.

The offended party, as a forgiven person in Christ, has a two-fold obligation. First, he or she is to show the same unqualified forgiveness they received from Christ. This is the point of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23-35. Second, if the offending party does nothing, then in obedience to Scripture and for the purpose of unity, restoration, and healing, the one offended should go to the offending party to correct the problem even if it means rebuke (Luke 17:3-4). If the offending party does not repent, then the offended party may need to follow the procedures of Matthew 18. This, however, never means the right to harbor resentment or anger.

If God by His grace and mercy has forgiven us such an enormous debt, one we could never pay because of our own sinfulness, how much more shouldn't we forgive others the debts or sins against us as mere fellow-servants regardless of how much we have been hurt. What we suffer cannot compare to what Christ suffered for us. But forgiving others is never to be viewed as a work by which we seek forgiveness for our own sins because our debt is too great for any of us to pay by what we do.

On the part of the offending party the obligation is also twofold: First, to deal with the wrong done by repentance or confession before God. This reestablishes the vertical relationship. Then go to the offended party and correct the problem by asking their forgiveness and by doing the right thing as called for by the circumstances. Compare the following passages on forgiveness (cf. also 18:21-35; Luke 17:3-4; and 1 Peter 3:7).

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Matthew 5:23-26 If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Principles to keep in mind:

- Failure to forgive demonstrates our unwillingness to treat others on the same basis of grace that God has treated us. We must be willing to extend forgiveness as freely to others as God has freely extended it to us (Matt. 18:21-35; Eph 4:32).
- Failure to forgive others stems from our failure to turn the matter over to the Lord and trust in His sovereign purposes and control. The Lord who rested totally in the Father's love and plan is our perfect example in this (1 Pet. 2:21-25).
- Failure to forgive others keeps the Lord from forgiving us, not because our act of unforgiveness becomes the basis for our own forgiveness, but because unforgiveness, like any known sin, stands as a barrier to fellowship. The basis for our forgiveness is always the cross and Christ's presence before the Father as our advocate (1 John 1:9-2:2). It is important for us to understand, however, that failure to forgive others is not only sin, but a sin which is a contradiction to the heart of the gospel message (cf. Matt. 5:23-24; 1 Pet. 3:7; Ps. 66:18).
- Failure of people to forgive one another results in a sick church—one without the power and blessing of God on its ministry and life.

(3) Pray Regarding Personal Temptation—"and lead us not into temptation ..." (v. 4c)

This particular request has troubled many. Exactly what does this mean? One thing for sure, it is not a request out of fear that God might lead us into some form of temptation. James 1:13 specifically re-

minds us that God tempts no man. Temptation to sin always comes from sources other than the Lord. This request stems from recognizing certain principles and spiritual realities. It reminds and warns us of:

- The principle of our own inherent weakness and our inability to always recognize temptation or to be able to handle certain temptations due to our particular spiritual state or phase of maturity.
- The principle of our three enemies, the real sources of our temptation—(a) the sinful nature or indwelling sin, (b) the world around us, and (c) Satan against us. Satan and the world have many snares and traps to which we are susceptible because of our own desires and proneness to turn to the many tempting offers made by these sources for significance and happiness.
- The principle of our desperate need of the protection and guidance of the Lord—our only strength against temptation (cf. Eph. 6:10f).

This prayer request is a matter of recognizing these principles that we might turn to the Lord and lean on Him to protect us and to keep us from temptation, especially the unrecognizable forms.

The Parable of the Persistent Friend (11:5-8)

Luke 11:5-8 And He said to them, "Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

In this parable we see the certainty of God's answer and supply through persistent prayer.

Certain questions repeatedly pop up in the minds of believers regarding prayer. For instance: Why are we to continue to pray for something if the first time we pray we believe God for our request? Isn't that unbelief? What about those times when we pray and are certain of an answer, and no answer is forthcoming? We believe and are confident it is God's will, yet nothing happens. What are we to do? What are we to think?

Such questions are often a discouragement to prayer because people do not understand enough about prayer and its place in God's plan and in our lives. Further, believers know they are to pray and to pray in faith, but this is hard. They say, "I know God can, but is it His will?" After all, God's will is an important ingredient to the way we pray and receive answers.

Please note Mark 11:22-24:

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (NIV)

Now compare the above promise with the following passages:

Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done."

Ephesians 5:17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The Lord's story of the friend who refused to take no for an answer is given to counter feelings of doubt and to become a reason and motivation for continuous and persistent prayer that believes God for what we ask. What do we mean by "persistent prayer"? Sufficient to say it means more than keeping on in prayer.

Why this parable? (Luke 11:1 cf. 18:1, i.e., the context). The disciples had asked the Lord to teach them to pray. In essence they were saying, "Bring us to the point, Lord, where prayer is not an option or for emergency use only. Bring us to the place where you are Lord and where prayer becomes an indispensable and irresistible reality."

These verses, consisting of the parable, the prescription, the promise, and the principle, were given to answer questions and to motivate them (and so also us) in the struggle of prayer. In Luke 18:1, Christ undoubtedly had the principle of persistent prayer in mind as well. Note that we have only two options: Either we pray biblically in faith or we faint and fail to pray which is itself a form of failure.

This parable, in answer to the unnamed disciple's request regarding prayer (11:1), is designed by the Lord as further instruction on the subject of prayer. It is developed around three people whom we will call friend A, B, and C, and five circumstances.

Friend A, coming from a long journey, visits friend B late at night, evidently seeking help. Friend B, possessing insufficient resources himself, goes to his neighbor, friend C, for help on behalf of friend A. Friend C, however, though he possesses sufficient resources, is reluctant to rise and give help to friend B, but he is persistent and continues to ask on behalf of friend A. Finally, friend C who has the resources provides the requested resources because of the persistence of friend B.

Let's note several lessons or principles we can learn from this parable about prayer:

The Principle of the Need of Others

Here is where prayer has its origin. Prayer is designed to fill the needs of needy man (Heb. 4:16). But the parable illustrates praying for the needs of others, not just for our own needs. Friend B was making requests for his friend who came to him at midnight, hungry and without bread. Here also is where the church seems to have lost its vision in the ministry of intercession. Remember there are basically two kinds of prayer requests: (a) prayer for our own needs (petition) and (b) prayer for the needs of others (intercession).

As believers, we are all priests of God (1 Pet. 2:5). To us has been given the ministry of intercession through which we can bring untold power and blessing into the lives of others by praying for the lost, for laborers to be sent out, open doors for the Word, and the basic needs of fellow believers (cf. 3 John 2; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2-4, 12). To pray properly is to become sensitive and open to the needs of others. It is to care for others rather than be occupied with ourselves.

When on the cross, our Lord prayed for His own deliverance, but he never forgot those around Him. From the meaning of the Greek text, which uses the imperfect tense of continual action in past time, we know the Lord repeatedly prayed, "Father forgive them ..." during those hours on the cross.

Closely related to the above is our next point found in this passage.

The Principle of Sacrificial Love

It was Andrew Murray who pointed out in *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, that intercessory prayer is part of God's training school (p. 49). Here our sonship, fellowship and friendship with God is tested as well as our love for others. Our prayer life is a good barometer of the true condition of our spiritual life and our maturity and fellowship with Jesus Christ.

What happened in this parable? A man took the weary traveler and friend into his home at midnight. He did not excuse himself with "I've had a hard day, have no food—go elsewhere." He sacrificed his night's rest and went out in the darkness to find the needed bread. "Love seeks not its own," love gives of itself, its time, its comfort for the needs of others.

This kind of love in word and deed is not natural to any of us. It requires supernatural capacity or ability and motivation. It requires the mind of Christ (the Word of God in the soul and the control of the Spirit controlling and motivating the life). John 15:5,7-8 and Ephesians 6:18 remind us that genuine fellowship with the Lord is vital to our prayer life just as prayer is vital to our fellowship. In a way, each feeds the other. Without the vertical focus, prayer becomes self-centered and based on wrong motives (James 4:2). So, in a very real sense, intercessory prayer is a test of our love, of our fellowship with God and our friendship with others. What kind of friend am I?

The Principle of Our Impotence

The man we have called friend B said, "I have nothing to set before him." People often speak of the power of love, of what love can and does do for others. But it is important for us to realize another truth. In ourselves we are extremely limited. We may want to help another, but because of our puniness as man we are unable or at least very limited in our ability to help. In ourselves we are nothing.

No matter how much we may want to lead a person to Christ, you and I can't open their eyes, we can't force them to see the light. Only the Spirit of God can do that (Acts 16:14). Evangelism, then, if it is going to be effective must be preceded by prayer. The same principle applies to building people up in the Word. Consistently, the Apostle Paul prayed for the spiritual enlightenment of the people to whom he ministered (Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-20; Col. 1:9-14; Phil. 1:9-11). Doctors may do all they can for someone who is ill, and still not alleviate the problem, but God can.

The principle is that we are inadequate and weak, but God is the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent One who is able to do above all that we can ask or even think. In His wisdom He knows what is best, in His love He always cares, and in His power He is able to do anything. So the more we come to see and sense our impotence and need, the more indispensable and irresistible prayer should become to all of us.

The Persuasion Regarding the Friend Who Can and Will Supply

Though this man cannot supply the need himself, he knows there is another who can and will supply this need. He has a super rich friend nearby who will be both able and willing to supply.

The following are important principles concerning faith:

- Faith must have the right object,
- The object must be available,
- The object must be able, and
- The object must be willing.

Knowledge of these truths is a great incentive to prayer (cf. Neh. 1).

Faith and knowledge made this person leave his home at midnight to go to the house of his friend to get bread for the weary traveler who had come from the long journey and was tired and in need of food. As mentioned above, prayer is a test of our friendship with God, of how well we really know Him and so of how confident we are that eventually God will answer and supply. Such faith leads to prayer: knowing God and His promises and our access to Him in Jesus Christ, we can be confident in His supply—that he won't turn us away, that He feels and cares for our needs and the needs of others.

This illustrates and teaches us the simple truth that our loving heavenly Father and "Friend" will give what is needed if we ask. When a need really exists, there can be no mistake, our God will supply! Why? Because our God who cannot lie, who is immutable, who is loving and faithful, has given us promise after promise to that effect. Compare also Matt. 21:22; 18:19-21; and Luke 11:9-10.

Psalm 9:10 And those who know Thy name will put their trust in Thee; For Thou, O LORD, hast not forsaken those who seek Thee.

Psalm 10:17-18 O LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt strengthen their heart, Thou wilt incline Thine ear 18 To vindicate the orphan and the oppressed, That man who is of the earth may cause terror no more.

Psalm 34:4 I sought the LORD, and He answered me, And delivered me from all my fears.

Psalm 145:18-19 The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. 19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.

Proverbs 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

How well do we know our God? How many of the principles and promises dealing with prayer do we know?

We hear people say, "but sometimes God's answer is NO." Yes, that is true and 2 Corinthians 12:7f is an example. But the point I believe we must see is this: too often this kind of attitude is a cop out on intercessory prayer or on personal petition and real praying. Too often people give up before they have prayed according to the prescription of persistent prayer.

The Perplexing Answer (v. 7)

In the parable the man who *could* meet the need is reluctant to do so. What is the point of this part of the parable? The God who has told us to pray, who cares for us, and who has promised to supply and answer, often holds back the answer and the gift. Sometimes we meet with what appears to be His refusal. *Why?* What is involved here? What is Christ teaching us about intercessory prayer? That we must keep knocking on God's door as the reluctant friend until He can stand it no more and finally gives in? NO!

What about those times when we are sure of God's will, when there truly is a genuine need and we ask in faith, believing, and yet we seem to meet with silence or an apparent NO? What then? Let's look at the next principles for our answer.

The Persistence Which Takes No Refusal

In our passage friend B met with a refusal—"don't bother me," but he wouldn't take no for an answer and he shamelessly persisted until he got what he asked for. Was he wrong in this? Should he have simply said, "Well it must not be God's will, brother. Sorry, I just can't help you."? Obviously not because Christ followed up this parable with verse 9, "ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, ..." a very definite and firm promise.

Persistent intercessory prayer is part of God's training school. Here again, as Murray reminds us, it is a test of our friendship with God, of how well we know Him as our *heavenly Friend and Father*, and of how committed we are to knowing the Lord and finding His will. Note that the passage emphasizes the need of persistence in prayer, and that, as Luke 18:1 teaches, we should never give up.

Steadfast prayer like this requires faith and knowledge of what God wants to accomplish—knowing God and His plan. Steadfast and continuous prayer is to become a time of testing and training, a time of searching and discovery as we will see below.

Persistent praying is self-revealing

Persistent prayer demonstrates our knowledge and confidence in our Friend and heavenly Father. It greatly glorifies God because it shows we are resting in His wisdom and love. The lack of an immediate answer does not turn us away in disgust or cause fear or doubt and frustration. *Why?* Because we know our heavenly Friend and Father. Do we understand all that God is doing? No, not really. Is it easy? No.

Persistent prayer demonstrates the maturity of our faith or the lack of it and so also our need of understanding God, His plan, principles, promises, and purposes. It demonstrates our need of faith, of wisdom and biblical values and priorities along with patience and an eternal perspective. A mature or growing faith sees and believes the promises of God, embracing them with persistence even though the answer is not immediately forthcoming (Heb. 11:13, 39). Mature faith knows that God will answer in a better time and in a better way.

This is no place better illustrated than in the prayers of our Lord both before and on the cross. Had the Father taken the cup of the cross from Him or called ten thousand angels to deliver Him from the cross, we would still be in our sins. God answered His Son, but in a better time and in a better way.

Persistent praying becomes a time of discovery regarding God's will

Persistent prayer is often needed to bring our prayers into the will of God, i.e., to correct and make them such that they will glorify God and become a greater blessing to us (cf. Luke 18:38-41).

This story of the blind man in Luke 18:35-41 shows that the blind man was crying out for mercy, a very general request which he repeated, believing and knowing that Jesus Christ could and would heal him. But what did Christ do? Did He heal him immediately? No. Instead He said "what do you want me to do for you?" Of course Christ knew the man was blind just as our heavenly Father knows our needs before we ask them (Matt. 6:8). So why the question?

The Lord's question to the blind man teaches us that God wants us to pray specific requests by which we bring God's person, promises, principles, and purposes directly to bear on the details of our lives and the lives of others. This kind of praying fits with the basic concept we have seen about prayer. It is not just a religious exercise or ritual divorced from our mind, emotions and will, and the specifics of our lives. Why? Because prayer is a means of fellowship and growth by which we are to seek and discover more about the Lord and His will.

Through true persistent prayer we are forced to investigate the needs and requests as to their nature and motive and as to God's purpose in the situation. This demands time, thought, soul searching, and fellowship with God. It demands that I ask and think about some crucial questions that help me to discover what God is seeking to teach me, questions like: What are my motives? What are the real needs? What does God want me to do? What does God want to accomplish? God, how do you want me to pray?

Persistent praying and searching in prayer causes us to see our own needs and inadequacies or those of others more pointedly. It helps to bring the real issues to the surface which cause us to more fully depend on the Lord in specifics. So we don't just say "Lord, help me, or help Bill today." But "Lord, strengthen me in this area, or in this specific problem or weakness."

Persistent prayer that forces us to search out and investigate the specific needs aids our personal walk with God and our growth in faith and obedience. When we get specific we are forced to deal with specific areas and root problems in our lives or in the lives of others. We don't just pray, "Lord, deliver me from sin," but "Lord, enable me to deal with my temper, or my lack of love, or my fear regarding taking a stand, etc." It forces us to face what we really are and how God is sufficient for our specific needs.

What then are some of the provisions of persistent praying?

The Provisions of Persistent Praying

Remember we are talking about times of delay in God's answer and what persevering prayer provides in believers through the process of searching and discovery.

(1) It develops our relationship with the Lord. Through the search/discovery process, our understanding of God, our faith, our confidence, our joy and peace (Phil. 4:1f), and our strength and courage to go on in the joy and strength of the Lord in the face of continued pain or persecution are all enhanced (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10; 4:16-18).

(2) It provides specific answers from God, but in His timing. And, as we look back, we can often see the hand of God working out His wise purposes through which we can praise Him for specific an-

swers (2 Cor. 9:11-12). Being specific enables us to wait for specific answers and to more clearly identify them when they come so we can praise and thank God for the answers.

The main principle of the parable is this: If the unfriendliness of a selfish earthly friend can be overcome by persistence—how much more will not persistent praying bring an answer and reward from our heavenly Friend who is also our heavenly Father?

The passage is not saying that God holds back answers because He is unfriendly or doesn't want to be bothered. As we will see from the context, He is the all wise heavenly Father and holds back answers in His perfect wisdom and goodness because He cannot give us anything but what is best for all concerned.

The Prescription for Persistent Praying (11:9)

Luke 11:9 And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

The Greek text employs the continuous present with each of the commands (“ask, seek, knock”). But as you can tell by what has already been said, by persistent praying Scripture is not telling us to just keep on asking or repeating the same request. There is a great deal more to it than that.

“And I say” in verse 9 is *kagō* (*kai* + *egō*) and *legō* which means “and I, I say.” Or “now I, I say.” This was used as a kind of special formula to introduce a point of truth or doctrine which needs to be gleaned from the parable. It is like saying, “here is the point.” This is followed by three commands, which, in the context give us the following principles.

Keep on Asking

This is a command to keep on bringing our request, keep on coming to the Lord with the need and the issue. Don't give up or faint. Don't throw in the towel. We are to persevere before the Lord in our requests. But how?

Keep on Seeking

Some see this as just another way of saying the same thing, but I believe this is a call for searching and discovery in the midst of continuing to pray. I believe this means more than just asking or seeking for the thing requested. This means, in our prayers and through the prayerful reading and study of the Word, we are to search for God's will and the lessons He want us to learn. Pray for spiritual wisdom and understanding and for that which God is doing in the situation (James 1:5). We need to ask questions like: What is God seeking to teach me or us? Is the Lord wanting to take us in another direction or is the timing just all wrong for now? Is He wanting to develop our patience, trust, change our values, or reveal the wrong sources of happiness or sources of self-trust and self-management?

Keep on Knocking

This is a call for expectant waiting in our prayers. Don't give up and go away. Don't stop. Stay, wait and rest the matter in the Lord's hands and timing. We have here the principle of waiting on the

Lord, of the faith-rest life—resting patiently by faith in God’s wisdom and love. The answer and revelation of what God is doing will come. Just trust in the goodness and wisdom of God.

With that in mind, the Lord quickly focuses our attention on the nature of God and our relationship with Him as our heavenly Father as believers in Christ. Why? To encourage us to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking. God is a faithful father kind of God.

The Promise of God’s Sure Answer (11:10)

Luke 11:10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened.

This verse simply states that those who keep on asking, seeking, and knocking, who persist in prayer, will receive answers from the Lord. They will receive, they will find, and God will open the door.

It is helpful to note that the present tense is used with each of these verbs regarding God’s sure answer (“receives, finds, knocks”). In verse 9, the future was used, but not here, at least not with the first two. There is a manuscript problem with the third and it is difficult to determine from the evidence if this should be the present or the future. Probably the present as with the first two verbs.

The present tense stresses the actuality of God’s sure answer even more emphatically. This may be what we call the future present which denotes an event that has not occurred, but which is regarded as so certain that in thought it may be viewed as a present reality. Or, it may be the gnomic present of what is a general, timeless principle. The Lord consistently gives to those who persist in prayer. It’s God’s pattern. The Lord is emphatically assuring us of God’s concern and involvement in our lives to direct us, transform us, and answer our prayers.

Now to strengthen our faith and to demonstrate why we can be assured of God’s answer and concern, the Savior focuses our thoughts on God’s *MUCH MORE GRACE* by calling our attention to God’s infinite and holy love as our heavenly Father.

The Principle of God’s Much More Grace (11:11-13)

Luke 11:11-13 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

The Comparison to Human Fathers (vv. 11-12)

God is our heavenly Father who can do no less for his children than would our earthly father.

Matthew 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

The rather extreme examples given in these verses 11-12 represent the norm, the general pattern among men. When societies degenerate and morally go bottom up, child abuse follows, but in general, fathers do not break with these principles. They do not give harmful gifts or gifts that mock their children's requests. They will often be unwise in their gifts, but they generally do what they think is best.

These examples reinforce the point that God, because of who he is as a holy and infinitely wise God, can only respond in perfect kindness and love.

The Contrast to Our Heavenly Father (v. 13)

Because God is perfect and infinite in all aspects of His character and being, He can do nothing less than the most and the best. He will do much more than our earthly fathers who, though they generally seek to give good gifts, are also sinful and finite in their wisdom.

In this verse we see a contrast of nature and a contrast of gifts. In contrast to the limited and material gifts of earthly fathers, our heavenly Father gives the highest and greatest gift, one that involves and is important to every other spiritual gift—He gives the Holy Spirit.

But what about asking for the Holy Spirit? Can this prayer be legitimately prayed today? NO! Either one of two things apply:

(1) In the Old Testament, the gift that God had promised His people was the Holy Spirit (cf. Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-29). So the Lord was here telling the disciples that during this interim period, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as promised in the Old Testament, if they would ask in persistent prayer, they could then have been indwelt and empowered by the Spirit.

(2) Or, our Lord was saying that what the Father had promised would one day be realized once Israel turned and repented. At that time Christ was being rejected, so the promise would have to be postponed. Christ was saying they should not give up hope, but should continue praying and wait for the gift that would come after His glorification or death and resurrection (cf. John 7:37-39). In the upper room, this is precisely what the disciples did (Acts 1:14).

I personally prefer view number one above.

Conclusion and Application

Because of our lack of wisdom and finite human condition, and because of our sinfulness, if God answered all our prayers just as we ask them we would receive that which would be equivalent to either a stone, a serpent, or a scorpion. But God as our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ (as the one who knows best, who knows all the facts, and who can give only what is best) waits until, through persistent asking, searching, and knocking, our prayers are changed into the will of God (if against it) or until we have learned the lesson(s) He is seeking to teach us through the training ground of persistent intercessory prayer.

The capacity to have this kind of faith in God is dependent upon our knowledge of Him and our confidence in His will. Until God's will is known and sensed on a request, prayer will have to fall into two categories:

(1) The prayer of confident expectation and faith knowing that God will answer in His own time and according to His wisdom.

(2) The prayer of submission and trust as the Lord prayed, "Nevertheless Father, not my will but Thine."

One aspect of our prayer should involve asking the Father to help us know His will about the issues for which we are praying. Another aspect involves giving thanks to the Father for answering according to His will. In the meantime, our prayer should be that God would enable us rest in Him and to grow and learn from what He is doing.

Lesson 9: The Devotional Life

Introduction

In our hurry up, man-centered, man-dependent world that measures success by activity, making big bucks, or how much we accomplish, finding time to hide ourselves alone with God for steady spiritual growth is a lost priority. It is viewed by many as a nonessential, as something for those who have nothing to do. The question people often ask is where is the practicality of time alone with God?

We have become so utilitarian that we find it extremely hard to look at time in terms other than 'To Do' lists and projects, performance and accomplishments. Others view time alone with God as a virtual impossibility. There are centrifugal forces at work in our modern world that propel us into a whirlwind of activity or business. But perhaps more than anything else our society has been led into a dangerous mood of impatience. Eugene Peterson accurately captures this mood of our day and writes:

One aspect of *world* that I have been able to identify as harmful to Christians is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We assume that if something can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently. Our attention spans have been conditioned by thirty-second commercials. Our sense of reality has been flattened by thirty-page abridgments.

There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.

Everyone is in a hurry. The persons whom I lead in worship, among whom I counsel, visit, pray, preach, and teach, want short cuts ... They are impatient for results ... The Christian life cannot mature under such conditions and in such ways.¹

King David knew his need of daily time alone with God and, though faced with trials and pressures that were pulling him in other directions, he vowed that nothing would keep him from meeting with God daily—especially at the beginning his day. In Psalm 5:3 David vowed: "In the morning, O LORD, Thou wilt hear my voice; In the morning I will order *my prayer* to Thee and *eagerly* watch."

No doubt it was this intimate morning-by-morning meeting with the Lord that developed David's faith and made him a man after God's own heart. This morning watch, as we might call it, has the special reward of knowing God more intimately and of Christlike transformation. Surely the Lord had this in mind, at least in part, when He said in Matthew 6:6 "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay (reward) you."

The rewards of time alone with God are often not immediately evident and in our impatience we run to something more visibly practical. But there is a self-deception at work here as well. The negative ef-

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL, 1980, pp. 11-12.

fects of ignoring daily time alone with God is also not immediately visible. It's not like falling off a roof where gravity immediately takes over and swiftly plunges us to the ground.

Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

The aftermath of failing to draw near to God is more like the decomposition of organic material, slow but sure. In time we can begin to see and even smell the signs of spiritual and moral decay. Ironically, spiritual decay is often accompanied by a paradox, the rock-like hardening of our souls which may blind us to the rot taking place in our heart.

Hebrews 3:7-8 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, ..."

Hebrews 3:12-13 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Mark 6:51-52 And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, 52 for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

Unless we make time alone with God a priority, the other hours devoted to our busy schedules will be poorly used. We are prone to ignore times of retreat because our work, our ministry, our families, all seem more important. Doing seems so much more practical than praying or meditating on the Word. But the spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation on the Word do not constitute idleness or indolence. They are rigorous disciplines that are vital to the spiritual life.

No doubt getting alone with God is not easy and forms a kind of paradox that modern man finds tremendously difficult—retreat is really God's way for us to advance. Satan obviously delights in deceiving us in this matter and works overtime to make it difficult. And the fact it is difficult only serves to highlight the great need we have for time alone with God. We need to hear and identify with God's word to Elijah the prophet when He told him to hide himself by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3).

Finding time to get alone with God is a need for all Christians—wives and mothers, husbands and fathers, children, students—everyone. Why? Because it is through seclusion with God that we are able to develop and maintain the mind of the Spirit and keep our spiritual equilibrium so that God is at the center and in control of our lives.

It is through the two spiritual disciplines that will be discussed in this lesson that God communicates to us and we to Him. Here is where our faith is developed both in content (what we believe), and in degree (how much and how consistently we trust in Him rather than in ourselves).

Through the **dailies**, and what I will call for lack of a better term, the **weeklies**, we are able to get into God's Word and get God's Word into us for conviction, motivation, edification, comfort, direction, and disciplined living by the power of the Spirit.

The Two Disciplines

The *dailies* refer to the discipline of daily getting into God's Word and daily going to the throne of grace. The *weeklies* refer to the discipline of weekly (regularly) assembling together with other believers for fellowship, singing, reciprocal ministry, prayer, and the study the Word. Though this study will deal with the weekly aspect, the primary focus will be on the daily devotional life.

The dailies and weeklies are part of the means by which believers are able to more intimately know their God, relate to and rest in their new life in Christ, and experience true spiritual change and liberation from life-dominating patterns of sin. The dailies promote growth in devotion to God and the ability to grasp, personalize, believe, and apply the Scripture, God's personal Word to His people. Apart from the dailies and weeklies properly understood and experienced, there will be very little peace and true spiritual change from within through a deepening faith relationship with the living God.

For instance, Romans 8:2-4a speaks of the Christian's new life in Christ with its new possibilities of emancipated living available to believers through the Spirit-controlled life. However, this is not just some mysterious, automatic experience that somehow suddenly sweeps over the Christian after he or she has trusted in Christ. So Romans 8:4b relates this new life-changing capacity to a walk in accord with (adapted to and under the control of) the Spirit. Then verse 5 relates this spiritual walk according to the Spirit to the focus of one's mind. Literally, Romans 8:5 reads,

for those who are according to the flesh (controlled by the sinful nature), are minding, thinking on, the things of the flesh, and those according (controlled by) to the Spirit (are minding, thinking on) the things of the Spirit.

As the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit is the one who teaches us and illuminates our hearts to the Word (Eph. 1:15-20; 3:16-19). True spirituality, walking by the control of the Spirit of truth, will result in spiritual illumination, understanding, and so right thinking about God and man and the real values and priorities of life. But it is equally true that meditating on the word and right thinking is crucial to true spirituality or the Spirit-controlled walk.

The Holy Spirit does not operate in a mindless vacuum, one devoid of God's point of view. The Word and the Spirit work together so that, if we are not taking time to get alone with God in His revelation to us in the Bible, two things will happen: (a) we will quench the ministry of the Spirit and grieve Him, and (b) as with a partial vacuum, we will tend to draw in the attitudes and viewpoints of the world around us.

Romans 8:6 adds to our understanding of the issues here. It reads: "For the mind of the flesh is death." The mind of the flesh is attempting to live independently of God; it's the mind of man's point of view, of human solutions to life, and of human will power. The result is death. Death means separation and a loss of life, but the context must determine the kind of death or loss of life involved. The apostle was writing to the Christians at Rome, and by the context he was undoubtedly referring to a life of carnality, frustration, and the absence of peace, a life dominated by the sinful nature. If continued, such a life would eventually result in physical death as discipline from the Lord.

Ephesians 5:14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."

Romans 8:13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Hebrews 12:9-13 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

By contrast, “the mind of the Spirit” is the mind of spiritual dependence on God, of operating by God’s viewpoint with His values, objectives, and priorities. The result is life, peace, victory, fellowship, a life controlled and led by the Holy Spirit, and of being transformed in God’s image.

These spiritual disciplines or routines (the dailies and weeklies) are God’s grace means of channeling our minds according to the Spirit. Here is the place where the mind is filled with the things of Christ and restructured by the Spirit of God according to the Word of God that we might walk in newness of life.

An Important Balance

There is a subtle balance which must be maintained, a narrow road, or we will miss the way of deliverance by grace and end up in the pit of one of two extremes, maybe even both.

We are calling the dailies and weeklies *spiritual disciplines* because the term discipline focuses on the fact of the believer’s responsibility in the process of godliness. But this is not meant to imply that by the discipline of human will power or human effort we can overcome our sinful nature and its life-dominating patterns. We cannot consistently and in all areas free ourselves from life-dominating habits by our willpower no matter how badly we desire to do so. For one thing, very often, the goal in such pursuits is selfish.

Though people often overcome some habit by sheer determination, self remains at the core and true Christlike change does not occur. People often want change and may turn to God for help, but if they are not really seeking to know God and grow in their relationship with Him, they will only be turning to God as a kind of Genie.

A basic truth of the Bible is that spiritual change is the product of genuine godliness, of growing in our dependence on and relationship with God through Christ.

Colossians 2 touches on some of the methods or human regulations men often use in their attempt to control sin or bring about change. In 2:23 Paul refers to one of these methods as “self-made religion” or “will-worship” (KJV). This is the Greek word *ethelothrēskia* from *thelēma* meaning “will” and *thrēskeia* meaning “external religion or worship.” It refers to will-worship, service, worship of the will, or a self-imposed religion of do’s and don’ts by which men attempt to change their lives.

Colossians 2:20-23 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 which all refer to things destined to perish with the using—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

But the apostle shows us in this passage that such methods are doomed to failure and they are doomed to failure for two reasons.

(1) First, they fail because all human methods are *futile* to deal with man’s condition in sin which is so ingrained in his total being. The flesh simply cannot overcome the flesh. Self cannot overcome self because self will always remain the center of the life.

(2) Second, man’s religious methods do not work because they are *faithless* in the Christian’s new position and life in Christ. Perhaps Paul is also warning us that the moment we attempt the process of change by our willpower, we are worshipping our own will (self) which takes us to the heart of the problem, our need for faith and dependence on God and what He has done for us in Christ. Will-worship is doomed to failure because it neutralizes faith in the Christian’s position and divine operating assets in Christ. It is the opposite of dependence on the Lord and His grace work. As long as we think we can deliver ourselves by our own willpower, it will only make the sin within us stronger.

Note also that in Colossians 2:23 the apostle teaches us that such man-made religion or will-worship has “an appearance of wisdom.” It will have an outward display of success to some degree, in certain areas, and for a time, but there will be serious flaws, cracks, and crevices in our righteousness and the true condition of our inner life will eventually manifest itself in spiritual failure.

Matthew 12:33-36 reveals another truth which is practical to this point.

Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man out of *his* good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of *his* evil treasure brings forth what is evil. 36 And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment.

The Pharisees to whom Christ was speaking in this passage were religious externalists who sought to be good by their own will power and religious works. Since their inner life was not being changed by God’s grace—by regeneration and by continued fellowship with the Lord—it was impossible for them to truly speak good things and behave in a righteous way. Sooner or later, regardless of their outward appearance, the real condition of the heart would become evident. Such is actually true of any of us, even though we are regenerated by the Spirit of God as believers in Christ. If our inner world is not being fortified daily by an intimate life with God, the true condition of the heart will come to the surface.

It is not that we want to be that way; we have no intention or desire to give vent to our inner hostilities, explode in anger, or react in self-pity, self-justification, arrogance, or act in fear. But, as we go through life, as we meet varying problems and people, the real condition of our heart will manifest itself.

Though we may try to cover these up, stifle them with all our might, the truth will come out by what we say or do, or even by our body language. Will power and good intentions have no defense against the

sinful nature. Only a heart, a spiritual mind which is right with God, one treasuring up God's truth and using it through these spiritual disciplines, can provide a defense against the unguarded moment.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

Knowing this, we are brought face to face with a vital truth. All aspects of true righteousness are gifts of God: imputed righteousness, experiential righteousness, and, of course, ultimate sanctification. It is essential that we understand that experiential righteousness, victory over the sin nature ("putting off old habits" and "putting on the godly character"), or overcoming life-dominating sins is the work of God. True, we are called upon to cooperate with God by faith and positive response to grace, but the needed transformation, the spiritual change, is grace given through our new life in Christ and the power of the Spirit.

Romans 5:17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

The gift of righteousness mentioned in Romans 5:17 should probably not be limited to imputed righteousness. There was no such dichotomy in Paul's theology. With the gift of God's righteousness in Christ also comes the work of God on our behalf to produce His righteousness within by grace through faith. So Paul adds, "will reign (live victoriously) in life through the One, Jesus Christ." When and where? In life, not just after this life, but even now through the new life that is ours in Jesus Christ.

Here, then is a key truth and a place where we can easily slip off the narrow road to spiritual change. When we grasp this truth, that righteousness is by grace, even experiential righteousness, we are tempted to do nothing (to "let go and let God") or to believe there is nothing we can do or should do. This is where these routines of spiritual disciplines comes into play. God has ordained these spiritual disciplines as the means of receiving His grace or of appropriating it into our lives so that God can change us. These disciplines allow us to put ourselves in the place of blessing and at God's disposal.

Galatians 6:7b reminds us of the law of the harvest. "For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." We reap according to what we sow. Just as a farmer is helpless to grow his crop without preparing the soil and sowing the seed, so we must prepare the soil of our hearts and sow the seed of the Word to reap a harvest of righteousness. Then automatically by the power of God's Word, the seed produces (Mark 4:26-29).

So it is with these spiritual disciplines. They are God's means of preparing the soil of our hearts, of sowing to the Spirit, and of setting the mind on the things of the Spirit. Without these spiritual disciplines, we sow to the flesh and reap of the flesh, either in mere human good and dead religious works or in sinful behavior or both.

One vital characteristic of godliness is contentment. Think about just how much evil exists because of greed and the lack of contentment. Paul wrote, "But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment" (1 Tim. 6:6). "Contentment" is the Greek word *autarkeia* meaning "self-sufficiency." But as this word is often used in the New Testament, it included the concept of becoming independent of things for one's satisfaction, significance, or security. Instead, these things are found in God through the sufficiency of Christ.

Philippians 4:10-13 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Regarding contentment, Spurgeon wrote:

We need not sow thistles and brambles; they come up naturally enough, because they are indigenous to earth: and so, we need not teach men to complain; they complain fast enough without any education. But the precious things of the earth must be cultivated. If we would have wheat, we must plough and sow; if we want flowers, there must be the garden, and all the gardener's care. Now, contentment is one of the flowers of heaven, and if we would have it, it must be cultivated; it will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature alone that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the grace which God has sown in us.²

In Genesis 12:1-13 we find that Abram failed to stay at the place of blessing near Bethel where he had built an altar to worship God. When faced with the famine, he failed to stay occupied with the Lord and moved south toward Egypt (a picture of the world) to find relief from the famine. Abram forgot God's promises and turned to his own solutions by escaping to Egypt and then by lying about his wife whom he claimed was his sister, a half truth.

Bethel means "house of God." This, along with the altar Abram had previously built there, reminds us of the need of times of worship and the spiritual disciplines which allow God to work to keep our hearts centered on Him and so, give us victory. We might say that Abraham forsook the dailies.

As David thought on the work and nature of God as his Shepherd, he prayed, "Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Psa. 23). We must be careful not to view these disciplines as a set of do's and don'ts. Rather, just as we would view a Thanksgiving table lavished with all its good things, so we need to view these spiritual disciplines as a communion table spread before us by the Lord; a place where we are invited to come and sit in order to dine and nourish our soul on the living God and His matchless grace.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.

Dangers to Keep in Mind

(1) These disciplines should not be thought of as a magical formula for spiritual change, nor as procedures to gain points with God. They only help to prepare the soil of the heart. They put us in the place where God can work His righteousness within through the Spirit of God, in the light of the Word of God and its sufficiency, and the sufficiency of Christ. It involves doing what we need to do to allow God's grace to work through the discipline of these procedures. As Paul challenged Timothy, "On the other

² Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Morning, Feb. 16, Electronic Format.

hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7b). Or as I might paraphrase Paul’s admonition to the Philippians, “Put your salvation to work, appropriate it, with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12b-13). Obedience to these disciplines is a matter of grace because through them we simply make ourselves available for the work of God.

(2) These spiritual disciplines are not just for pastor-teachers, missionaries, monks, or for those people often think of as spiritual giants. They are for all believers: for ordinary people, for people with jobs, families, children, etc., and for all believers in all levels of spiritual maturity.

(3) While these disciplines involve routine procedures, we must guard against allowing them to become simply routine, mere habit, drudgery, or legalistic procedures in which we take pride like the Pharisee who prayed proudly in Luke 18:11-12. Rather, these disciplines must be viewed as privileges of grace by which we draw near to God that He in turn may draw near to us. The goal is to know the living God more intimately, to experience His life within ours.

(4) While the dailies and weeklies involve specific set times (corporately and individually) they must not be limited to these times. In fact, these scheduled times are designed to bring these disciplines and the reality and truth of God into all the activities and circumstances of our day. So we should not just go to church once a week, or have our so-called “quiet time” with God and then forget it in a kind of “see you next week, God” or “see you in the morning, Lord.”

(5) The desire to feed at God’s table can have its own addiction that could keep us from seeing the hurts of our world. When the pursuit of the Savior and our inner life obscures the outer world and the needs of people, our spiritual disciplines become an aberration. We must not see our time alone with God as a means to escape the pain and pressure of a crazy world. We are simply taking steps to fortify our inner life.

The Dailies

The dailies refer to those daily spiritual disciplines and routines which are needed to maintain and experience personal fellowship or a personal walk with the Lord that will result in the fruit of growth, production, and spiritual change or Christlikeness. Included in these daily disciplines are prayer, Bible study and reading, Scripture memory, meditation, and daily dying to the self-life through faith and devotion to Christ.

The Importance of the Dailies

The importance of these daily disciplines is brought out in Scripture by a number of factors:

(1) There is the repetition of such words as “daily,” “today,” “night and day,” in contexts that stress prayer, Bible study, meditation, etc. (See Appendix 6 for passages that emphasize this ‘daily’ emphasis with principles that apply.)

(2) The need for these disciplines on a daily basis is seen from the nature of who we are as human beings. We are frail, weak, sinful, prone to wander in arrogant independence of God, and we possess a sinful nature which dominates and controls unless that power is broken by the power of Jesus Christ. Remember the old hymn with the words, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the Lord I love.” We are like sheep who tend to wander and turn to our own way.

Isaiah 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

(3) The Word warns us that we live in an evil day, and that our enemy, the devil, walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He does his best to divide and fragment the thinking of God's people. He tries to get people confused as to who they are and why they are here. He gets them preoccupied with other things. He wants them to be independent, to think like the world thinks, to think like the natural man thinks in the futility of his mind. He keeps people away from serious involvement with the Word of God in order to keep their relationship to God's Word superficial and secondary.

Ephesians 5:15-16 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

1 Peter 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Someone has said that our adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. Satan has a number of cultural values or belief systems, actually illusions he uses to confuse and manipulate the church so that it must, of necessity, fail in its calling and purpose. Each of these are opposed to and work against developing and maintaining the mind of Christ through studying and meditating on the Word. They are designed to keep us out of the Word which is so essential to our ability to avoid the delusions of Satan and the world system and to hear and respond to the call of God on our lives. (See Appendix 7 for a summary on the subtle snares of worldliness.)

(4) The Greek grammar of the New Testament also highlights our need. Some passages use the present tense of continuous action in the verbs that exhort believers to watchfulness. Others use the aorist imperative which carries an element of urgency because of the ever present danger of our enemies. All together, this strongly stresses that Christians must be on alert, watching carefully how they are walking and handling life each moment of the day (cf. Eph 5:15-16 and 1 Peter 5:8 above).

(5) To make things even more precarious, Scripture warns that, as the church age moves toward the last days, things will grow worse and worse meaning that the evil of the day and the demonic forces will not be in a state of status quo but will be very much on the increase. Thus, as that great day approaches there will be greater and greater difficulty and pressure on believers as well as for all mankind (cf. also 2 Tim. 3:1-4:4).

1 Timothy 4:1-3 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

This pressure will come in many forms to distract, discourage, and defeat believers. There will be direct demonic attack on the minds and bodies of men. There will be the problem and frustrations of national and international fiascoes of government, economic instability, greater government interference, increased loss of freedom, escalating talk of disarmament, world peace, and foreign policies with godless internationalists which leave us more and more open to the loss of our freedom. There will be continued breakdown in law enforcement and control of the criminal element. There will be, as we see so rampant today, the extreme moral breakdown of society where white is black, black is white, evil is good, and good is evil. And there will be the perpetuation and increase of the human viewpoint delusions and temptations to seek happiness in the details of life, in man-made religion, in asceticism, emotionalism and

materialism. So there will be increased danger for believers to become side-tracked, distracted, and loaded down with side issues in the pursuit of peace and prosperity, comfort and pleasure.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Philippians 3:17-19 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Romans 13:11-14 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Of course, God has not left us defenseless against the three enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:14; 5:4-5). However, the believer must avail himself of his spiritual assets in Christ, his spiritual armor, which God has so graciously issued him. So we are told in Ephesians 6:10 to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. This is a command for us to strengthen ourselves continually (a continuous present), moment by moment in the strength, power, and ability which God gives. Such strengthening is certainly aided through the spiritual disciplines of the daily life and the weekly assemblies.

Our Example

Since the Lord Jesus is our trailblazer and example to follow in the Christian life, we would expect to see Him emulate the dailies for us and this is precisely what we find (cf. Luke 5:15-16).

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Luke 5:15-16 But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

1 John 2:6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

In the Luke passage just quoted, Christ was in the thick of His ministry and popularity with hundreds coming to Him for aid and to hear Him speak (see also Mark 1:29-39). He had plenty of opportunity to claim, as many people do today, that He was too busy for prayer and private time with the Father. But even though the Savior often exercised His deity to perform His miraculous works, Jesus, the man, never operated from the source of His own ability or independently of the Father. Every step He took was a product of total dependence on the Holy Spirit.

John 14:10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.

Luke 5:16 begins with “but,” the Greek word *de*, an adversative or continuative particle. Here it is adversative and places verse 15 and 16 in contrast to one another to call our attention to an important point. The point is this. Though filled with all kinds of opportunities, though confronted with great needs and great popularity, though deeply burdened and concerned for the people, the Lord Jesus never ever neglected His own personal spiritual life with the Father. Daily and regularly He sought time for private fellowship to fill His life with the life of the Father.

The phrase “would *often* slip away” is what Greek grammarians call an imperfect periphrastic. This is a grammatical construction designed to lay some stress on the idea of action that was either customary or continuous in past time. The point is, this was the habit and custom of the Lord Jesus. He regularly slipped away for private personal time with the Father. Obviously, if He, the sinless God-man needed and valued this, then how much more should not you and I?

What the Dailies Include

Time in God’s Word

Based on the analogy of Scripture, the goal and ideal is to daily hear the voice of God speaking to us from His Word. We need to read, study, hear, meditate, and learn the Scripture and its truth, but for this to have its maximum impact on us, we need to daily get into the Word for ourselves. In this way, Bible study becomes a first hand, personal experience rather than simply second hand from someone else.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Proverbs 8:32-36 Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways. 33 Heed instruction and be wise, And do not neglect it. 34 Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. 35 For he who finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the LORD. 36 But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death.

Psalms 119:2 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart.

Psalms 119:2 points out two important ingredients that we do not want to miss as we think about the dailies. First, the verbs in this verse are in the imperfect tense and in a context like this, it denotes a process that is on going, a pattern of life. Second, the Psalmist pronounces blessing on those who observe (NASB) or keep (KJV, NIV) the testimonies of God’s Word. “Observe” is a Hebrew word (*nasar*) which means “to guard, watch over.” It is used of guarding one’s mouth (Prov. 13:3; Ps. 141:3), one’s tongue (Ps. 34:14), one’s path (Prov. 16:17), and the heart (Prov. 4:23), but it is also used of guarding with fidelity and this is usually centered around observing or keeping God’s covenant or His Word

(Deut. 33:9; Ps. 78:7; 119:2, 22, etc.).³ But third, we should note the second line of the verse, “Who seek Him with all *their* heart.” The goal is to seek and know the Lord. This is the great motivation for obedience. As we daily go to the Word, we should be seeking to see and know God in the pages of Scripture.

Suggested procedures for getting into the Word daily are:

(1) Follow a daily reading program that will take you through the Word in a year. Some excellent resources are: *Read through the Bible in a Year*, by John Kohlenberger, Moody Press. Another is *The One Year Bible*, by Tyndale House. This comes in most of the versions. Some study Bibles contain such a guide. One illustration is *The Ryrie Study Bible*.

(2) For those who spend considerable time on the road, an excellent way to hear the Word is to listen to the Scriptures on tape.

(3) Spend time in personal study and examination of a portion of Scripture. Read for major ideas and ask questions like who, what, why, how, etc. Take notes on your observations and discoveries. List promises, principles, commands, warnings, and personal applications. Above all, pay attention to what you can learn about the glories of God—mercy, grace, love, goodness, etc.

(4) Today, good studies on the Scripture (commentaries, doctrinal studies, etc.) are not only available in books and magazines, but through the Internet. Find conservative, sound, evangelical sites like the Biblical Studies Foundation and download the studies that are in keeping with your personal needs. But whatever you read, always keep your Bible handy and check what you read against the Scripture itself (cf. Acts 17:11).

(5) Become involved with a Bible teaching ministry that makes the preaching and study of the Word a priority and regularly attend the services and Bible studies. Take notes when you hear the Word taught and then study those notes with an open Bible as part of your daily time in the Word. This will prepare you for the next lesson and help you to personalize what you are hearing.

Meditating on the Word

Psalm 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

In his excellent work on the spiritual life, *Pathways to Power*, Unger wrote these introductory words to his chapter on meditation:

Meditation upon God’s Word is fast becoming a lost art among many Christian people. This holy exercise of pondering over the Word, chewing it as an animal chews

³ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, Moody Press, Chicago, 1980, p. 495.

its cud to get its sweetness and nutritive virtue into the heart and life, takes time, which ill fits into the speed of our modern age. Today most Christians' devotions are too hurried, their lives too rushed. But holiness and hurry never did suit well together. Prayer and preoccupation have always been strange bed-fellows. A head knowledge of the Word may perhaps be consonant with the scurry of the age, but not a deep heart experience of its preciousness. A deep knowledge of spiritual things can only come by the way of unhurried reflection upon God's truth and by prayer.⁴

The fervor of the ancient Psalmist for the Word of God needs to grip our hearts today (Psa. 119:97, 103). Personal Bible study along with the memorization of Scripture work in concert with meditation. Meditation should really become a part of study, memory work, and prayer.

The word used the most for "meditation" in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *hagah* which means "to utter, moan, growl, speak, think carefully, ponder, meditate." So two ideas are prevalent in this word, thinking and speaking. The original idea is that of speaking with oneself, murmuring in a low voice as is sometimes done when we are carefully thinking and pondering over something we are about to do or say. For this idea compare the following verses:

Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Proverbs 24:2 For their minds devise violence, And their lips talk of trouble.

Psalms 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

The principle idea of the word as used in Psalm 1:2 and Joshua 1:8 is that of carefully and personally reflecting on the Word, on a point of doctrine, or on a passage of Scripture. Meditation involves personalizing the truth of Scripture and speaking to ourselves with its principles so that God's Word is transformed from the *logos* (the revelation of God) to the *rhema* (the spoken Word of God), that which has spoken to us in a personal way. Meditation, then, involves insight to Scripture with personal application as James so exhorts us:

James 1:22-25 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

Why do we meditate? In eastern oriental meditation men meditate in order to empty the mind. But biblical meditation operates on the principle of exchange or renewal. We are to meditate, not aimlessly or

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Pathways to Power*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1953, p. 41.

mystically, but to cleanse the mind of man's thoughts and ways in order to fill it with God Himself and His thoughts and ways. Meditation is done to exchange man's point of view with God's truth.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Psalms 119:15 I will meditate on Thy precepts, And regard Thy ways.

One of the main purposes for the daily disciplines is renewal and replacement. In Luke 11:24-28 the demon possessed man failed in his quest for freedom after the removal of the demon because of failure with regard to the principle of replacement.

None of us can overcome sin merely by renouncing it or by human reformation. We can only overcome sin when we replace it with God's righteousness through His plan of redemption and sanctification in Christ. Sinful habits cannot be broken without replacing them with righteous ones through the life of Jesus Christ. The daily disciplines help us to appropriate His life by faith. In Philippians we are told to meditate or think on biblical topics and good things.

Philippians 4:8-9 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.

Let's look at an illustration. If you want to replace all the air in a bottle you do it by filling it with something else. Meditation only has value when it is occupied with God and His truth.

When should we meditate? There should be specified times, scheduled times when we get alone to reflect and ponder on the Word of God (Psa. 63:6; 119:148). We should also meditate without ceasing, day and night, all through the day (Josh. 1:8; Psa. 1:2).

For some of the rewards of meditation note the following verses:

Psalms 1:3 And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

1 Timothy 4:15-16 Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

Meditation can produce rest, removal of tension, and can lower the blood pressure which means better health. It can also give us greater insights into God, biblical truth, self, our true needs versus our wants, the needs of others and the needs of our ministries.

Since we cannot meditate biblically in a vacuum, and because it may open our mind up to Satan's attacks, there are some biblical requirements for meditation:

(1) Be in the Word—To meditate biblically we must be in the Word, hearing, reading, studying, memorizing. This means we must establish priorities, discipline, scheduling time for this daily and week-

ly. It also involves ways and means by which we can accomplish this need, like purchasing books, getting involved in a memory program, carrying a cassette in our car, etc.

(2) Desire and Longing—Psalm 1:2 says of the man who meditates, “but his delight is in the Law of the Lord.” Closely related here is a recognition of the need. First Peter 2:2 says, “like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”

(3) Be Prepared for Battle—Through the Word and the indwelling Holy Spirit we have the spiritual equipment with which to destroy the evil fortresses of the mind, the vain reasonings, powerful imaginations, rationalizations, and the perverted viewpoints and attitudes of the world. But Satan will not give up his ground without a struggle, so we must be prepared. This basically means being prepared to resist Satan with our spiritual armor (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10f).

When confronted with sinful thoughts we need to:

(1) Identify the evil thoughts—God’s Word, Bible teaching, and study provides the index for what is evil.

(2) Recognize their nature—They are futile, destructive, vain.

(3) Confess them if you have cultivated them.

(4) Refocus and replace them with the viewpoint of God’s Word—Draw upon biblical truth.

(5) Meditate—think on these things, on God’s Word.

Memorization of truth

Proverbs 6:20-22 My son, observe the commandment of your father, And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; 21 Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you.

Exodus 13:16 So it shall serve as a sign on your hand, and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 6:8 And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

Exodus 13:16 and Deuteronomy 6:8 are to be taken figuratively for remembering God’s truth so that it is readily available to apply to the situations of life. The frontals or frontlet bands on the forehead stood for the retention and thinking area of the mind. The sign on the hand referred to the application of doctrine to the concerns of life. The hand also speaks of doing, working, and serving from the motivation, skill, and ability which God’s Word gives.

The Pharisees of Christ’s day took this literally and wore phylacteries, little leather boxes or pouches containing four parts of Scripture (Ex. 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deut. 4:4-9; 11:13-21). These were tied about the head and hands and were worn by some as a charm for protection against evil which was never God’s intent. Jesus Christ strongly condemns this in Matthew 23:5 because it missed the metaphorical picture and original intent.

Phylactery is the Greek word *phulakterion* and means “an outpost,” or “a place of fortification.” The word is from *phulax* which means “to guard,” so it means “any kind of safeguard.” But wearing a

phylactery came to be used by some as a kind of amulet. The Word of God is not to be carried as an ornament or amulet, but stored in the mind as a guard against man's viewpoint or that of the world, Satan's devices, and the sinful nature. Christ was also condemning the Pharisees for the external show of their religious practices.

Thus, right from the start we have a very pertinent warning regarding our worship practices whether they are corporate (the weekly assemblies) or individual (the dailies). These are never to degenerate into mere religious, external practices as a kind of mysterious charm against evil, nor are we to do them to impress others (Matt. 23:5). Rather, they are a means of getting the Word within our hearts so that, if it is understood clearly and retained, it can then be applied carefully and accurately to bring every thought and action into the captivity and obedience of Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

In Proverbs 3:1 the command is given "my son do not forget my teaching." "Teaching" is the Hebrew word, *torah*, the term used for the Law. Fundamentally, it means "direction, instruction." Here it refers to the principles of doctrine taught by the parent in the home, based, of course, upon the Law, the Old Testament Scripture. Verse 3 tells us how this is to be accomplished, but first there is a reiteration of the need to retain God's truth. "Do not let kindness and truth leave you." "Kindness" is the Hebrew word *chesed*, and in this context, undoubtedly refers to the steadfast love and grace of God and His provision for man. So it is again a command not to forget the Word which is the storehouse of grace and truth.

Then, Solomon points us to the method of remembrance:

"Bind them around your neck." Though the language is slightly different, this alludes to the memorization of God's Word metaphorically pictured in Exodus 13:16 and Deuteronomy 6:8. God's grace and truth are to be retained, memorized, so that through their application, they become an ornament of beauty to the life.

"Write them on the tablet of your heart." This is added so the picture is clear. In this context, "heart" refers to the mind, and "writing" to the process of memorizing which implants the instruction of grace and truth in the mind.

Proverbs 3:21-22 My son, let them not depart from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion, 22 So they will be life to your soul, And adornment to your neck.

Proverbs 4:21 Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart.

Proverbs 6:20-23 My son, observe the commandment of your father, And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; 21 Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you. 23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life,

Proverbs 6:20 gives the command to retain and apply the Word. Then verse 21 points us to the method. "Bind" is the Hebrew word *gashar* which means "to confine, league, tie together, bind fast and firmly." "Heart" again refers to the mind. The Word is to be memorized, bound securely and confined to

the mind so that it cannot escape. But it is to be so bound that truth is tied together with truth. Perhaps the idea is that it is all to be joined together so that, as God's truth is memorized and stored in the mind, it forms a wall of protection to the believer as well as an ornament of grace.

"Bind" (*gashar*) is used this way in Nehemiah 4:6, "... the whole wall was joined together ..." As the people rebuilt the wall and joined its sections together for the city's protection, so believers are to rebuild their minds with God's viewpoint by memorizing the Word. Thus, a wall of protection is developed against the forces of evil.

"Continually" is the Hebrew word *tamid*. The need for continuousness could have been expressed by a participle, or by an imperfect tense, but to make sure we get the point, this special word is added. This is to be a process which goes on without interruption throughout life.

"Tie them around your neck" is again metaphorical of the applying what has been memorized so that it forms an ornament of beauty portraying godly character.

Proverbs 6:22 gives us the general effects of the memorization-meditation process. God's Word provides guidance and protection in the conscious and subconscious life. God's truth becomes a friend for all times and seasons—a guide by day and a comforter by night.

Proverbs 6:23 describes something of the nature of God's truth and illustrates something of what it does.

"Commandment" is singular and may refer to the Bible as a whole, as God's special orders to direct our lives. But to know God's commandment is like carrying a lamp to light our path. "Teaching" is the Hebrew *torah* and could well refer to the categories of doctrine that are to be memorized as a light for life.

"Reproofs for discipline." "Reproofs" is a word which means "argument, reproof, rebuke, correction." "Discipline" means "discipline, chastening, corrections, training" but it can also refer to "instruction" or "principles and precepts of doctrine" that are designed to discipline, correct, and train so that one is brought into conformity to the plan and way of God. The phrase could be paraphrased, "the correction/training received from the principles of doctrine is the way of life." So we should memorize verses of Scripture, categories of doctrine, and the principles of the Word as well. The principle behind this is that the believer should first understand, learn, and then commit to memory everything he can about the Word.

Proverbs 7:1-3 My son, keep my words, And treasure my commandments within
you. 2 Keep my commandments and live, And my teaching as the apple of your eye.
3 Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Committing God's Word to memory gives us the capacity to recall His truth for meditation, application, and utilization. Just as hearing is not learning and understanding; so understanding is not memorization. The Apostle Peter calls this to our attention and had this concept in mind in 2 Peter 1:12-13. One of his teaching techniques was repetition so that people might not only know and understand a doctrine or verse of Scripture, but that by repetition they might have it memorized for easier recall and constant availability.

2 Peter 1:12-13 Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things,
even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is
present with you. 13 And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling,
to stir you up by way of reminder,

Thus, through the dailies, the truth of the Word of God, in one form or another (verses of Scripture, principles of doctrine, categories, etc.) is constantly reviewed and gradually committed to memory. Then the Holy Spirit is free to bring back to mind principles of the Word or passages which are pertinent to the needs of the moment.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Though by strict interpretation this passage was a promise given to those who would later write the New Testament, it may illustrate how the Spirit brings to mind the truth we have committed to memory for application to the situations of life.

Prayer

Very soon the apostles of the early church were faced with the rising needs of the people and their desire for the apostles to come to their aid which would pull them away from their primary responsibilities (Acts 6:1). This illustrates the typical centrifugal pulls which often come with ministry and the temptation to invest time and energies in many good and necessary tasks. But the apostles refused and determined rather to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They did not ignore the needs, they found others to do the work described in Acts 6:1, but they refused to be drawn away from the greatest need—prayer and the teaching of the Word.

Acts 6:1-4 at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

It has been reported that Martin Luther once said: "I have so much business, I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer." Like Martin Luther, these early disciples recognized that the secret to failure is failure in secret prayer.

In Acts 6:4 the word "devoted" means "to attend steadfastly to, to persist in a certain course of action." Here the action is prayer and the study and teaching of the Word. And a careful reading of Psalm 119 teaches us that we really cannot even study God's Word effectively without prayer.

How do you suppose these apostles came to such a conviction and commitment to prayer? While the Lord Jesus was on earth, these men never asked, "Lord, teach us to preach," or "teach us how to study." But they did ask "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). The point is they had never seen anyone pray like Christ with the fervency, the dependency, and the consistency with which He always prayed. What they didn't realize then, but did later, was that he was teaching them both by His life and His lips. Christ's whole life was a lesson in prayer and prayerful dependence upon the Father for everything He did; the words He taught, the miracles He performed, everything.

This request of the disciples was followed and answered by some specific directions on prayer, and many other passages in the gospels set forth the teachings of Christ on prayer. Nothing, however, probably had as much effect as our Lord's own life of dependency upon the Father as seen in His prayer life.

What exactly did they see in Christ's life? Prayer was more than an occasional practice. It was a moment-by-moment attitude, an attitude of heart and mind. For Jesus Christ prayer was like breathing. His life teaches us that prayer is to the spiritual life what breathing is to the physical life. Prayer for the believer should become just as automatic as breathing as Paul exhorts us "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

Obviously then, our daily prayer does not always consist of just a specific time, but should be an attitude of praying without ceasing, ever drawing upon and communicating with our heavenly Father.

How did the disciples come to see this need so that they would ask the question, "Lord, teach us to pray"? By the constant attitude of expectation and prayerfulness which our Lord demonstrated in everything He did. Before He performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, he looked up and thanked the Father. Before He told Lazarus to come forth, He thanked the Father (Luke 10:21-22). Of course He was also seen spending long hours in prayer, often very early in the morning, sometimes all night, and often in the midst of the busiest times of His ministry.

Christ was demonstrating to His disciples by the example of His life that at all times men ought to pray and never to lose heart (faint) (Luke 18:1). The words "at all times" means that constantly, in every situation and circumstance, even when things appear to be going our way, when we do not see some special crisis or need, we still need to pray. It's like the old hymn, "I Need Thee Every Hour." Indeed we need God's sustaining grace every moment.

Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

"Ought" is the Greek word *dei* which emphasizes a moral and spiritual necessity and obligation. "Lose heart" is the Greek *enkakeō* from *en*, a preposition meaning "in," and *kakos*, "bad, mean, worthless," and thus "to act badly or in an evil way." But in usage, it came to mean "to act cowardly, to lose heart, faint." When we faint, give up, become depressed, etc., we are acting badly as though God were dead, didn't care, and was helpless to enable us or to guide and provide for us. This verse emphasizes a contrast of alternatives. Either we pray constantly or we will faint, act badly or cowardly.

Why don't we pray as we should? Why isn't prayer like breathing for us as it was for Christ? Perhaps it's because, as one man put it, we treat it like a fire extinguisher which has a sign "for emergency use only!" Why is that? Why don't we at all times enjoy the privilege and power of prayer? Why aren't we like the Psalmist who declared in his determined commitment "in the morning, O Lord Thou wilt hear my voice, in the morning I will direct my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch"? (Psalm 5:3)

Psalm 119:164 Seven times a day I praise Thee, Because of Thy righteous ordinances.

Part of the answer lies in an awareness of our need and an attitude of expectancy and faith—believing God will work in our life through prayer. Another cause for our self-sufficiency is our failure to truly allow the Word to speak to our hearts (Psalm 119:164). The daily intake of the Word not only guides us in how to pray biblically, but it should become a great incentive to pray and communicate with our God. (See Appendix 8 for George Müller's comments on the importance of the Word to his prayer life.)

Far too often in our prayer, private or corporate, we are merely fulfilling a religious duty which we think God wants and which we ourselves know is important. But somehow we fail to enter into prayer out of a sense of our need and in a state of believing expectancy, praying in faith, knowing and believing

God is at work in answer to our prayers. I think too, that people do not pray expectantly because they are afraid God will work and it will mean changing our habits, or that God send us somewhere and we aren't really available.

The Weeklies

Our second routine procedure is likewise essential for deliverance from those daily life-dominating patterns. The book of Nehemiah records the third return of a remnant of believers to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity. The first and second returns are recorded for us in the book of Ezra. The third return is recorded for us in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah the prophet returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. This was accomplished miraculously through the leadership of Nehemiah as recorded in the first seven chapters of the book. The last chapters deal with spiritual reformation in the nation (Neh. 11-13), but, before spiritual reformation can occur, there needs to be spiritual renewal of the heart and repentance.

Nehemiah 8:1-12 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. ... 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. 8 And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. 9 Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." 11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

It is interesting and instructive in the passage above that we first find the people gathering together to hear the Word of the Lord explained and proclaimed by Ezra the scribe, a man highly trained in the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures (Ezra 7:6; Neh. 8:1-8). On this day of the reading and explanation of God's Word, the people were told "'this day is holy (set apart, important) to the Lord your God: do not mourn or weep.' For all the people were weeping when they heard the Words of the law." Then in verse

10, in connection with this day and the explanation and reading of Scripture, they were told not to be grieved, for the joy of the Lord was their strength.

What is the “joy of the Lord?” May I suggest to you that it is God’s people assembled to hear God’s Word read and explained which brings conviction and repentance, and brings them into vital communion and fellowship with the Lord because this further increases their knowledge of Him and His life and plan for the believer’s life. This is called “the joy of the Lord” because it causes joy in the heart of God when God’s people assemble to hear and respond to His Word.

It is also this assembling together to hear God’s Word that gives strength and stability to believers (8:10). It provides the spiritual renewal necessary for understanding God’s ways (8:12b, 13), repentance of our ways (9:1-3), praise to God for His being and actions in history (9:5ff), and reformation or godly change in one’s own life (10:28-13:31).

Malachi 3:16 is another Old Testament passage which speaks to us on this subject of regularly assembling to worship and think together on the Lord and the things of our salvation.

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name.

As the context in this passage suggests, the wicked and the world are constantly mouthing their secular, humanistic viewpoint and their accusations against God and His truth. We live in an evil age that is rampant with the viewpoint of a world system in opposition to God, so the godly must be warned and instructed against that which they hear and face in the world. In the midst of spiritual failure and corruption all around, the people of God must come together to hear, learn, think, and reckon on their God.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

There can be no real deliverance and depth in our walk with God without this. Assembling together for fellowship with one another in prayer, praise, and study is absolutely essential to godly living and spiritual change.

The same truth is found in the New Testament with an even stronger emphasis. In Acts 2:42f we find that the New Testament church in Jerusalem actually met together daily for fellowship in prayer, the Lord’s Supper, and the study of the Word. The results were phenomenal in terms of expressions of love, unity, and outreach, or souls added to the church by the Lord.

Acts 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Another passage we can learn from is 1 Corinthians 15:33: “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.” First, we have a command. Literally it means either “stop being deceived” or “never allow yourself to be deceived.” The point is, people are being deceived; they think that the people they pal around with (or with whom they fail to spend time as with the body of believers) have nothing to do with their behavior patterns or their spiritual life. Paul tells us that to think that way is foolish. It is to be led astray, deceived by spiritual ignorance, or indifference. Note the connection in the following verses:

1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;

1 Corinthians 6:9-12 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. 12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:33, Paul quotes a Greek proverb under inspiration because it is absolutely true and pertinent to the believer’s life, growth, and victory in this life. The basic and clear principle is—those with whom we spend time, and what we do in those associations has a definite bearing on our conduct. This is a spiritual law of life.

The verb “corrupts” is what we call a gnomic present tense. It points to a general principle of life, to what is always true. The verb means “to spoil, ruin, destroy.” “Manners” is also interesting. It is the Greek word *ethos* which means “custom, usage, habit, or pattern.” It is used in connection with habits of purity, or good patterns of behavior. Now the principle is clear—running with the wrong crowd, and failure to assemble with believers for fellowship in the things of God’s Word, definitely affects one’s capacity for spiritual change.

But let’s note a further implication here. It is not enough to just avoid the wrong crowd, or refuse to intimately associate with those who have no interest in spiritual things, nor is it enough to just start spending time with believers in formal and informal gatherings to hear the Word. One needs to do both, to put off the old associations from the standpoint of running with them as before (1 Pet. 4:4), and to put on the new associations, to regularly assemble for fellowship with believers.

Perhaps the strongest passage on our need to weekly meet together with other believers for fellowship and spiritual encouragement is Hebrews 10:24-25:

and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

In verse 24 we are asked to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Literally, the Greek text says, “Let us consider one another with a view to stimulating love and good deeds.” This is first an exhortation to pay attention to one another that we might minister to each other to help them experience the sufficiency of Christ’s love in the interest of also promoting love and good deeds.

Then in verse 25 the author of Hebrews gives us the means whereby we can do this. The means is two-fold:

First, by “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some ...” It is perfectly clear. One way to minister and be ministered to is by cultivating the pattern of frequently and regularly meeting together for fellowship with the saints (believers in Christ).

Of course the question arises, how often should we assemble? Some think once a week is enough, others, once or twice a month. But the early church met daily, and later they met at least once a week on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

But this is not what the passage tells us in the last clause of this verse, which the author leaves last for emphasis. He says, “and all the more as you see the day (the day of Christ’s coming) drawing near.” Wow! If one only has a heart to hear God’s Word, this is plain. This is not a legal thing wherein we put in so many appearances a month or a week. This is related to our need and the recognition of not only the importance and blessing of meeting together, but also of the growing dangers, deceptions, pulls, and distractions of the last days as we get closer and closer to the return of the Lord.

So what does the author mean by “all the more ...” In the Greek text the phrase is a dative or instrumental of degree or measure stressing quantity, size, or amount. Literally the text says “by so much the more as.” The principle is that we aren’t given a specific number of times to follow. That which determines this is our sensitivity to the times in which we live and the great importance of assembling together and the results it is designed to have on our lives.

In addition, we are not simply to assemble together without purpose, or just to get together socially. So the text adds “but (by) encouraging one another.” The word “encouraging” is *parakaleō*. This is a very broad term with a variety of ideas though all are somewhat related. It means “to call on, beseech, exhort, or admonish, cheer, encourage, comfort.”

Regardless, in whatever sense it is used, it makes a strong appeal to the individual to make a choice, or to act or move in a certain direction. The appeal may be *prospective* in the sense of obey God’s Word, follow its instruction, or respond to the Lord in some area (Rom. 12:1). Or the appeal may be *retrospective* in the sense of believing God’s Word and being comforted or consoled over what has happened, as with some trial or loss as with the loss of a loved one in death.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

When we put this in the total context of the book of Hebrews, one of the primary purposes of assembling together then, is to hear the Word taught and expounded which comforts, exhorts, and encourages us in our walk with the Lord. The exposition of the Word along with the personal encouragement of one another become the means of exhortation and comfort which promotes love and good deeds (cf. also Heb. 3:7f; 5:1-6:1).

Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Hebrews 13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

The issues are clear, or should be. We all desperately need time in seclusion with God. We need to be still that we might know God more intimately; that we might truly know that He is God (Ps. 46:10).

To grow in our walk with the Lord and to experience biblical change that occurs from the inside out, we must be hearers and doers of the Word through the dailies and the weeklies.

The problem of living in an affluent and secular society is we become so easily duped and we fail to understand our real need. Our need in the spiritual realm is far greater than our dulled awareness. We have been numbed to our need because we have so much in the physical realm and in some ways, at least, we seem to be able to cope with life. Indeed, some seem to prosper without God at all. This almost caused the Psalmist to slip as he wrote in Psalm 73:1-3. But later, having come into the sanctuary or house of God, the place of fellowship (equivalent for us to the dailies and weeklies), he saw how numbed he had become and wrote the beautiful words in the rest of the Psalm.

Scripture warns us that “man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Deut. 8:3). And our Lord warned us: “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions,” “For life is more than food and the body than clothing,” “But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you” (Luke 12:15, 23, 31).

The Dailies and Weeklies: A Means of God’s Protection

If properly understood and utilized, the dailies and weeklies are God’s protection for us against certain dangers:

(1) Misplaced Confidence. It is so easy for us to put our confidence in the wrong things—in people, possessions, good health, power, position, wealth, personal abilities, training, and on the list goes. This is one of the warnings God gave to Israel once they entered the land. The danger of our physical blessings is that they can so easily numb us to our real needs.

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you shall eat and be satisfied, 12 then watch yourself, lest you forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Luke 12:15-18 And He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” 16 And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a certain rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 And he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’”

(2) Misused Privileges. Though our new life and spiritual blessings and privileges are the foundation for spiritual success, they do not guarantee it. They must be appropriated by faith and used daily or we become callused to the presence and blessing of God and it can happen so quickly (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-10:12).

Just three days after the children of Israel had seen God deliver them from Pharaoh's army through the miracle of the Red Sea and had sung the glorious song of God's redemption, they began to grumble against Moses when they came to Marah and found only bitter water to drink. You would think that, having witnessed what they did, and having sung God's praise in declaration of His person and power, they would have responded to the situation with something like, "Lord, since there is no one like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders, we are trusting you to give us water and to meet our need." But in only three days they got their eyes off the Lord and on the situation in callused unbelief.

But you know, if we are not extremely careful, it's no different for you and me. The need is for us to daily hear the warning of the apostle: "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

(3) Misplaced Priorities. In our materialistic society, perhaps no passage is more crucial than Matthew 6:19-34. Why? Well, because our treasures are so determinative regarding what we do with our lives. One's perspective (earthly and temporal versus heavenly and eternal) determines one's treasures, and one's treasures determine devotion, values, and priorities. It is so easy for us to be duped into devoting ourselves to that which passes away.

A clear demonstration of our values is an undying commitment to the Word as the index and fountain of our lives. Many Christian leaders tip their hand here. They espouse this conviction with their mouth, but deny it by their activity and business. They are "go go boys." On his daily radio program some years back, I heard Dr. Paul Meier, a well-known Christian psychologist in Dallas, Texas, say he needed at least two hours a day to meditate on the Word. Our values and commitments demonstrate not only our love for God, but our awareness of our real needs.

(4) Missed Reality or Hypocrisy. We simply cannot live, experience, or impart to others what we do not possess ourselves! The genuineness of our relationship and walk with the Savior will always determine the reality of what we are in our experience. The biblical prayer is not, "Lord, change my wife or children or church board," but "Lord, change me. Make me like your Son."

Matthew 23:1-5 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. 4 And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. 5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments."

Isaiah 29:13 Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote."

I think it was Howard Hendricks who said, "the big question is not simply, is Christianity true? There is plenty of historical evidence that it is. The basic question is what difference is it making in my life? This is what the world looks for in our lives as the evidence of the real thing." It is the dailies that

can help keep us real with the Lord if we take the warnings given earlier in this study and approach them as a time to feed at the table of the Lord rather than as an obligation.

May we heed the words of the old hymn:

Take time to be holy, Speak oft with thy Lord,
Abide in Him always, And feed on His Word,
Take time to be holy, The world rushes on;
Much time spend in secret, With Jesus alone;
Take time to be holy, Let Him be thy Guide,
And run not before Him, whatever be tide.

**Part Three:
The Multiplied Life**

Preface

We live in a self-centered, consumer-oriented world that looks at life, religion included, primarily from a selfish point of view. And this world viewpoint all too easily rubs off on Christians. A large portion of the Christian community sees the blessings and provisions God has given us in Christ as designed strictly for our own personal happiness and comfort. Our tendency today is to make satisfaction and personal comfort our religion. As Packer notes:

We show much more concern for self-fulfillment than for pleasing our God. Typical of Christianity today, at any rate in the English-speaking world, is its massive rash of how-to-books for believers, directing us to more successful relationships, more joy in sex, becoming more of a person, realizing our possibilities, getting more excitement each day, reducing our weight, improving our diet, managing our money, licking our families into happier shape, and whatnot. For people whose prime passion is to glorify God, these are doubtless legitimate concerns; but the how-to books regularly explore them in a self-absorbed way that treats our enjoyment of life rather than the glory of God as the center of interest.¹

By contrast, Scripture teaches us that even the comfort we receive from God is to enable us to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves receive from Him (2 Cor. 1:3-4). In other words, like our Savior who came not to be ministered to but to minister, the Christian life is to be other oriented.

In keeping with this focus on ministry, one of God's objectives for the church is that we might allow Him to reproduce Himself in us as good stewards of His abundant grace. A steward is a manager, not an owner. He is one who manages the property of another. God is the owner and we are the managers of the various stewardships He has given. This includes the whole of life, of course. But to be good stewards of His grace, we must know the precise areas of stewardship for which God is holding us accountable. Scripture breaks this down into a number of areas. For instance, children are a gift from God and one of our most important stewardships. According to the creation mandate of Genesis chapter one, we are also to be good stewards of His creation. But for the purposes of this study, we will limit our focus to four areas.

1. The stewardship of *time*—redeeming it for eternity.
2. The stewardship of *talents*—discovering and developing our spiritual gifts and natural talents for the blessing of others and for God's glory.
3. The stewardship of God's *truth*—multiplying ourselves through evangelism and discipleship.
4. The stewardship of our *treasures*—laying up treasures in heaven through financial faithfulness.

Each of these subjects are obviously worthy of an entire book and many have done just that. However, in keeping with the goal of laying a foundation for Christian growth, some sections will be somewhat limited though a considerable amount of space will be devoted to evangelism and discipleship.

¹ J. I. Packer, *Keeping in Step With the Spirit*, Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan, NJ, 1984, p. 97.

Lesson 1:
The Stewardship of Time
Multiplying the Life Through Redeeming the Time

Introduction

There are many inequities in the world, but one thing we all have in common is the same amount of time each day. God has allotted twenty-four hours to each one of us. Perhaps, because we are products of our fast-paced society, we tend to think and act as though God has short changed us when it comes to time. It is not uncommon to hear comments like, “There just isn’t enough time in a day to do everything I need to do.” “I just don’t know where the time goes.” “I’ll try to find time, but I’m hard pressed for time at the present.” In our day when many people meet themselves coming and going, most people feel pushed for time. The feeling is that there simply aren’t enough hours in a day. Life with all its demands is far too busy.

We fill our conversations with phrases which convey the rush of our modern times. Along with the statements just mentioned, we speak of the *peak* or *rush* hour of the day, or we tell family members to get a move on because we don’t have all day. We regularly use words like *urgent*, *priority*, or *pressing*. There was a time when we viewed telegrams as adequate for sending vital information. But today, not only do we have the telephone, fax, email, and the Internet, but we have priority mail, even next-day delivery so we can send an important document or package the very next day thousands of miles away.

With all our modern conveniences and technological advances we should have more leisure time than any period in history, but the opposite is really the case. For most people it’s run, run, run, go, go, go, and so much so most people seem to be out of breath. How ironic.

Robert Banks has an interesting note on this for the Christian.

With respect to time, Christians are a good deal worse off than many. This is especially the case if they live in a large city, belong to the middle-classes, have managerial or professional positions, or combine outside employment with substantial household responsibilities.

Christians and people raised in a Christian setting tend to take their work more seriously than others. They also place a high value on family obligations. And they are often in the forefront of community and charitable associations. The upshot of this commitment to work, community and family is, as my eldest son commented: ‘Christians are like trains—always on the move, always in a rush, and always late.’¹

If you are a pastor of a large church (and many pastors of small churches don’t fair much better), time is even more critical. Due to the extreme demands and unreasonable expectations placed on pastors, finding time to fulfill all these expectations is virtually impossible. They literally bump into themselves in the process of trying to meet their schedule. Pastors and their wives are often like ships passing in the night.

¹ Robert Banks, *The Tyranny of Time: When 24 Hours Is Not Enough*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL, 1983, p. 32.

The Purpose of This Study

The design of this study and its focus is certainly not to get Christians busier. It is not busier lives that we need. What is needed is a better use of the time we have combined with a biblical view of time on earth from the standpoint of who we are as Christians, where we are, what we should and should not expect from this world, and why we are here.

In our performance-oriented society, activity that produces some kind of result is placed at a premium and time is viewed from a utilitarian standpoint. Unless we can see some kind of obvious yield, the time spent is viewed as wasted time. Whatever we do must be accomplishing something tangible and this includes even our time spent in worship whether alone or gathered with the body of Christ.

Most of us sense something else about time: it is a resource. Moreover, it is a unique resource. It cannot be accumulated like money or stockpiled like raw materials. We are forced to spend it, whether we choose to or not, and at a fixed rate of 60 seconds every minute. It cannot be turned on and off like a machine or replaced like a man. It is irretrievable.²

Of course, time is a resource and we should not waste the time God has given us. Scripture addresses this issue. But is play, leisure, rest, and simply smelling the roses a waste of time? Hardly! We have reached the point, however, where even leisure time has taken on a kind of utilitarian bent. We must see our time off from work, no matter what the reason (worship, leisure, play, etc.), as a means of making us more effective in the workplace or in Christian service. Though there is some truth to this, have we not carried it too far?

Writing to draw our attention to the importance and need of learning to relax and enjoy leisure time, Swindoll says:

Work is fast becoming the American Christian's major source of identity. The answer to most of our problems (we are told) is "work harder." And to add the ultimate pressure, "You aren't really serving the Lord unless you consistently push yourself to the point of fatigue." It's the old burn-out-rather-than-rust-out line.³

The problem we each face in our society today is not the amount of time a sovereign God has allotted to us, but our view of time and life itself, and how we use the time we have.

As the Eternal One, God is not limited by time as we are. He is the sovereign of time. With Him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (1 Tim. 1:17; cf. 2 Pet. 3:8). He sees the past, present, and the future as one. But unlike God, temporal and finite man is confined to twenty-four hours each day and to a certain number of days in the life which God allots him.

This does not mean, however, that man's temporal life is meaningless and without eternal ramifications. True, the Bible teaches us that time is a resource and a stewardship for which we are all responsible before God. But if we are not careful, we can fall into the trap of the western mindset which sees time strictly from the utilitarian standpoint where performance and accomplishments or doing something productive is the all-important goal. When this happens, we lose the capacity to simply enjoy God, people, and the life God has given us. Again, as is the case in all of life, we need a biblical balance. Without this

² R. Alec Mackenzie, *The Time Trap*, McGraw Hill, McGraw Hill, New York, 1972, p. 2.

³ Charles Swindoll, *Leisure*, Multnomah Press, Portland, 1981, p. 1.

balance we become feverish, legalistic joy killers, and will destroy our capacity to be the people God has called us to be.

The Problem of the Tyranny of Time

Rather than a friend, we have turned time into a tyrant. And we have allowed this tyrant to invade and dominate our lives. If you look carefully at our society, you can easily see the decline in our social life and in our relationships with people brought on by the tyranny of time and by our failure to grasp the meaning of time from a biblical perspective. Regarding this decline, Robert Banks has this to say:

Seizing on the image of a familiar children's toy, Don McLean compares the average person to a spinning top:

Round and round this world you go,
Spinning through the lives of the people you know ...
How you gonna keep on turning from day to day?
How you gonna keep from turning your life away?

Consequently our encounters with others are becoming more and more limited and instrumental. We associate rather than interrelate, hold ourselves back rather than open ourselves up, pass on or steal by one another rather than pause and linger awhile. The number of our close friends drops and the quality of our married life diminishes.⁴

Developing vital relationships with people is tremendously time consuming and, because of our utilitarian or production-oriented mindset, our tendency is to economize our commitment to spending the time needed to develop deep relationships with family and friends.

The life of the church is detrimentally impacted by these time pressures. There are too many meetings, programs, organizations, and other constraints calling the body of Christ to go, go, go, and do, do, do. The results are debilitating on our relationship with God, with one another, and with time needed to think, meditate, and grasp God's truth. In this rat race of always being on the go, we are failing to grasp who we are, why we are here, and where we are really going. We are like the bus driver who told his passengers, "I have some good news and then some bad news. The bad news is we took a wrong turn and are on the wrong road. But don't worry, the good news is we are making great time." It's as though the going itself, the movement at a fast pace, is its own reward regardless of where it takes us. We have become enamored with speed for the sake of speed itself. We want our computers to run with the speed of light. If it takes ten seconds to save a thirty-page file, we become impatient and complain. We want it done in a split second. But doesn't it seem only logical that the traveler, if he is unsure of the route, should stop and ask where he is and where the present road is taking him rather than continue on in the same direction regardless of his speed?

There is a passage in Mark that speaks powerfully to this very issue of being preoccupied with activity or *how much we have and can accomplish*. We are told in Mark 6 that the disciples, having returned from a very busy time of ministry, gathered around the Lord Jesus and began to inform Him about all that they had done and taught (vs. 30). In the Greek text it is obvious that the disciples were quite preoccupied with their performance, with what they had done. This is seen in the repetition of the Greek

⁴ Banks, p. 51.

word *hosos*, “how much.” Literally, the text reads, “They reported to Him **how much** they had done and **how much** they had taught.” But then in verse 31 we read these very interesting and thought provoking words, “And He said to them, ‘Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.’ (For there were many *people* coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)” This was not just a problem of time, but of the responsibility to deal with the use of time in a way that would enhance the time they had.

This is dramatically illustrated in the story about the feeding of the five thousand which follows. This event was surely designed to teach them how much more they needed time alone with Him to draw upon the resources of His glorious life to be effective in the use of the time they had. It was not just a matter of “how much” they did, but of who was in charge of their lives. And for this, they (as it is with us) needed to hear the word of God to Elijah, “Go ... hide thyself” (1 Kings 17:3).

The Perspective of Time in the Bible

An Overview

In modern society, we tend to look at time as an abstract quality, but just how is the concept of time used in the Bible?

There is no general word for ‘time’ in the OT, nor are there specific words for the categories of ‘past,’ ‘present,’ or ‘future.’ The Hebrew word most commonly translated as ‘time’ is *ayt*, which really refers to the instant or duration of time during which something occurs (1 Sam. 9:16; Eccles. 3:1-8; Ezra 10:13; 2 Chron. 24:11). Another word, *olam*, refers to immeasurable time, whether past (Eccles. 1:10) or future (Mic. 4:7). While it does not mean ‘eternal’ in the sense of without end, it does point to a length of time beyond human comprehension. Another common word, *mo`ed*, means ‘fixed time,’ i.e., a time designated for a specific occurrence like a festival (Lev. 23:2, 4). In other words, time in ancient Israel was not conceived as an abstract dimension but primarily as related to specific happenings whether of short or long duration.⁵

The New Bible Dictionary adds the following with regard to the concept of time in Scripture:

The Hebrews had their ways of measuring the passing of time ... but the most frequent contexts for the words translated ‘times’ and ‘seasons’ suggest a concern for appointed times, the right time, the opportunity for some event or action. The commonest word is *et* (cf. Ec. 3:1ff. for a characteristic use); *zeman* has the same meaning. *Mo`ed* comes from a root meaning ‘appoint’ and is used of natural periods such as the new moon (e.g. Ps. 104:19) and of appointed festivals (e.g. Nu. 9:2). In particular, all these words are used to refer to the times appointed by God, the opportunities given by him (e.g. Dt. 11:14; Ps. 145:15; Is. 49:8; Je. 18:23). In NT the Gk. *kairos* often occurs in similar contexts, though it does not in itself mean ‘decisive moment’ (cf. Lk. 19:44; Acts 17:26; Tit. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:11).

⁵ *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, Electronic Media.

The Bible thus stresses not the abstract continuity of time but rather the God-given content of certain moments of history. This view of time may be called 'linear,' in contrast with the cyclical view of time common in the ancient world; God's purpose moves to a consummation; things do not just go on or return to the point whence they began. But calling the biblical view of time 'linear' must not be allowed to suggest that time and history flow on in an inevitable succession of events; rather the Bible stresses 'times,' the points at which God himself advances his purposes in the world (*Day of the Lord).⁶

C. H. Pinnock, in his article on time in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* warns us against making sweeping conclusions in the study of the words for time in both the Old and New Testaments. Before discussing the words for time, he has this to say:

Study of the biblical words for "Time" out of their contexts will not yield a scriptural doctrine of time. Biblical teaching on time (or any given subject) is based not on the linguistic method of treating words in isolation, but upon direct biblical statements and word usage ...⁷

This does not mean we ignore the meaning of these words, but that we must consider them within their contexts, and Pinnock then discusses the Hebrew and Greek words used for time and comes to basically the same conclusions as the above articles. Then, concerning the biblical conception of time, he says:

Primarily, the Bible views time as the limited succession of days in which human experience of the world flows. Human beings are allotted their appointed span of time; the Lord gives, and He takes away (Job 1:21). ... Ultimately, God controls human destiny (Ps. 31:15; 139:16). Through sin, history has become the record of the activities of fallen human beings.

God displays His redemptive grace toward lost humanity through the medium of history. His sovereignty over history (Eph. 1:11) is seen in the historical acts of redemption (Isa. 46:4-10) ...⁸

Principles on Time Stewardship

I have been a little surprised by the relatively small number of passages that directly address the use of time in comparison, for instance, to the number of passages devoted to the stewardship of money. Dozens of passages are devoted to wealth and money, but very few to time. Perhaps my surprise can be attributed to our modern concern for time management and the way we see time as a resource like money.

The fact that fewer passages are devoted to the time issue doesn't mean that our use of time is not important because it obviously is. This difference does suggest, however, how much emphasis western

⁶ *The New Bible Dictionary*, Electronic Media.

⁷ C. H. Pinnock, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, Q-Z, Revised, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 852.

⁸ Ibid.

society has put on time and how we have become preoccupied with it as a commodity that must be hurriedly spent before we lose it.

This modern-western view of time can be illustrated in the differences that exist in other cultures. For instance, Banks notes that “Whereas the English clock runs, the Spanish clock walks.”⁹ This has tremendous implications on the way people view life. “If time is moving rapidly, as Anglo-Saxon usage declares, we must hurry and make use of it before it has gone. If time walks, as the Spanish-speaking say, one can take a more leisurely attitude to it.”¹⁰

What then are some of the lessons we can learn from God’s Word regarding the stewardship of time?

Old Testament Passages

Psalm 90:12

So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90 is a meditation (vss. 1-11) and a prayer (vss. 12-17). The prayer flows out of the Psalmist’s meditation on God’s greatness and eternity which stands in stark contrast to man’s frailty, sinfulness, and temporality. In this Psalm, Moses prayed for the practical outcome of his meditation, mainly, that he would have the ability to make the life God had given him more meaningful and that God might confirm or establish the work of his hands (vs. 17). He wanted his life to count for God and that it might have eternal value, but an essential part of this was an awareness of the value and purpose of his time on earth. Man’s problem is that he tends to live for the moment rather than for eternity. But where does time management begin? By calculating not only the brevity of life, but also the approximate days he might have left according to the average life span. With that life span in view, he prayed that he might devote himself to bringing in a harvest of God’s wisdom so he might live wisely, walking circumspectly in the light of God’s wisdom (cf. Eph. 5:15-18).

Numbering our days would include evaluating the use and management of our time. This means evaluating where and how we spend our days. If we are too busy to spend time in the Word, then we need to ask ourselves why. Let me suggest four reasons why people are too busy, but are going nowhere in terms of eternal investments, or in accomplishing God’s will.

(1) People may stay busy because of their egos. People want to appear important. In our society, the crowded schedule, the incredible number of hours and heavy demands are supposed to show how successful or important a person is. Somehow we have come to gauge people, including ourselves, by activity and performance, so we overload our schedules.

(2) People may stay busy as a cover up for laziness. Running around in a lot of extracurricular activities is sometimes a way to avoid the more important or difficult responsibilities. This is particularly true for pastors. Some would rather be busy with all kinds of things rather than spend many hard hours working and thinking through the Word or a text of Scripture. If a Pastor doesn’t take the time to study and know the Word, how can he lead people to the quiet and still waters of God’s Word? The same principle applies to all of us.

⁹ Banks, p. 144.

¹⁰ Ibid.

(3) People may stay busy because of greed. People are greedy or materialistic. Matthew 6 is a classic commentary on this problem. People are busy, busy, busy because they have up-side-down priorities and they are never satisfied; enough is never enough. As a result, they pursue the details of life from morning to evening. If they make \$70,000 this year, next year they figure with just a little more work, they might make \$90,000. Greed for money is only one aspect. This can also involve greed for power, praise, prestige, position, possessions, and security.

(4) People may stay busy because they are more concerned about pleasing men rather than God. They have never learned to say “no” which is important to our ability to keep God’s priorities before us. If we do not plan our schedules and decide what we should and should not do, others will decide for us. Our business will be a form of betrayal rather than commitment. A good illustration of this seen in Acts 6:1-7. When confronted with how to meet the needs of the people, they first approached the problem by establishing priorities according to biblical principles. They said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, ... whom we may put in charge of this task.” Instead of adding this job to their present responsibilities, they delegated the task to others. Biblical priorities and God’s will for us individually must determine our activities rather than the wants or even the needs of people.

Numbering our days also means evaluating the quality of our time spent. The amount of time we spend at something is often not as important as the quality of the time spent. Not only must we consider where our time goes, but how we spend it and why. By how I mean how well. Is it quality time? Do you take time for God’s Word and other projects which require solid thinking and alertness when you are not beat, or when you are at your best? When you spend time with your family, is your mind and heart somewhere else? Are you distracted? When in church, for instance, what exactly are you thinking about?

The why is also very important. We need to consider our motives and goals in the use of time. As believers we need goals and a plan. All we do should be structured around fulfilling biblical goals. We need (a) objectives (immediate, short-range), (b) goals (intermediate), and (c) a mission (long range). Then everything we do in the use of our time should be structured around that. This includes rest, recreation, relaxation, fun, as well as our work, service, and ministry.

Some of the greatest thinkers and inventors have been people who took short naps (catnaps). Why? Because it helped them to think and use their time more effectively. They were goal oriented (1 Cor. 10:31).

Psalm 39:4-5

LORD, make me to know my end, And what is the extent of my days, Let me know how transient I am. 5 Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah.

The setting for this Psalm consists of God’s disciplinary reproofs in David’s life (vss. 8-11). We are not told when this occurred or of that which the discipline consisted. We see only that David felt the heavy hand of God in his life and was in great emotional and spiritual torment. But Scripture teaches us that such reproofs are tools used by God as the master craftsman to purify and mold the life of His people. He uses them to turn us away from sin and from lives of self-centered independence into greater levels of maturity and spiritual dependence on God Himself. As He is the source of life, so He is to be our means and reason for life. But typically, in rebellious independence, man seeks to find from this life what it simply cannot and was never designed to give. Man looks to his comforts, pleasures, pursuits,

accomplishments, and wealth to find meaning, significance, satisfaction, and security in and with this life. But one of the great messages of the Bible is such can only be found in God.

Man's life is fleeting, like a handbreadth, which was the shortest means of measurement in David's time. Man's life is like one's breath seen on cold morning that quickly vanishes. Without God, man's life is without substance; he is like a phantom or a shadow. Man can amass great wealth, but he can't take it with him. He must leave it behind and who knows what will become of his fame or fortune.

David knew that without God, man is without hope and meaning in life. As a godly man, though frustrated and in pain, rather than express his frustration before others which might dishonor God, he made a commitment to muzzle his mouth (Ps. 39:1). As he meditated on his life and life in general, his silence was broken, not before men, but as it should be, in prayer to God. He prayed for answers, indeed, for wisdom that he might learn what God wanted him to know and apply in view of the shortness of life. David's prayer shows us just how hopeless the perplexities of life are unless seen in the light of an eternal and all-wise God and His plan for us as revealed in the Bible.

So what was David asking when he prayed, "Lord, make me to know my end and what is the extent (measure) of my days; Let me know how transient (short lived) I am"? Some would say that he is asking, in view of man's fleeting life and shadow-like existence, what is the purpose and meaning of my life, of all my days? But perhaps this is not the full substance of David's request. He was asking, Lord, help me to not put all my eggs in such a fragile basket, one that is so fleeting and passing away. As Israel was to be kind and give aid to the stranger and sojourner (Deut. 10:18-19), so David was asking God to help him live as a stranger or sojourner in total dependence on the Lord (vs. 12) rather than trust in this fleeting world.

Note how he concludes his reflections on the fleeting and frail nature of life in verse seven. "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You."

"And now" is the Hebrew *`atah*, an adverb of time meaning simply "now." But this adverb is often used to introduce what should follow in the light of present conditions, i.e., "as things are now this is where I stand," or "as things are now, what should be done?" David was saying that with things as they are in this present form of the world, with man's life on earth as it is, fleeting and insubstantial, "for what do I wait?" The verb "wait" is *qawa* which means "to wait, look for with eager expectation, hope." It contains the idea of an enduring expectation in faith trusting that the object of faith will meet the expectations. David put this in a question. Do I look expectantly to this fleeting life with its phantoms to enchant me or give meaning to my life? He then quickly gave his answer in the positive. "My hope is in You." God alone was his place of confident expectation.

Being good stewards of time does not mean we cannot enjoy the many good things God gives us in this life. Indeed, 1 Timothy 6:17 teaches us God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." But we must also realize that in our enjoyment, we are not to fix our hope on the fleeting uncertainties of this world whether comforts or pleasure or power or position or wealth, but on God alone (1 Tim. 6:17; Ps. 62:1-12). So David concluded the Psalm with a request for God to remove the discipline that he might enjoy the time he had on earth (vs. 13).

1 Timothy 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

Psalm 62:1-12 MY soul *waits* in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation. 2 He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken. 3

How long will you assail a man, That you may murder *him*, all of you, Like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence? 4 They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high position; They delight in falsehood; They bless with their mouth, But inwardly they curse. [Selah]. 5 My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him. 6 He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken. 7 On God my salvation and my glory *rest*; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. 8 Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. [Selah]. 9 Men of low degree are only vanity, and men of rank are a lie; In the balances they go up; They are together lighter than breath. 10 Do not trust in oppression, And do not vainly hope in robbery; If riches increase, do not set *your* heart *upon* them. 11 Once God has spoken; Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God; 12 And lovingkindness is Thine, O Lord, For Thou dost recompense a man according to his work.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven— 2 A time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted. 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to tear down, and a time to build up. 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance. 5 A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing. 6 A time to search, and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep, and a time to throw away. 7 A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; A time to be silent, and a time to speak. 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; A time for war, and a time for peace.

Solomon is teaching that all the events or activities of life as illustrated in verses 2-8 have their proper “time” (*zeman*, point in time, appointed time) and season (*eth* or *etz*, duration, opportunity). Some of these events occur only once in life while others occur repeatedly. The important thing is to recognize that God has ordained times for the various events of life (opportunities, responsibilities, trials) and that we are to take the time to do what is needed. As Banks points out, “The character of the event, experience, stage in life or relationship will determine the type and length of time that should be placed at its disposal.”¹¹

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11

What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. 11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

As verses 1-8 indicate, those things which fit into God’s appointed time are filled with polar opposites and these are both destructive and constructive. This might produce the question raised in verse 9, “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?” But this is answered in verses 10-11. God has made everything appropriate, proper (same word is translated “fitting” {NASB} or “proper”

¹¹ Banks, p. 175.

{NIV} in 5:18) in its time ... Literally, the Hebrew means beautiful. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) it is translated by *kalos* which means fair, beautiful, fitting, useful. Without maintaining the perspective of eternity, men will fail to see this. For this reason, God has placed the eternal perspective in man's heart so that he can see beyond this life, the polar opposites, and the often rut-like routine of the daily life God has appointed for each person. Every culture, no matter how primitive, seems to have some concept of eternity. This, of course, is particularly true for those who have the time perspectives of God's Word. In the New Testament it is described from the perspective of living as ambassador/sojourners.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to recognize the significance of a particular point in time. Along with Paul we may be 'perplexed' on some occasions, but we need not be 'driven to despair' (2 Cor. 4:8). We do not always recognize the significance of large blocks of time ... yet we can still echo the Psalmist's affirmation: "But I trust in thee, O Lord, I say, 'Thou art my God,' My times are in thy hand ..." (Ps. 31:14-15a).¹²

Ecclesiastes 9:12-13

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.

Here Solomon gives us the attitude all men need. They are to live life as unto the Lord and make the most of the opportunities God gives, but they must always understand that "the issues and length of life are quite unpredictable. No one can guarantee success or foresee how God will deal with him."¹³ Ecclesiastes 11:2 adds, "Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth."

So the lesson is that we can and should enjoy life and the time on earth God gives us, but apart from knowing and loving God, nothing on earth will have any eternal value. Purpose and meaning to life cannot be found in material or temporal things. God alone can give us that. Since that's the case, He must be our priority in life (Matt. 6:33-34).

New Testament Passages:

Romans 13:11-14

And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.¹² The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.¹³ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *The Ryrie Study Bible*, NASB, Expanded Edition, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 1028.

“*This do knowing the time...*” The Apostle teaches us that there is the need for time orientation according to the truth of the Word and what it reveals to us concerning the times. Knowing this becomes a strong motivation to the kind of godly living just described in the preceding verses. “Time” is the Greek *kairos*. In contrast to *chronos* which may refer to elapsed time, or to the duration of time, *kairos* more often looks at fixed or definite time, and especially of the quality or characteristics of a particular time with its accompanied events. So it may refer to a seasonable time, a time of opportunity, a fruitful time, the fullness of time or times, a welcomed time, a time of salvation, or a difficult time (Gal. 6:10; Col. 4:5; Acts 14:17; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10; 2 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 3:1). *Kairos* is used 85 times in the New Testament and 30 of these by Paul.

The decisively new and constitutive factor for any Christian conception of time is the conviction that, with the coming of Jesus, a unique *kairos* has dawned, one by which all other time is qualified.¹⁴

Mark 1:15, Galatians 4:4, and 2 Corinthians 6:2 make it clear that with the coming of Jesus Christ a new time has dawned which is the acceptable time, a time of salvation, a time of opportunity to find God and experience His salvation through the person and work of the long-awaited Messiah Savior. And this Savior, in the fullness of time, entered into human flesh, ministered among men, died for our sin, was raised from the dead, and now ascended sits at the right hand of God. From this exalted position, through the work of the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ, He seeks to draw all men to Himself.

The suffering, death, resurrection, and ascended session of Jesus is not just a fact of past history. Rather, these momentous events in time have ushered us into a present time of salvation which Paul has defined as a time of proclamation for the body of Christ. By God’s mercy, this is a day when men from every tongue, tribe, and nation can find salvation through Christ if we will but proclaim the message.

But while today is the *kairos* of salvation, it is also another kind of *kairos*, a time described as difficult (2 Tim. 3:1), as existing amidst days that are evil (Eph. 5:17), and as a time of night. It is a time, however, when the night is almost gone and the day is near (Rom. 13:11). The day that is near is the day of Christ’s return when He will usher in the fullness of times (pl.) in the millennial kingdom of Christ’s personal reign on earth (Eph. 1:11).

While faith brings salvation and forgiveness of sin, it also brings a special responsibility in relation to time. Faith calls on us to live wisely in view of the nature of this *kairos* as difficult and filled with evil while also bearing in mind the reality of the coming day when this present time will end. The call for godly living in the preceding verses is based on possessing a proper grasp of God’s sovereign purpose for this age of darkness because it is moving toward the consummation of all things through the final phase of salvation that comes to men in Christ. The issue is a need to grasp the nature of this time as a time of opportunity for salvation, but also as temporal and evil in contrast to the glory of the future which is a time of eternal light and the fullness of times (Eph. 1:11). So living godly is related to one’s grasp of the nature of time in the plan of God.

¹⁴ *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, Gen. Ed., Vol. 3, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1975, p. 837.

Ephesians 5:15-17

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The Apostle calls us to a guarded walk because the days in which we live in the present form of the world are evil. “Evil” is *poneros* which means, wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, degenerate.¹⁵

Satan is called “the evil one” (*ho poneros*) and certainly, the evil of these days is greatly magnified by Satan’s activity as the ruler of this age (John 12:31; 14:30; Eph. 2:2; 6:12). The days are undoubtedly described as evil because they are full of ideas, values, and uses that are destructive and contrary to the purposes of God, but they are also evil because of the many delusions and temptations designed by the evil one to draw men away from God and His will (2 Thess. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:26; Rev. 12:9).

“Making the most of your time” is literally, “redeeming the time.” Time is *kairos* which was described earlier. The verb is ἐξαγοράζω, (*exagarázō*), “to redeem, ransom, buy, buy up.” This verb is used in the sense of “to buy back” or “take off the market” in Galatians 3:13 and 4:5 in connection with the believers redemption from the Law. In the middle voice as here it may carry the idea, “to buy up for oneself.”¹⁶ The use of the middle voice would stress the benefits received by rescuing the time God has given on earth from the many evil uses promoted by the evil one.

The former life of darkness as children of disobedience is now to become a life of light as children of God who seek to prove what is pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 1:1-14). With this comes the responsibility to make wise use of this time. The reason, remember, is that the days are evil. They are filled with deceptions and temptations designed to cause us to miss the will of God. Ephesians 5:15-18 challenges believers to a watchful and careful walk in wisdom and by the Spirit so that they can grasp God’s will and overcome the evil of these days. So, a further result of such a careful walk in wisdom is the capacity to rescue time from the bondage of unprofitable uses and activities while here on earth that displease the Lord and have no eternal value.

Galatians 6:9-10

And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Based on the laws of the harvest (vss. 7-8), the Apostle exhorts us to a life of benevolent good to others, to all men, but especially to the household of faith (vss. 9-10). In the process of his exhortation, he uses *kairos* twice, once in verse 9, “due time,” and in verse 10, “opportunity.” In verse 9, *kairos* is used with the adjective *idios*, “one’s own, private, personal,” or of what is “peculiar, distinct, appropriate, proper.”¹⁷ Literally, “in its own season or time,” meaning a time appropriate and proper and this

¹⁵ Walter Bauer, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979, Logos Library Systems, electronic media.

¹⁶ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 158.

¹⁷ Abbott-Smith, p. 212.

would be the time of reaping, the time of harvest. There is a time coming that will be characterized by a harvest, a time of rewards for faithful service. Verse 9 then becomes a motivation for verse 10.

In verse 10, *kairos* is used with *hōs*, used here as a temporal conjunction meaning “while, as long as.” While *kairos* in verse 9 anticipates the future time of rewards, verse 10 looks at the present *kairos* that God has allotted to each of us as a time of opportunity for doing good or sowing good seed in the form of benevolent acts of love to others. The guiding principles in doing good are two fold: (a) our sowing will not go unrewarded, a time of harvest will follow, and (b) we are to do good *while we have opportunity*, as long as the Lord leaves us here on earth. This is the season we have for sowing good.

Colossians 4:5

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

This verse is similar in wording to Ephesians 5:15, literally, *buying up the time*. It is also similar in thought to Galatians 6:10 from the standpoint of making the most of opportunities. Whereas in Galatians 6:10 the context dealt with benevolent good of all types, the context here is on having an effective witness to the unbelieving community. Doing good to all men and having an effective witness obviously go together. “Opportunity” is *kairos* and again, rather than emphasize a point of time, the focus is on a period of time filled with all kinds of opportunities through the privileges and responsibilities given.¹⁸

In connection with our witness to the unbelieving world, we are responsible for two things: (a) Our conduct, which includes our behavior, must be opportune in relation to the time in its various possibilities; and (b) Our conduct, as it occurs in our speech, must be appropriately seasoned to fit the person we are seeking to reach for Christ.

1 Peter 1:17, 2:11

1:17 And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay (sojourn) *upon earth*; ...2:11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.

“Time” in 1:17 is *chronos* which simply focuses on the duration of one’s life on earth as well as its temporality. On the other hand, the word “stay,” while also pointing to the element of temporality, focuses our attention on the attitude and the manner of life that should characterize how we should conduct ourselves during that time. We are to live as sojourners.

The foundation and motivation for this exhortation is found in the preceding context in a number of things:

(1) We have a living Savior and a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and we look forward to an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for believers who are heavenly citizens (1 Pet. 1:3-4). In other words, our heavenly inheritance is everything our earthly inheritance can never be. The Lord pointedly reminds us of this in Matthew

¹⁸ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, edited by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., Regency, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 584.

6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

(2) As those whose salvation is also protected by the power of God, we look forward to the future aspect of that salvation which will be revealed at the return and revelation of Christ (1 Pet. 1:5-14).

(3) In the meantime, we must remember that we are children of a holy God. This means we are to be holy and live like exiles, becoming set apart to Him in all our manner of life (1 Pet. 1:15-19). Indeed, though we were once not a people of God, we are now. In fact, we are now a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, and a people with a special purpose—that we might proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (2:9-10).

As believers in Christ, we are now citizens of heaven from whence we are to be looking for the Savior (Phil. 2:20-21). This truth and hope is to dynamically impact the way we live. We must not settle down as “earth dwellers” who live as though this world were our permanent home or all there is to life. You know the attitude I am talking about—“we need to get all the gusto we can because we only go around once.” Instead, believers in Christ should live as temporary residents whose citizenship and real home is in heaven. “Stay” in 1 Peter 1:17 is the Greek *paroikia* (παροικία) and refers to the life of a sojourner who lives in a strange or foreign land. It describes the life of one who lives as a temporary resident in some foreign place in order to work, perhaps as an ambassador. But for this person, their permanent home and longing is elsewhere. *Paroikia* is used of Israel’s temporary stay as strangers in a foreign land, the land of Egypt (Acts 13:17) because they were to be longing for the land of promise, the land of Israel.

So, in 1 Peter 2:11, as an exhortation against fleshly desires that war against the soul and can spoil our witness in the world, the Apostle Peter combined *paroikia* with *parepidēmos* (παρεπίδημος) to more forcefully drive home how we should live and view our time on earth. *Parepidēmos* is a synonym which means “stranger, exile, sojourner, resident alien” and is used here of Christians who should not feel at home in this world because they are really just foreigners (*xenos*, stranger, foreigner) and exiles (*parepidēmos*) on the earth (Heb. 11:13).

I have tried to define the key words used here to paint the picture of just how we are to view our time and the use of time on earth, but perhaps nothing says it better than the old hymn which reads:

This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through,
My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door,
And I can’t feel at home in this world any more.

While I do not remember the exact wording, I remember reading a comment by Harry Ironside in one of his commentaries several years ago about being ushered into the foyer of the magnificent home of a very wealthy family. When he saw the size of the foyer (which was as large as some people’s entire house) and the lavish furnishings, he thought, “No wonder some folks have a hard time longing for the glories of heaven.” His point was that people with such possessions tend to think they have heaven here on earth and are living as such.

If you lived in the cold Northwest as I do, but knew that in a few months you would be moving to southern Arizona for the rest of your life, would that affect the way you live? If your present overcoat

was just about worn out, would you purchase a new one? What about your studded snow tires or your snow blower? Would you sell them or take them with you to Arizona? Knowing that your time in the cold Northwest was temporary and that you would soon be a citizen of sunny Arizona would definitely impact the rest of your time in the Northwest.

Peter is warning us that fleshly desires war against the soul and form the basis of our attachment to this present world. We look to the acquisition of these things to give us security, satisfaction, and a sense of significance, but we are to find this in Christ and in our heavenly home which is truly secure. This forms the foundation needed to win the battle. So there is a sequence in the two parts of verse 11. Though other truth is involved like the control of the Spirit, the ability to defeat fleshly desires is greatly dependent on our attitude toward our time on this earth and what we are seeking to get from this life.

Principles From the Life of Christ

Have you ever looked over your shoulder and found that you were pulling what seemed like a long freight train with boxcar after boxcar loaded with unfinished tasks, things you really wanted to accomplish, but there they are, unfinished and dogging your tracks. Undoubtedly, one or more of those boxcars are full of guilt, frustration, feelings of failure, and a sense that there is always more work than I can do. Have you ever wondered where the time went? We may wish for more hours in the day but that's just not an option, is it? God has allotted to each of us twenty-four hours in a day and not one minute more. Evidently, twenty-four hours is enough for us to do what He has called us to do. The amount of time in a day is simply not the problem.

Well then, what is the problem? One answer we might come up with is that it must be a matter of organization and proper time allotment. I don't have any figures on this, but I know that one of the hot items in the office supply stores are calendars and daily planners like "Day Timers" and the "Five Star Diary." No doubt, these are helpful and needed. I have one myself. But that's not the problem because many people who are pulling those boxcars of unfinished tasks are the most organized people in the world. The problem is much deeper and more complex.

The fact is there will always be more to do than we can ever accomplish whether we are talking about needs, work, leisure, travel, or you name it. **The need, however, does not constitute the call.** The Lord Jesus who only had about three years of ministry on earth could have been totally frustrated, but He never appeared to be in a dither over time and tasks. A study of the Savior's life shows that while He was tremendously busy and often exhausted at the end of the day, His life was never feverish or rushed. He always seemed to have time to love and minister to people, sometimes spending an extended time with just one person like the woman at the well. He would accept interruptions in His schedule as God's opportunities. A case in point is found in Mark 6 and the feeding of the five thousand. The plan was to get away to a secluded place to rest awhile, but when He saw the people who followed, He was filled with compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He used the situation as an opportunity to both teach them and give an object lesson to His disciples (Mark 6:30-44).

Yet, consider this about the Savior's ministry. He cared deeply about people and their hurts. He was full of compassion, yet for every hundred he healed, there were thousands He did not heal or minister to. Was it because He did not care? Of course not. It was because He knew the need did not constitute the call. He constantly walked in dependence upon the Father and His time and ministry were regulated by the Father's direction or will. Perhaps the most obvious illustration of this is found in Mark 1:32-39.

And when evening had come, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. 33 And the whole city had gathered at the door. 34 And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was. 35 And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for Him; 37 and they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." 38 And He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for." 39 And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

That there was tremendous need with the people clamoring for His ministry is obvious in this passage. Peter tells us that everyone was looking for Him, but He was never driven simply by the needs or by His own compassion or abilities or sense of importance, though He was the very Son of God Himself. Instead, He prioritized His life: He put first things first. He took time to get alone with the Father (vs. 35), sought the Father's will and enablement from the standpoint of His humanity, and did the Father's will. Simon's behavior in this passage is so typical of people and gives us a good example of our problem. While Simon would never have thought of the Lord as uncaring, the implication is that Simon saw the Lord's absence or time alone in prayer as unproductive, perhaps even as a sign of wrong priorities when in reality it was just the opposite. Simon looked only at the needs. Jesus saw the needs, but He saw them through the Father's will. Simon was impressed by a sense of their importance with so many flocking after the Lord and His disciples. After all, it was at the home of his wife's mother, but the Lord was not so impressed. Simon was perhaps driven by a desire for obvious results, numbers of people healed, but not the Lord.

Certainly the heart of Jesus was burdened with all the pain He saw at the home of Simon's mother-in-law. Certainly He took this to the Father. But the result of His time in prayer was to walk away from these needs and continue on to the nearby towns to preach. Why? "For that is what I came for," He said. He knew God's will for His life and He refused to be deterred no matter how much He was burdened by the needs He found all around Him. It was a matter of priorities according to God's will for Him. Though the world was still full of people with needs, at the close of His earthly ministry, just before the cross, He could pray, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished (finished) the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). God had given Him enough time to do what He had called Him to do and that was what mattered. There were no boxcars laden down with unfinished tasks over the shoulder of Jesus.

It doesn't matter who we are or how gifted or how able or strong, we will never be able to meet every need around us nor accomplish all that we see needs to be done. However, we can find time and the ability to do what God is calling us to do.

So why are we pulling a train loaded with unfinished tasks, guilt, and frustration? We live in a society that worships work. It is a society that has made work and the accomplishments of work the primary source of fulfillment, security, and satisfaction. Many have cultivated such an unrealistic standard of achievement that they have developed a neurotic compulsion to produce and perform. It has become like an intoxicating drug that they use to get a high. But why such a compulsion? It is undoubtedly prompted by the desire to succeed, to have what others have, or to have more than others have, to feel good about themselves, or to prove something to someone, perhaps a parent, or just to themselves. Remember, the Apostle Peter defines this as "fleshly desires that wage war against the soul." And what is this success that people are chasing? In terms of the world, it is sought in position, power, prestige, pleasure, and

possessions; or in brains, bucks, beauty, and in our world of super athletes, brawn. Regarding this, I just read an intriguing statement about success:

It is a temptation, a trap, an intoxicant, and a sedative. It is seductive, appealing, addicting, and confusing. It is the fuel that drives the engine of the world's dynamic, open-market economies. It begins as an aspiration and becomes an assumption, a right. It starts as an occupation and eventually becomes a preoccupation. *And we want it.*¹⁹

The irony of all of this is that no matter how much a person does, or accomplishes, or has, it never seems to be enough. Enough is no longer enough. No wonder, with this mentality or intoxicant, people never seem to have enough time. They are pursuing a path that leads to nowhere or climbing a ladder that is leaning against the wrong wall.

Conclusion

Being a good steward of the time God gives is not really a matter guarding the minutes so we can spend our time productively. Certainly we need to wisely use our time, but even more importantly we need to have a grasp of time in the sense of understanding the great events of God in history, past, present, and future as they are set forth in Scripture in the grand scheme of the plan of God. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, the goal concerning the stewardship of time is not to get Christians busier. It is not busier lives that we need. What is needed instead is a better use of the time we have combined with a biblical view of time on earth from three important elements:

(1) As it is made so evident in 1 Peter, we must grasp exactly *who we really are* as Christians. We are children of God and citizens of heaven who are exiles, sojourners, and aliens. The world, on the other hand, lives as earth dwellers who search for their meaning and purpose in life from this world alone. For the Christian, following Peter's instruction means adopting and maintaining this new attitude toward our time on earth and what we do with our lives.

(2) As Paul reminds us in Romans and Ephesians, we must comprehend exactly *where we are*. We live in a time described by Paul as a time of darkness or night and as an evil age, the form of which is passing away. Everything in this world is designed to get us to make life in this world our ultimate aim. Our need then is to walk carefully so we can rescue the time God has given us on earth from the many evil uses and perspectives promoted by the evil one.

(3) We must also ask and respond to the issue of just *why we are here*. We are here as ambassadors of Christ called to a world-wide mission of making disciples of all nations starting in Jerusalem (home base) and reaching out to the uttermost part of the earth (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). We are here to represent the Savior, to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.

2 Corinthians 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

¹⁹ Ramesh P. Richard, "Success, The Consuming Addiction," Dallas Theological Seminary's *Kindred Spirit*, Winter 1996, p. 10.

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

Lesson 2:
The Stewardship of Talents
Multiplying the Life Through Our Spiritual Gifts

Introduction

For years, the body of Christ, the church, has been hampered by a clergy mentality that makes a strong distinction between the professional clergy and the lay person. This clergy or minister mentality fails to see and function under the New Testament truth that every believer is a ministering priest who is to be ministering for the common good of the body of Christ according to the gifts God has given him.

I have had the privilege of pastoring several independent Bible teaching churches over a period of 28 years. While some of the people attending these churches were new converts, many came from different denominational backgrounds and naturally possessed the typical view of the local church and its pastor. On a few occasions, I had people introduce me to their friends as their “minister.” In other words, they saw me as “the Minister” or “the Pastor” who was there as the paid professional to preach, teach, counsel, visit, and keep the administrative wheels running smoothly.

As the chapters that follow will seek to show, believers individually and the church as a whole exist to be good stewards of the truth of God in evangelism and discipleship through the exercise of the gifted members of the body of Christ. We exist for the mission of penetrating the world and building believers so that they become healthy ministering saints. And while other factors hurt this mission, certainly one very large contributing factor is the “clergy/layman, retailer/consumer” mentality that is so prevalent in our society. The idea of becoming a mission-oriented church with every believer a minister scares people. They are much more comfortable with the concept of paying others to do the work of ministry for them. But the New Testament teaches us that church leaders are to be like coaches who should be training others for the work of ministry according to the spiritual gifts of each believer.

Ephesians 4:11-16 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

This clergy/layman mentality has produced a crisis in the church today that is having serious consequences on the spiritual health of the body of Christ. Concerning this condition Hull writes:

The evangelical church has become weak, flabby, and too dependent on artificial means that can only simulate real spiritual power. Churches are too little like training centers to shape up the saints and too much like cardiopulmonary wards at the local hospital. We have proliferated self-indulgent consumer religion, the what-can-the-

church-do-for-me-syndrome. We are too easily satisfied with conventional success: bodies, bucks, and buildings.¹

Hull continues:

What obvious truth causes the saints to squirm? Simply this: *the church exists for mission*. The church lives by mission as fire exists by oxygen. *The church does not exist for itself*. This collides head-on with the self-indulgent ego-driven psychobabble mentality that dominates evangelicalism. Look at the best-selling Christian books, listen to the television evangelist, talk to the average parishioner; the common thread is preoccupation with felt needs ... the preoccupation and prioritizing of felt needs over Christ-commanded activity must stop.²

There are two purposes for this chapter: (a) to demonstrate from Scripture that every Christian, as a member of the body of Christ, is a believer priest whom God has gifted for the purpose of ministry, and (b) to encourage the discovery and exercise of one's spiritual gifts for ministry to the church and in the world. Only then will we become good stewards of God's grace since recognizing and using our gifts is a very important part of being good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.

The Apostle Peter challenges us with our mission as God's people in 1 Peter 2:9 which says:

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

But vital to our ability to proclaim the excellencies of God is Peter's word to us in 1 Peter 4:10-11.

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

For reasons of time and space, and in keeping with the purposes just mentioned, this study will not attempt to discuss, at least in detail, some of the more difficult subjects of spiritual gifts as: Are all the gifts listed in the New Testament in operation today such as the miraculous gifts of miracles and healings, or tongues and interpretation of tongues, etc. (the cessationist versus the non-cessationist issue)? Are the gifts listed in the New Testament just illustrative of the kinds of gifts God has given, or, when combined together, do they give us an exhaustive list of the gifts God has given to the body of Christ? Though the cessationist issue will be briefly mentioned, a detailed discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this study. The goal here is to awaken believers to who they are in Christ (gifted servant/priests) and to encourage them to become functional for the Master as His ambassadors in a hurting and fallen world.

¹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan, NJ, 1988, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Key Passages on Spiritual Gifts

Romans 12:3-8 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

1 Peter 4:10-11 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

2 Timothy 1:6 And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

Stewardship Principles From Scripture

1 Peter 4:10-11

Verse 10. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

(1) The word "gift" is the Greek word, *charisma*, which means "a gift of grace, a free gift." It is especially used of special spiritual abilities given by the Spirit for God to enable Christians to serve the body of Christ. They are grace gifts sovereignly given by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4, 11, 18). A friend of mine put it like this: "*Spiritual gifts are those endowments of power which enable us to carry out the vital functions of our body life in Christ as members of His body. These endowments are a supernatural enablement so that supernatural results are produced.*"³

³ Robert Deffinbaugh, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, Lesson 36, Biblical Studies Foundation, www.bible.org, electronic format.

(2) All believers have at least one spiritual gift. There can be no fudging here. Regardless of what you may think, God's Word teaches us that every Christian has a spiritual gift. The same truth is expressed by Paul in Romans 12:6 and 1 Corinthians 12:7. At the point of salvation, when we believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, we become members of the body of Christ by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit who places us into union with Christ. According to the analogy portrayed in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, each believer becomes a gifted member, like an arm, or a foot, or an eye with ability and a function to perform. This is a matter of grace and the sovereign work and choice of the Spirit, never our merit or works (1 Cor. 12:4, 11, 18).

(3) Our gifts are to be viewed as a *stewardship* for which we are responsible as “good (Greek: *kalos*, noble, praiseworthy, useful) stewards.” The word “steward” is the Greek *oikonomos*, “a manager or servant of a household.” The management activity usually involved financial transactions requiring a careful accounting of funds received and disbursed. The concept of responsibility then extended to non-financial matters. So a steward is not an owner. Instead, he is a manager of what belongs to another and is held responsible to carefully account for his stewardship.

The parable of the faithful and sensible steward in Luke 12:41-48 illustrates the issues involved here. The steward of this passage was responsible to see that all the other servants were properly fed, but his performance was subject to review by his master with the possibilities of reward or loss based on his faithfulness. In verse 48, the word “entrusted” is used in connection with the concept of stewardship. This is the Greek *paratithēmi*, that, in this context, carries the idea of what is entrusted to the care, protection, and/or investment by another.

(4) Peter also teaches us gifts are given for “serving one another.” They are for the common good of the body of Christ as an expression of love (1 Cor. 13) and never for personal gain or selfish agendas (1 Cor. 12-14). The Apostle Paul defines the common good by such things as edification (building up the body of Christ), exhortation, consolation, and instruction, attaining unto a mature man in Christ, etc. (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:3-5, 17, 19, 26, 31; Ephesians 4:11-16).

Verse 11. Whoever speaks, *let him speak*, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, *let him do so* as by the strength that God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(5) While all gifts are designed to serve others (vs. 10), the Apostle Peter classifies the gifts into two basic categories, (a) speaking (teaching, exhortation, etc.) and (b) serving (showing mercy, helps, administrations, giving, etc.) (vs. 11). But the emphasis here is not so much on the nature of the gift, but on that which should govern the use of the gift.

(6) For those who speak, that which should characterize what is spoken is the Word of God rather than their own viewpoint. Man's tendency, of course, is to espouse his own ideas in accord with his personal agendas or bias, even when claiming to be teaching the Bible. Many times teachers use the Bible to lend authority to what they are teaching. And too often the Bible is misused through very poor *exegesis*, which means a careful explaining of the text based on context, grammar, contextual meaning of words, historical/cultural background, etc. The result of such a failure is *eisegesis* in which the person reads into the text their own ideas. James warns that being a teacher of God's people is very serious business because of the responsibilities involved (Jam. 3:1). So God requires us to be dedicated students who handle the Word of God carefully so that our teaching is truly based on God's truth and not our own ideas.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

(7) For those who serve in other ways, Peter teaches that they must do so by the strength which God richly supplies rather than in their own strength (see 1 Cor. 15:10; Col. 1:29). All stewards need to be serving out of the source and sphere of fellowship with God and dependence on Him (John 15).

(8) With the words, “to whom belongs the glory and dominion, ...” Peter reminds us that no matter what is done, the purpose or ultimate goal is God’s glory and dominion (rule) through the Lord Jesus. This forms a fundamental principle and a warning that should guide the whole of the Christian’s life and ministry as a steward of the various aspects of God’s grace. Due to our innate self-centered tendencies, it is far too easy to serve from selfish agendas—to be accepted by others, or for praise, position, or prestige. This was one of the problems that Paul addressed with the church at Corinth. Some of the Corinthians were using their gifts, especially the more spectacular or showy gifts like tongues, for personal gain. Paul said, “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; ...” (1 Cor. 14:4a). In other words, they were using this gift for selfish purposes. Though the one who speaks in a tongue does not understand what he is saying (vs. 14), he is still edified personally by the emotion and satisfaction of the experience. Clearly, his primary motive is not according to the excellent way of love for others (1 Cor. 12:31b-13:13; 14:4b, 12) and, therefore, it cannot truly be designed to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31).

1 Corinthians 4:1-3

In verses 1-2, Paul teaches us three principles that are tremendously important to the exercise of spiritual gifts as stewards of God. The principles apply to how we should view others and the exercise of their gifts, and how we should think of ourselves in the exercise of our own gifts. Typically, people tend to focus on the style and personality of others in their ministries and in the use of their gifts, especially in connection with pastors and expositors of the Word. As 1 Samuel 16:7 teaches us, people are impressed by things like human charisma, dynamic personalities, physical looks, voice, intellectual prowess, and oratorical skill. God, on the other hand, sees the heart and shows no such partiality (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9). He looks for something far different in a steward; He looks for faithfulness that stems from a heart of love and devotion to Him (cf. Rev. 2:1-5 with 1 Thess. 1:3). The Thessalonians also had works, labor, and endurance, but it was the product of faith, love, and hope which focuses our attention on the inner life as the real resource of the good works of the Thessalonian believers. So what are these principles?

(1) “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (verse 1).

Rather than idolizing others, putting them on a pedestal, or comparing people with people based on human standards of measurement (cf. vs. 6-7; 2 Cor. 10:7-12), we are to see other believers (including ourselves of course) as simply instruments, servants, and stewards of God’s grace. (Note and see the preceding context of 1 Cor. 3:5-9 as the background to 4:1-2.)

“Let a man regard us in this manner ...” is a direct imperative, a command. It clearly states how God demands that we regard our teachers or others in the use of the stewardship of their gifts. Paul used the third person perhaps to make it more general (it should *not* be viewed as a permissive imperative), but what he said here is a command and is equivalent to, “You regard us in this manner.”

“Regard” is the Greek *logizomai* which means “to calculate, reckon,” and then “to evaluate, estimate, look upon, put in a class as.” It is used in the Greek Septuagint in Isaiah 53:12 in the sense of “he was classed among the criminals.” How then are we to view people in the use of their gifts?

We are to view them “as servants.” This is the Greek *hupēretēs*. Originally it referred to one who was “an under rower on the lower tier of a ship.” It then came to be used of a servant or an assistant who serves a master or superior. It carries the idea of subordination and stresses the servant’s relation to the Lord and to others as a servant, not a superior. We are to view one another as servants under the authority of Christ.

“As stewards” is *oikonomos* and, as seen previously, focuses on the fact that none of us are owners, but servants who have been entrusted with great responsibility and accountability. The Apostle Paul was responsible to dispense the Word of God to other servants. Any positive and godly results that come from a person’s ministry is always the result of God who “causes the growth” or gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

(2) “In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (verse 2).

This verse points us to the second principle. What God requires, and so what we are to look for in ourselves and in the stewardship of others, is a faithfulness that flows from a heart that is right with the Lord.

“It is required” is the Greek *zēteō* which means, “to seek, look for,” and then somewhat removed from this, it came to mean, “try to obtain, strive for, aim, desire.” From that it came to mean, “to demand, require.”⁴

What, then, are we to look for and require in ourselves and in others? Dynamic, scintillating personalities? NO! We should look for those who are “trustworthy.” “Trustworthy” is the Greek *pistos*, “reliable, faithful, dependable, inspiring faith, trust.”

What is needed for a man or woman to be faithful? The key to this question is found in the two parts of our word “faith-ful.” A faithful person is one who is full of faith. At the same time, such a person inspires faith and faithfulness in others. *Pistos* is used of God and of the truth of Scripture, both of which inspire faith.

(3) “But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself” (verse 3).

In this verse, Paul shows us another important principle and one that is certainly related to understanding and trusting in the principles of verses 1-2. The only opinion that really matters is God’s, and since I am His servant and what He wants from me is a faithfulness that stems from loving Him, I must not derive my sense of significance and confidence from the opinions of people. In the context of 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul deals with human opinions or judgments, those based on human standards where the focus is on the outer man, the kind mentioned above (again, cf. 1 Sam. 16:7 and 1 Cor. 4:6-7; 2 Cor. 10:10). Certainly there is a place for proper assessment from the right people when discerning our gift and its development. And we should also be open to loving rebuke when we are walking contrary to the

⁴ Walter Bauer, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979, Logos Library Systems, electronic media.

Word. But we must guard against putting too much stock in the praise or criticism of others. We simply must not look to the opinions of people for our sense of significance whether negative or positive. A good friend whom we trust that will honestly level with us is different. Their input can be a means of positive growth and change.

Since gifts are the products of God's grace, they should never become a matter for boasting in self or in others nor in self-depreciation because of the lack of a gift that another Christian has. This is true even when one diligently uses his or her gift(s) because in the final analysis, it is God who works in us both to will and to do (Phil. 2:13), and who both gave and prospers the use of our gifts (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 15:10).

Romans 12:3-8

The Context and Root for the Exercise of Spiritual Gifts (12:1-2)

The first 11 chapters of Romans are doctrinal and lay the biblical foundation for the Christian life. With chapter 12, Paul moves to the practical application and results that should follow for the Christian in his day-to-day life in a world that is very much opposed to the plan of God. The key idea or focus of this practical section is on *relationships*. Ours is a world of relationships and it is vital that we learn how God wants us to live in those relationships. So the Apostle discusses six relationships that are vital to our ability to live in the world as the people of God:

- In relation to God (12:1-2)
- In relation to the church (12:3-16)
- In relation to society (12:17-21)
- In relation to the state (13:1-7)
- In relation to the future (13:8-14)
- In relation to Christians when they disagree (14:1-15:13)

The most important and foundational relationship of all is a person's relationship to God. If that is wrong all our relationships will be wrong whether in the home, in the church, or in society. In all of this there are really only two main relationships. One is with God and the other is with people. The Savior taught us that the Law (or the Word of God) can be boiled down into two great commands: to love God with all your heart, and then, out of that relationship, to love one's neighbor (Matt. 22:34f; Mark 12:29-31).

Here in Romans, the Apostle teaches us the same truth. Romans 12:1-2 is a call for the consecration or presentation of the believer's life to God as a reasonable act of worship that should flow out of the awesome mercies of God described in the preceding chapters. It is in essence the launching pad for the believer into the service of God in all the other relationships of life.

This service must first and foremost be to God, expressed through service to others. Our service of worship should be the logical outflow of God's Word and His work in our lives. It is a reasoned worship, not at all like the frenzied, sensual, self-indulgent worship of the heathen. To practice this kind of worship, we must cease being shaped by the world around us, and have our minds renewed and transformed so that we look at all things from a divine perspective.

The verses which follow spell out the exercise of this renewed mind in greater detail. Paul outlines in verses 3-8 the Christian way of thinking concerning spiritual gifts.⁵

Paul, an Illustration of Spiritual Gifts at Work (12:3a)

“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you ...” Here Paul shows us that even his teaching about spiritual gifts that follows is the product of his own spiritual gift, “the grace given to me” (cf. 1:5). Whatever our ability and function in the body of Christ, it is the product of gift(s) given to us by God. Note also that the exercise of his gift here was done through a letter written from afar. This illustrates how God can use our gifts in various ways from all over the world through the medium of letters, books, magazines, radio, TV, computers, and now the Internet.

The Call for Sound Personal Evaluation (12:3b)

“To everyone among you.” This serves to emphasize the universal meaning and application of the whole issue of spiritual gifts. Again, no believer is exempt from the need to know and apply this truth.

“Not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment.” The NIV has, “think of yourself with sober judgment.” Sound or sober judgment is *sōphroneō*, “to be of sound mind, be reasonable, sensible.” It is used of the demoniac who, after the demons had been cast out by the Savior, was described as “clothed and in his right mind” (Mark 5:15).

So there is a call here for each believer to know what his spiritual gifts are, and, based on that knowledge and conviction (i.e., “faith”), seek to know what ministry or ministries God wants him to have in the body of Christ. This conviction begins with a sound evaluation of our spiritual abilities with the result that we arrive at a well-balanced evaluation of our gifts. But contrary to the focus in our society today on self-esteem, the warning here is against arrogance or thinking too highly. So, there is in this a call to think soundly, sensibly. The standard for how we think is “as God has allotted to each a measure of faith,” or as the NIV translates it, “in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” But what is “the measure of faith” God has given or allotted?

“Allotted” is *merizō*, “to deal out, assign, divide, apportion.” That which God gives or apportions is called, “a measure of faith.” But what is the measure of faith? “Measure” is the Greek *metron* which may be used of the instrument of measure, or, as here, the result of what is measured out, the quantity and quality of what is given. In this context, it refers to spiritual gifts, the spiritual endowment of power given by God to each believer to minister to others.

“Of faith” points us to the source or the channel. Either it is looking at the fact that God gives spiritual gifts to those who exercise faith in Christ, or it refers to faith that must be exercised to grasp the nature of one’s gift as given by God, and then to exercise it in ministry. Both concepts, of course, are true.

A great amount of hurt occurs to the body of Christ when believers overrate their own gifts or those of others (1 Cor. 3), or undervalue their gifts or the gifts of others (1 Cor. 12). Wiersbe writes:

It is not wrong for a Christian to recognize gifts in his own life and in the lives of others. What is wrong is the tendency to have a false evaluation of ourselves. Nothing causes more damage in a local church than a believer who overrates himself and

⁵ Deffinbaugh, *Romans*.

tries to perform a ministry that he cannot do.⁶ (Sometimes the opposite is true, and people undervalue themselves. Both attitudes are wrong.)

The Call for Faithful Cooperation (12:4-8)

(1) The Analogy of the Body (12:4-5). Using the analogy of the human body, Paul describes the relationship all believers have as gifted members of the body of Christ, the church. In forming the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit has created a unity in diversity just as with the human body. Though we are one body in Christ, we are many members and each believer is a vital part of His body and has a special spiritual function to perform. This analogy is explained in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Verse 5 stresses three important elements: *unity* (we are one body), *diversity* of functions (individually members), and *mutuality and dependency* with each member belonging to all the others (one of another).

(2) The Responsibility (12:6-8). As with the human body, the nature of this spiritual body demands that each member exercise his gift(s) unselfishly for the health and growth of the body (see 1 Cor. 12:12-31). Seven gifts are listed, but this is, of course, not exhaustive (see also 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-31, and Eph. 4:11).

A brief description of these and the gifts listed in other passages will be given below. For now, the purpose in focusing on the particular passage discussed above is twofold:

First, as part of the process of being transformed by the truth of the Word and commitment of life to Christ (Rom. 12:1-2), we want to help believers grasp who they are in Christ—gifted ministers. As mentioned earlier, God has not called us to be spectators or those who sit, soak, and sour and pay others to minister to us. Rather, He wants us to sit, soak, and then, out of the transforming power of God’s truth, to serve.

The second objective is simply motivation. Understanding our giftedness as members of the body of Christ should help to motivate us to discover our gifts and get involved in ministry.

Definition of Spiritual Gifts⁷

Positively (What It Is)

Basic Definition and Explanation

The primary Greek word used in the New Testament for spiritual gifts is *charisma*, “a gift of grace, a free gift.” It is related to *charis* which means “grace.” Gifts are never merited or earned.

- (1) Gifts are a special grace-given ability (nature or essence)
- (2) Gifts are given by the Holy Spirit (a divine endowment) (source)
- (3) Gifts are given to each believer in Christ (recipients)

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Right*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1977, p. 140.

⁷ Part of what follows is taken from *The Holy Spirit* by Charles Caldwell Ryrie, pp. 83-92.

(4) Gifts are for service to the body of Christ that it may grow quantitatively (evangelism), qualitatively (edification), and organically (developed ministries and offices in the church) (immediate purpose)

(5) Gifts are for the glory of God (ultimate purpose)

Spiritual gifts are God's special gifts given to believers to enable them for special service to the body of Christ and in the world. When related to the gift of ministry or service or helps, it may include natural talents received at birth.

Synonyms for Spiritual Gifts

(1) "Gifts" (1 Cor. 1:7; 12:4; 1 Pet. 4:10). Greek word is *charisma*.

(2) "Grace" (Acts 4:33; Romans 12:3; 2 Cor. 8:7). Greek word is *charis*.

(3) "A measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3)

(4) "Manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:7)

Negatively (What It Is Not)

(1) It is not an office in the local church like elder or deacon. Certain gifts are needed to function effectively in those offices, but an office and a gift are not the same thing.

(2) It is not a particular geographical area or a place of service. It is the ability to serve, not the place where one serves. A teacher may teach in Sunday School, in a seminary, in a home Bible study or as a missionary in any part of the world.

(3) A spiritual gift is not a particular age group. A person may feel more at home teaching children than adults, or vice versa. But if one really has the gift of teaching, he can learn to adapt to a variety of age groups, though God may very well give him a burden for a certain age group.

(4) A spiritual gift is not a particular specialty or method of ministry. The gift of teaching may be used through radio or through writing or through the classroom, etc.

(5) It is not a certain personality type (vivacious, scintillating, dynamic, etc. (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5 with 2 Cor. 10:10).

Distribution of Gifts

Gifts Are Distributed by the Holy Spirit

According to 1 Corinthians 12:4 and 11, the distribution of spiritual gifts is the product of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:4 and 11 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit ...11
But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills (NIV).

The Holy Spirit, then, is the primary agent in the giving of gifts. While the Lord as the head of the body directs the distribution of the gifted people and their ministries, and the Father brings about a variety of effects (1 Cor. 12:5-6), the gifts themselves are given only by the Spirit.

Gifts Are Distributed to Every Believer

As illustrated in life and as stated by Scripture, no one person has all the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:29-30), but every Christian has at least one spiritual gift (1 Pet. 4:10). This helps us to see why it is so important for all believers to know what their gifts are and use them. No one is to be a one man show. No believer can even begin to do all that is needed. The need is for leaders to train, motivate, and delegate ministry to others in the church according to their giftedness and God's leading.

Gifts Are Distributed on the Basis of Grace

(1) Gifts are not distributed on the basis of spiritual maturity. The church at Corinth was a carnal church yet they appeared to have an abundance of gifts (1 Cor. 3:1-4, 7).

(2) Gifts are not distributed on the basis of education. Compare the disciples (Acts 4:13; 2:6-8).

(3) It also appears spiritual gifts are not distributed on the basis of desire or prayer because they are evidently given by the sovereign will of the Spirit when He places believers into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:11-13).

Scripture asserts all believers have a gift. If gifts were not given at salvation, then there would be a time when that assertion would not be true. Sometimes 1 Corinthians 12:31 is used to teach believers should pray and seek spiritual gifts, but this verse was addressing the need for the church at Corinth to promote or manifest zeal for those gifts which edify rather than the showy gifts.

First Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6 in all probability "refers to what had happened at Lystra on Paul's second missionary journey. It was then that Timothy, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, had been amply endowed with this gift. Of this and of the character of his task he had been made aware *through (dia) prophetic utterance* of inspired bystanders."⁸ The prophetic utterance declared the fact to Timothy and all those around and the body of elders present with Paul acknowledged it by the laying on of hands.

The Distribution of Some Gifts Were Limited as to Time

While this is a tremendously debated issue, the evidence of both Scripture and history support the view that the Spirit has not given all the gifts to every generation. Certain gifts of the Spirit were employed in the earliest stage of the church to *authenticate* the message of the apostles and prophets, and to *lay the foundation* for the church. Ryrie writes:

There were foundation gifts of apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20), which gifts do not appear in the periods of building the superstructure of the church. Those who were contemporary with Christ experienced certain miraculous gifts of the Spirit which were not experienced by the generation which followed Him (Heb. 2:3-4).⁹

Sometimes it is argued that Hebrews 2:3-4 teaches the miraculous gifts mentioned in verse 4 are continuing today because the present participle, "testifying," shows these gifts to be continuing. But this is a genitive absolute which functions adverbially and it is dependent on the main verb of the sentence to

⁸ William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on I and II Timothy and Titus*, 2nd ed., Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, p. 159.

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1965, p. 84.

which it belongs. Those advocating the continuation of these miraculous gifts try to connect it to the future verb of verse 3, “how will we escape.” They would translate, “how will we escape while or since God is continuing to testify ...” or something similar to this.

But the closest and the most natural verb to connect this participle to is the word “confirmed” of verse 3. “Confirmed” is an aorist indicative active which most naturally refers to a past historical fact. The participle, then, points to the means of confirmation, “by signs ...” But the question is to whom? It was “to us (the writer and those of his generation) by those who heard (the apostles who walked with the Lord), God also testifying with them (i.e., those who heard).” In an article published for The Biblical Studies Foundation’s Web page (www.bible.org), Dan Wallace gives a very in-depth grammatical explanation of this passage and then summarizes his conclusions as follows:

All in all, Hebrews 2:3-4 seems to involve some solid inferences that the sign gifts had for the most part ceased.¹⁰ Further, it offers equally inferential evidence of the purpose of the sign gifts: to confirm that God was doing something new. The whole argument of Hebrews rests on this assumption: there is a new and final revelation in Jesus Christ (cf. 1:1-2). He is the one to whom the whole OT points; he is the one who is superior to the Aaronic priesthood, to prophets, and to angels. He is indeed God in the flesh. Is it not remarkable that in this exquisitely argued epistle, the argument turns on Scripture over against experience? The strongest appeal the author makes to the audience’s experience is to what they were witnesses to *in the past*. If the sign gifts continued, shouldn’t we expect this author (like Paul in Gal 3:5) to have employed such an argument?

I do not pretend to think that this sole text solves the problem of the duration of the sign gifts. But whatever one’s views of such gifts, this passage needs to be wrestled with.¹¹

Development of Gifts

Gifts are to be discovered, developed, and used through faith, hard work, and prayer (Rom. 12:3; Col. 1:29-2:2; 1 Cor. 15:10).

Although the Spirit is the source of spiritual gifts, the believer may have a part in the development of his gifts. He may be ambitious in relation to his own gifts to see that they are properly developed and that he is doing all he can for the Lord (1 Cor. 12:31). To covet the better gifts is not a matter of sitting down and conjuring up enough faith to be able to receive them out of the blue. It is a matter of diligent self-preparation. For instance, if one covets the gift of teaching, he will undoubtedly have

¹⁰ To be sure, not all of them had yet: John was still to write his Revelation of Jesus Christ. (But since the author of Hebrews was most likely not from John’s circle of influence, for all practical purposes the gift of prophecy might even be viewed as dead as far as he was concerned.) At the same time, “signs and wonders and various miracles” is the normative description of healing and miraculous *deeds*, not prophetic words.

¹¹ Daniel B. Wallace, Ph.D., Associate Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary, *Hebrews 2:3-4 and the Sign Gifts*, The Biblical Studies Foundation, electronic format.

to spend many years developing that gift. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in the giving of gifts, but in the development of them He works through human beings with their desires, limitations, ambitions, ...¹²

Description of the Gifts

Division and Classification

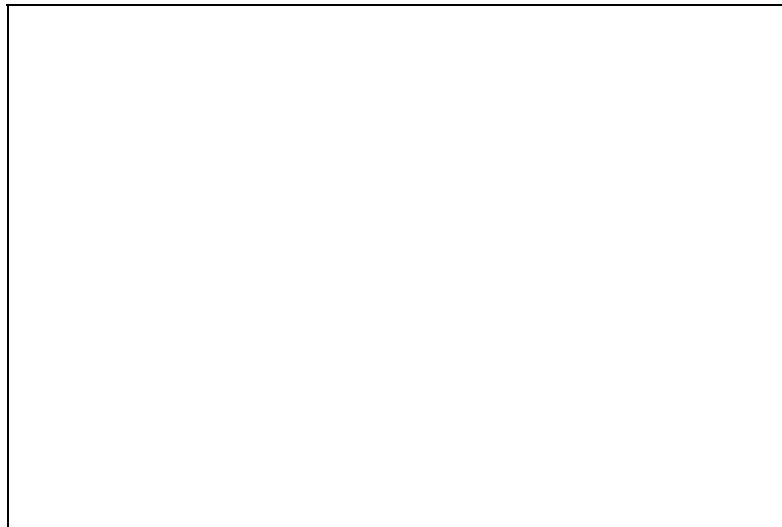
Note that in the following chart, the Word of Wisdom and Word of Knowledge could be synonyms for the gifts for apostleship and teaching.

Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
Prophesying Ministering Teaching Exhorting Giving Ruling Showing mercy	Apostleship Prophesying Evangelizing Pastor-teachers or Pastors and teachers	Speaking Serving or support
1 Corinthians 12:6-10	1 Corinthians 12:28	1 Corinthians 12:29-30
Word of wisdom Word of knowledge Faith Healing Miracles Prophesying Discerning of spirits Interpretation of tongues	Apostleship Prophesying Teaching Miracles Healing Helping Administrations Tongues	Apostleship Prophesying Teaching Miracles Healing Tongues Interpretation of tongues

As mentioned previously, some believe that these lists are only illustrative of the gifts God gives to the church since the lists vary and are only partial when compared together. However, the New Testament is a unit of God's revelation to us and together they give us a complete list of the spiritual gifts given to the church. In addition to these, however, there are many natural and developed talents that people have and can use in the exercise of these spiritual gifts. For instance, some teachers are also gifted artists and are able to enhance their gift of teaching through their artistic ability. I have also known artists who were gifted at teaching, and they were able to lend support (helps) to teachers in creating neat overheads in a class presentation.

Classification According to Function and Use in the New Testament

¹² Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 85.



Definition and Explanation of the Gifts¹³

A. Apostleship (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28)

Apostleship can have both a general and a limited meaning. In a general sense the word means one who is sent, or a messenger. The Latin equivalent is the word missionary. In a general sense every Christian is a missionary or an apostle, because he has been sent into this world for a testimony. Epaphroditus is an illustration, for the word “apostle” is used to describe him (“but your messenger,” Phil. 2:25). However, in the specialized sense of the gift of apostleship it refers to the Twelve (and perhaps a few others like Paul and Barnabas, Acts 14:14). They were the leaders who laid the foundation of the church and they were accredited by special signs (Eph. 2:20). Since this was a gift that belonged to the earliest period of the history of the church when her foundation was being laid, the need for the gift has ceased and apparently the giving of it has too. “And are built upon the foundation of the apostle and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20).

B. Prophecy (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10; 14:1-40; Eph. 4:11)

This word also is used in both a general and a limited sense. In a general sense it means to preach; thus, generally speaking, preaching is prophesying, and the preacher is a prophet in that he speaks the message from God. But the gift of prophecy included receiving a message directly from God through special revelation, being guided in declaring it to the people, and having it authenticated in some way by God Himself. The content of that message may have include telling the future (which is what we normally think of as prophesying), but it also included revelation from God concerning the present.

¹³ The material that follows, points A-N and the discussion on 1 Corinthians 13:8, is taken from Ryrie’s *The Holy Spirit*, Moody Press, pp. 85-91. Keep in mind that the translations of various verses or parts thereof used by Ryrie in this section were taken from the King James Version.

This too was a gift limited in its need and use, for it was needed during the writing of the New Testament and its usefulness ceased when the books were completed. God's message then was contained in written form, and no new revelation was given in addition to that written record.

The gift of prophecy may have been rather widely given in New Testament times, though the record mentions only a few prophets specifically. Prophets foretelling a famine came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of these was named Agabus (Acts 11:27-28). Mention is made also of prophets in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:10), and Philip had four daughters who had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9). Prophets were also prominent in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 14).

C. Miracles (1 Cor. 12:28) and Healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30)

This is the ability to perform special signs. Paul exercised this gift at Ephesus when he performed miraculous healings (Acts 19:11-12). And yet, even though he had the gift of miracles, he did not consider it usable in the cases of Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:27) and Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23). The gift of healing seems to be a specific category within the larger gift of miracles. An example of the gift of miracles which is not a case of physical healing was the blindness called down on Elymas the sorcerer in Paphos, Cyprus, by Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:11).

Distinction should be made between miracles and healings and the *gifts* of miracles and healing. The spiritual gift is the God-given ability to perform miracles and healings for the purpose of serving Him. However, a miracle or healing may be done apart from the exercise of the gifts. The miracle of the physical sign accompanying the filling with the Spirit recorded in Acts 4:31 was completely apart from the exercise of a gift on the part of any person. The miracle of Aeneas' healing at Lydda was apparently a result of Peter exercising the gift of healing (Acts 9:34), while the raising of Dorcas at Joppa by Peter might not have been the result of exercising a gift but the result of God answering prayer (Acts 9:40). Thus every miracle or every healing is not the result of the respective gift being exercised.

Consequently, then, it does not follow that if one considers the gifts of miracles and healings temporary, he also is saying that God does not perform miracles or heal today. He is simply saying that the gifts are no longer given because the particular purpose for which they were originally given (i.e., to authenticate the oral message) has ceased to exist ...

If the giving of these particular gifts was limited to the early church, in what light is one to regard the question of healing today? Here are some issues to consider in finding the answer to that question.

(1) As has been stated, God can and does heal apart from the exercise of the gift of healing. He does answer prayer, and He answers it in regard to physical problems, but such answers to prayer are not the exercise of the gift of healing.

(2) It is obviously not the will of God to heal everybody. For example, it was not God's will to heal Paul of his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:8-9).

(3) Miracles and healing must not be equated with supernaturalism. In general it is a favorite pressure approach of faith healers to say that if you believe in the supernatural power of God, then you must also believe in His power to heal in the case at hand. This is simply not true, for it is a *non-sequitur*. God does not have to use His supernatural power to prove that He possesses it. Furthermore, any gift given once has been given to the whole church.

(4) To disregard human means in the matter of healing and simply pray for a miraculous cure is like praying for a harvest and then sitting in a rocking chair without planting or cultivating. God more often than not uses human means in the accomplishing of His purposes. This is true in matters of health too.

(5) Those who claim that the gift of healing is exercised today have to admit that the gift is limited in its effectiveness, for they do not claim to heal decayed teeth or suddenly mend broken bones.

(6) Reports of miraculous healings (within the limitations already stated) may be true (but this is not necessarily related to the gift), may be false, may be the cure of something that was psychosomatic.

Naturally all of these six considerations do not apply to every case, but they are germane to the whole question of healing today.

D. Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)

Tongues are the God-given ability to speak in another language. In the recorded instances in the book of Acts the languages of tongues seemed clearly to be foreign languages. There is no doubt that this was true at Pentecost, for the people heard in their native tongues; and it seemed to be the same kind of foreign languages that were spoken in the house of Cornelius (for Peter says that this was the same thing that occurred at Pentecost, Acts 10:46; 11:15).

The addition of the word “unknown” in 1 Corinthians 14 (found in some translations like the KJV) has led many to suppose that the tongues displayed in the church at Corinth were an unknown, heavenly language. If the word is omitted, then one would normally think of the tongues in Corinthians as the same as those in Acts; i.e., foreign languages. This is the natural conclusion. Against this view stand 1 Corinthians 14:2 and 14, which seem to indicate that the Corinthian tongues were an unknown language. In any case, the gift of tongues was being abused by the Corinthians, and Paul was required to lay down certain restrictions on its use. It was to be used only for edifying, only by two or three in a single meeting and then only if an interpreter were present, and never in preference to prophecy. The gift of interpretation is a corollary gift to the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues was given as a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22) and especially to unbelieving Jews (v. 21). If the need for the sign ceased, then of course the gift would no longer need to be given. (See discussion on 1 Cor. 13:8 at the end of this section.)

What about tongues today? One cannot say that God would never give this gift or others of the limited gifts today. But everything indicates that the need for the gift has ceased with the production of the written Word. Certainly the standard Pentecostal position that tongues are the necessary accompaniment of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not valid. ... It is usually fruitless to discuss the experiences people have; one can only measure all experience by the written Word. Even if tongues be not limited or a temporary gift, the emphasis of Scripture is not on the use of this gift. Also, one should remember that the fruit of the Spirit does not include tongues, and Christlikeness does not require speaking in tongues, for Christ never did. May God give us humility and faithfulness enough to remain open to all that originates from Him and **only** to that.

E. Evangelism (Eph. 4:11)

The meaning of the gift of evangelism involves two ideas—the kind of message preached (i.e., the good news of salvation) and the places where it is preached (i.e., in various places). The message is the gospel and the evangelist’s ministry is an itinerant one. In the example of Paul’s own life, the length of stay in one place on his itinerary sometimes lasted as long as two years (Acts 19:10) and sometimes only

a few days (Acts 17:14). Apparently one may do the work of an evangelist even though he may not possess the gift, for Paul exhorts Timothy, who was a pastor, to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

F. Pastor (Eph. 4:11)

The word “pastor” means to shepherd; therefore, the gift of pastor involves leading, providing and caring for, and protecting the portion of the flock of God committed to one’s care. In Ephesians 4:11 the work of teaching is linked with that of pastoring, and in Acts 20:28 the duty of ruling the flock is added. The words “elder,” “bishop,” and “pastor” (translated “feed” in Acts 20:28 {KJV}) are all used of the same leaders of the Ephesian church (cf. Acts 20:17 and 28).

G. Ministering (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:12)

Ministering means serving. The gift of ministering is the gift of helping or serving in the broadest sense of the word. In the Romans passage it is called the gift of ministering; in 1 Corinthians, the gift of helps; in Ephesians we are told that other gifts are given for the purpose of helping believers to be able to serve. This is a very basic gift which all Christians can have and use for the Lord’s glory.

H. Teaching (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11)

Teaching is the God-given ability to explain the harmony and the detail of God’s revelation. Apparently the gift is sometimes given alone (Rom. 12:7) and sometimes it is given along with the gift of pastor (Eph. 4:11). It is more obvious in the case of the gift of teaching that this is a gift that can be developed and must be trained. If we may assume that Peter had the gift, then it is clear that he had to do some studying of Paul’s epistles before he could explain them to others (2 Peter 3:16).

I. Faith (1 Cor. 12:8-10)

Faith is the God-given ability to believe God’s power to supply specific need. Every man has been given a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3), but not everyone has been given the gift of faith. Everyone may believe God, but this cannot be the same as possessing the gift of faith—otherwise there would be no significance to its being listed as a separate spiritual gift.

J. Exhortation (Rom. 12:8)

Exhorting involves encouraging, comforting, and admonishing people. Note that this is a separate and distinct gift from the gift of teaching. In other words, teaching may or may not involve exhortation, and contrariwise exhortation may or may not involve teaching.

K. Discerning Spirits (1 Cor. 12:10)

Discerning spirits is the ability to distinguish between true and false sources of supernatural revelation when it was being given in oral form. It was a very necessary gift before the Word was written, for there were those who claimed to bring revelation from God who were not true prophets.

L. Showing Mercy (Rom. 12:8)

This is akin to the gift of ministering, for it involves succoring those who are sick and afflicted.

M. Giving (Rom. 12:8)

The gift of giving concerns distributing one's own money to others. It is to be done with simplicity, i.e., with no thought of return or gain for self in any way.

N. Administration (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28)

This is the ability to rule the church.¹⁴

1 Corinthians 13:8

Some consider that the expression "tongues shall cease" in 1 Corinthians 13:8 is a proof that tongues specifically was a limited gift. The argument against such an interpretation is that the passage is contrasting the present state with the eternal state and therefore is not speaking of the gift of tongues. However, it should be noted that the wider and immediate context is talking about the gift of tongues to a very great extent and there is no reason not to consider that it is the gift spoken of in this verse.

It is also worthy of note that the principal thesis in Chapter 13 is that love never fails even though tongues and prophecy do and even though the whole present imperfect state fails. There is no necessity in the passage to make the end of tongues the same time as the end of the imperfect or temporal state. Tongues could cease before time ceases and eternity begins without destroying the point of the passage. Indeed, such a progression may prove the point better; i.e., Paul is saying that (1) when tongues cease love abides, and (2) even when time itself comes to an end, love will abide.

There are positive indications in verse 8 that tongues would cease before prophecies and knowledge. Of prophecies (the oral communication of God's truth before the books of the canon were written) and knowledge (the special understanding of these prophecies) it is written that they shall be done away (*katargeo*, "rendered inoperative"). Of tongues it is said that they shall cease (*pauso*). Furthermore, the verb "done away" used in connection with prophecies and knowledge is in the passive voice, indicating that someone (God) shall make them inoperative. The very "cease" used in connection with tongues is middle voice, indicating that they would die out of their own accord. (See Appendix 9 regarding the middle voice.)

Finally, it is rather significant that only prophecy and knowledge are mentioned in verse 9; tongues are not. It is as if Paul meant his readers to understand that the gift of tongues would cease before the gifts of prophecy and knowledge. After all, the fact that there are temporary gifts must have been quite evident in the early church since the distinctiveness of apostles would have been very apparent to all. To indicate that tongues or other gifts were also temporary would have been no shock to the readers of the New Testament epistles. Unfortunately, we too easily forget today that the Scriptures clearly teach that some of the gifts were temporary (Eph. 2:20). It looks as if 1 Corinthians 13:8 specifies that the gift of tongues belongs to that category too.

Final thoughts on the nature and use of spiritual gifts:

¹⁴ Following the translations of the KJV (1 Tim. 3:5 and 5:17), Dr. Ryrie is undoubtedly referring to the ability to guide or direct the affairs of local churches, but in view of the abuses I have seen over the years, I believe a better term for "rule" would be "lead." This is more consistent with our Lord's warning in Luke 22:24f and that of Peter in 1 Peter 5:1f.

(1) It seems gifts differ even within the same gift as with teaching, exhortation, etc. This is evident in the differences we see in the biblical characters of the Bible who had some of the same spiritual gifts. It appears that Barnabas, Paul, and Peter each had the gift of prophecy and teaching, but their ministries were very different and used differently by God (cf. Acts 13:1-2 with 1 Tim. 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:1). Recognizing that our gifts differ (Rom. 12:6) should promote individual freedom in their use according to those differences as long as we are not acting against the Word of God.

(2) Gifts are to be used according to the truth of God's Word (our index for faith and practice). They are to be used for His glory through the strength which God supplies (1 Pet. 4:11; Col. 1:29; 1 Cor. 15:10), and in ways that are fitting to the nature and purpose of each gift (Rom. 12:6-8). While individual differences exist in our gifts, how we exercise our gifts and the attitude that motivates us is as important as the fact that we do exercise our gifts. This is evident by the qualifying phrases of Romans 12:6-8 (according to the grace given to us, according to the proportion of faith, with liberality, with diligence, with cheerfulness), and by the warnings of 1 Cor. 13 (with love) and 14 (for the edification of the church).

(3) All gifts are important and needed (1 Cor. 12:15-25). Just as with the members of our physical bodies, there are no unimportant gifts, but all do not have the same priority (1 Cor. 12:28-31).

(4) God both gives and uses our gifts according to His own sovereign choice and purposes in accord with how He places us in the body (1 Cor. 12:4-6; Mark 4:20).

(5) Gifts constitute God's primary place of ministry for believers. Gifts are a declaration of God's will and calling for our lives (cf. Rom. 12:2 with vs. 3).

(6) Where and how we are to use our gift(s) is a matter of God's individual leading and whether or not we are listening to His leading (cf. Acts 16:6-10; 1 Cor. 12:4-6). Therefore, believers need to discern their gift(s) through thinking properly about themselves in the light of Romans 12:3, and through the encouragement and input from other believers (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

(7) All believers are to show mercy, give, walk by faith, and help others, but some believers have special gifts which enable them to excel in each of these areas (Rom. 12:7-8; 1 Cor. 12:9, 28).

Principles Related to Responding to God's Call

Since every believer in the church age is a priest of God, there is a general sense in which he or she is also an apostle (*apostolos*, "a delegate, a messenger, one sent on a mission"), not in the technical sense like the twelve and Paul, but in a general sense as one sent out by God, a representative whom God has called for special works of ministry (Matt. 28:20; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 3:15; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:25 {*apostolos*, your messenger or sent one; see also 2 Cor. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:20}).

Backing up this call are the promises, authority, resources, and provision of a sovereign Lord who has promised never to leave nor forsake us. The word for apostle, the Greek word *apostolos*, means one equipped and sent out by the provision and authority of another. This means two things: (a) What God has called you to do He has gifted you to do, and what He has gifted you to do He has called you to do (Matt. 28:19; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 12:7; Col. 1:29). (b) Whatever God has called you to do, He will provide for with the necessary resources to do that job or ministry, but according to His timing and in His way (see Neh. 1 and 2).

How do we determine God's calling?

Negatively: I have too often seen preachers or missionaries work people up into an emotional state in order to get them to give their lives to some kind of full time service. This is basically a form of manipulation. Determining God's call is not by a feeling, an emotional high, or by allowing someone to make you feel guilty, or by the burden of someone else.

Positively: Determining God's will starts by the consecration of our lives in response to the mercies of God as we are exhorted to do in Romans 12:1-2.

(1) By biblical vision and understanding—by realizing God can and wants to use each of us. God has given each of us the ability and responsibility to minister. I have known people who were afraid to do the work of ministry because they felt they would be encroaching on the "minister's" job. Every believer has permission to minister; indeed, he is called to minister. This is God's plan for the church.

(2) By spiritual gifts. We need to each grasp the concept of spiritual gifts and know the gift(s) God has given us (Rom. 12:3). God's call begins with Romans 12:1-2, but this should be followed up with Romans 12:3f, evaluation of one's gift. I have known people who have been convinced by a preacher in a very emotional service, that God had called them to preach yet they had no idea what their spiritual gift was. Such is getting the cart before the horse.

(3) By burden—by letting God put His burden for each of us on our heart. God does, of course, use the preaching of the Word, and He often uses missionaries and others to make us aware of spiritual needs of the world as part of building a burden in our heart. But we need to be careful not to manipulate people. Decisions and burdens need to be of God and not of man. We each need to be asking God to direct us and to give us a burden for what He wants according to His gifts, leading, provision, and timing.

(4) By intimacy and fellowship with the Lord. It's through the abiding life that we are in a position to hear what the Lord is saying to each of us. It is too easy for us to mistake self-centered objectives like praise and applause for God's will or call.

(5) By realizing we can make mistakes, it's okay. God has built into each believer the basics for the ministry He wants us to do (age, background, perhaps even some training, environment, and interests all in conjunction with our own spiritual gifts). Some people hold back from ministry because they have been paralyzed by fear, the fear of failure or of making mistakes.

(6) By realizing that God has called us to suffer because ministry in a hostile world often means suffering, and that He is always with us no matter what (Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:3,9; 1 Pet. 4:19; 3:17; Heb. 13:5-6).

Hindrances to Good Stewardship of Our Gifts

- (1) The belief God only calls preachers, evangelists, missionaries, etc.
- (2) Fear that we will fail, we will be persecuted, or that we don't know how.
- (3) Personal agendas in ministry for various reasons of covetousness—position, power, praise, applause.
- (4) Apathy, lack of devotion to the Lord and the body of Christ.
- (5) A wrong view of the church as an organization rather than an organism.

An Organization Versus An Organism	
Membership (as in a club)	Disciples, (members of His body)
Spectatoritis—Sit, Soak, and Sour (the spiritual couch potato)	Participants—co-laborers, partners who sit, soak, and serve
Consumerism—I am here to be served and to get	Ministry—Service to others—helping believers grow that they may labor with others
Clergy/Layman—we pay you, the minister, to serve us	Every believer is a ministering priest
Self-centered godliness—making satisfaction, comfort one's religion; using God like a genie ¹⁵	God and other-centered godliness—Mark 12:28-31; Eph. 4:11-16

¹⁵ Modern Christians tend to make satisfaction their religion. We show much more concern for self-fulfillment than for pleasing our God. Typical of Christianity today, at any rate in the English-speaking world, is its massive rash of how-to-books for believers, directing us to more successful relationships, more joy in sex, becoming more of a person, realizing our possibilities, getting more excitement each day, reducing our weight, improving our diet, managing our money, licking our families into happier shape, and whatnot. For people whose prime passion is to glorify God, these are doubtless legitimate concerns; but the how-to-books regularly explore them in a self-absorbed way that treats our enjoyment of life rather than the glory of God as the center of interest (J. I. Packer, *Keeping in Step With the Spirit*, Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan, NJ, 1984, p. 97).

Lesson 3:
The Stewardship of God's Truth
Multiplying the Life Through Evangelism and Discipleship

Introduction

The Treasure of God's Truth

2 Timothy 1:13-14 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.

In challenging Timothy to guard the message God had given him to communicate to others, the Apostle Paul defined that message as "the treasure which has been entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:13-14). Here the Apostle reminds us that this message, the message about the Lord Jesus that brings men into a vital relationship with the eternal God of the universe, is both a *treasure* and a *trust*. Obviously the only message that brings men into the kingdom of God, reconciles them to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), and gives them eternal life and life more abundant (John 10:10) is truly a treasure beyond measure or a pearl of great value (Matt. 13:44-46). The message of the Gospel is the most valuable thing a person can possess, but as something so intrinsically valuable, it also needs guarding. Why? Because there are many peddlers walking about with a false gospel seeking to pawn off one of Satan's many counterfeits on a gullible public (Gal. 1:6-9; Jude 3-4).

But while it is to be guarded, it must not be hoarded. Indeed, it is a message that must be shared or communicated clearly and accurately to others. In that sense, it is also a trust entrusted to us to commit to others. So, in 2 Timothy 2:2, Timothy is charged with the responsibility of entrusting what he had learned from Paul to other faithful men who in turn would teach others and so on, and so on.

This is the ministry of spiritual multiplication. Note that there are four generations represented here. Paul to Timothy to "faithful men" to "others also." This is very simple, but the results are awesome. If you win just one person to the Lord each year and train that person to walk with Christ and become productive himself, and then the two of you do the same thing with two more people (just one apiece) the next year so that you continue to double your numbers each year thereafter. Do you know how many people would have come to Christ after continuing this process for twenty years? By the end of the twentieth year, your ranks will have grown to 1,048,576.¹

The Problem We Face

It seems that a lot of people have the idea that making disciples (winning souls and building them in Christ) is a job for only a special cast of people like missionaries, pastors, and youth workers and that their job is simply to support them or pay them to do the work of ministry. There are a lot of things that have led to this like the minister/laymen mentality, but the point is, this is a totally erroneous idea and

¹ Christopher B. Adsit, *Personal Disciple-Making*, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernardino, CA, 1988, p. 332-333.

one that is certainly not biblical. Rather than grasping the concept of every believer a ministering priest (1 Pet. 2:5-10), too many have become simply spectators rather than team players. In other words, 2 Timothy 1:14 and 2:2 give us God's game plan for the body of Christ and most believers can be involved in this to some degree if they were only available. One of the primary roles of the so-called pastor or the pastor-elders is that of player-coaches who train or equip others to do the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).

Ephesians 4:12 does not describe three things that the pastors are to do as the KJV might lead some to believe, i.e., "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ." The Greek text would be better translated as "For (*pros*) the equipping of the saints unto (*eis*) the work of ministry unto (*eis*) the building up of the body of Christ" (My translation). Paul's intention is to describe an equipping ministry that develops others with a view to ministry which in turn is designed to produce a body that grows qualitatively (spiritual growth toward Christlike maturity), quantitatively (people coming to Christ), and organically (people being plugged into ministries—elders, deacons, teachers, etc.).

Becoming good stewards of the treasure of God's truth is not just something for a special few, but a calling for all of us as believers in Christ.

Early Church Growth

After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and the coming of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, what happened to the church? It grew by leaps and bounds and with great power. The events are recorded for us in the book of Acts. At first we see just the 11 disciples gathered with the Lord, then 120 in the upper room, then 3000, and shortly after that, the Lord added 5000 more to the church.

This was not simply addition, but multiplication through the ministry of the body of Christ with almost whole communities turning to the Lord and being added to the church, the body of Christ.

The growth of the church did not stop there. Through the centuries, the Church of Jesus Christ has continued to grow, and the awesome thing is it has grown among alien cultures, among hostile religions, and among both primitive and cultured and educated peoples. With this growth all over the world, the church has grown and triumphed in spite of traitors, apostasy, persecution, famine, sword, Bible burnings, the lions' den, burning at the stake, and you name it.

As the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (speaking of Christ's own person and work) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

It is evident that the Church has grown in many different ways, but as Wyn and Charles Arn point out, "... there has always been one way it has grown better, faster, and stronger than any other. From its beginning, through the centuries till today, one unique way has been more responsible for the Church's growth than any other. It is about this way—and the important implications it has for you and your church"² that this series on evangelism or making disciples, the great mission of the church, is all about.

² Wyn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, Church Growth Press, Pasadena, CA, 1982, p. 6.

The Church Today

The mission for the church has not changed. The mission given to the early church is still the mandate for the church of the twentieth century. Yet things are not well even though the potential for evangelism and discipleship world-wide has never been greater. Around every church and Christian home in every community, there are winnable people just waiting to be won. But, how well do we understand **our mission, the means** available to us, and the **biblical method** that works so well, but is so often ignored?

Statistics tell us that only about 7% of the church are trained to do the work of evangelism and only about 2% are actually doing the work of evangelism. Two men who have considerable experience in evangelism and discipleship and who have traveled all across America conducting seminars, holding consultations, conferring with church leaders and laity, and feeling the pulse of America are Wyn and Charles Arn. In their book, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, they point to a number of characteristics that mark the church in America.³

(1) "Reaching non-Christians is a low priority for most congregations and individuals." What was once the heartbeat of the early church has diminished enormously as a priority in the minds of most Christians.

(2) "The biblical concept of 'lostness' has disappeared from the conscience of most churches and most Christians." We have lost the sense and burden of Jude 23, "others save, snatching them out of the fire."

(3) "Most evangelism methods are relatively ineffective in making disciples." Local congregations often "import a program or formula that has seemingly been successful, but in reality, these programs are only short lived. They too often involve a 15-minute Gospel presentation under artificial conditions with little knowledge of the person or consideration of their unique needs" (p. 9). Such approaches tend to see people as notches on the handle of their gospel gun. Such approaches often lead to keeping score.

(4) "Evangelism focuses more on decision-making rather than on building relationships and discipleship-making ..." That brief verbal commitment is seen as the ultimate response to the Great Commission. Unfortunately, there is often a great gap between 'getting a decision' and 'making a disciple.'

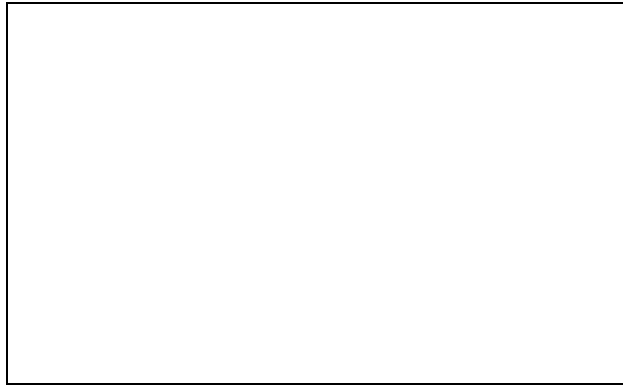
(5) "Making disciples is interpreted only or primarily as spiritual growth," but too often it's a growth that is self-centered and lacks certain elements that are essential to true biblical maturity, namely teaching people to reproduce themselves in others as disciple-makers themselves.

(6) "Evangelism methods are too often simplistic." They rely too much on canned presentations rather than on building relationships and caring for people as individuals (lifestyle evangelism) that builds bridges to the Gospel by genuinely loving people.

(7) "Evangelism is much discussed, but little practiced." It is a part of the doctrinal statement or on the bulletin, the subject of seminars, and videos, but it's not really a part of the lifestyle of the average believer or member of the congregation.

So, what's wrong? With the greatest message in the world, a message that gives life in place of death, why are we failing to spread the good news and fulfill the Great Commission? Clearly the church needs training, but more importantly it needs the right motivation to become the people it was called to be, a people proclaiming the excellencies of our God and salvation in Christ.

³ Arn, pp. 7-11.



Using God's Word as the source for discovering the Master's plan and with the hope of becoming a means of motivation, challenge, and instruction, this series on evangelism will fall into four major categories:

- Understanding Our Mission (Matt. 28:18-20)
- Understanding Our Means (Acts 1:8)
- Understanding Our Method (the *oikos* or network principle)
- Understanding Our Message

Though one of the great thrusts of these next few lessons will be on evangelism, it is not just a series on evangelism. To limit it to evangelism is to miss the complete mission of the church and perhaps leave us with the impression that our goal here is to enlist everyone for a program to train a team of people to go out and knock on doors with a canned evangelism approach. As it has just been pointed out, this is part of the problem.

Lesson 4:
The Stewardship of
God's Truth Through Evangelism
(Part 1)

Understanding Our Mission

The Great Commission

Each of the gospels, though they each vary in the wording, conclude with what we can call the Great Commission. And Acts, which continues what Jesus began, basically begins on the same note.

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

Luke 24:46-48 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things."

John 20:21 Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

Acts 1:8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Right from the very beginning when the Lord was calling His disciples do you remember what He told them? In Matthew 4:19 He said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." In Mark 1:17 we read, "And Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.'" But it is important to realize that fishers of men are not born. They are made. They are made by knowing the Master and knowing and following the Master's plan (or vision) rather than their own. To drive that principle home, He illustrated it to them on a couple of occasions.

One illustration is found for us in John 21:1-14. It is an event that occurred after the resurrection in one of Christ's post-resurrection appearances and just before His ascension, but also not long after He had told them, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." The story begins in John 21:1. It's the story of seven of the disciples who, probably in their impatience and frustration, went fishing and fished most of the night without success, but who, at the command of the Lord, pulled in a great catch of fish.

Now remember, this is a story of one of the ten post-resurrection appearances of the Lord just prior to His ascension and absence from the earth. In this scene, the Lord was manifesting Himself to men as

the risen Lord and inviting them to personal fellowship with Him as the source and meaning of their lives.

This event dramatically portrays that which the living Christ **is to us** and **is doing** today—calling men and women away from lives of frustration and futility to lives of meaning and productivity as they learn to live in vital communion with Jesus Christ and through following the Master’s plan for life.

But further, this story also portrays the typical tendencies and weaknesses of men as they tend to operate in and of themselves without waiting for the Lord, without His plan, strength and energy, and direction which, of course, only comes from intimate fellowship with the Savior.

John 21:1-10 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will also come with you.” They went out, and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus therefore said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” 6 And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find a catch.” They cast therefore, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” And so when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. 9 And so when they got out upon the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid, and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” 11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come *and* have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread, and gave them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

Let’s note a few things from this passage:

“*After these things*” refers to the seven great selective signs concluded by the resurrection which John describes in his gospel, but the purpose of these signs is clearly stated, “that you may believe ...” It is designed to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ alone as the Son of God and the only means of salvation (cf. 28-31). John 21 is an epilogue or postscript designed to reveal the person of Jesus Christ in certain ways that are vital to our mission in the absence of Christ’s literal presence on earth.

“*Jesus manifested Himself again to the Disciples...*” Who manifested Himself? Jesus, the resurrected one who had died for our sin. This is a special manifestation of the risen Christ. What did He do? He manifested Himself. “Manifested” is *phaneroo*, “to shine forth, make clear and visible.” The verb is somewhat causative and the text means that Jesus intentionally made himself to shine forth. It does not simply say, “he appeared” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:4,5). Christ was intentionally revealing certain things about Himself that are vital for us to grasp during His absence from us as the resurrected and ascended Lord of life.

Christ manifested Himself to the disciples, to believers, to those who were his followers, to those to whom He had given and would repeat again the Great Commission and to whom He had said, “follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” But this group was restless and uncertain. Their hopes were now revived, but they were in need of His direction and fellowship. They had a resurrected Savior, but they were in a fog. What were they to do now? How were they to act?

Where Was This Done? At the sea of Tiberius where these men went fishing. Tiberius is the Roman name for the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1, 23). It was sometimes called this because the city of Tiberius, the capital of Galilee, was located on its shores. But we should note that this was an area very familiar to the disciples both as fishermen (Mark 4:16 and Luke 5:1), and as disciples for they had spent much time with the Lord by and on this sea. The sea in Scripture is often a picture of the sea of mankind. So here they were in their own backyard so to speak, in very familiar surroundings. How much we need to see this! The Lord wants to take our lives as they are—our family circumstances and conditions, our businesses, our routines—the things we take so for granted and do so automatically, that we think we can handle so well, and then He uses those very things to manifest just how much we need Him for meaning and success according to His standards.

When Did He Do This? The timing of this is significant!

“Again” (vs. 1), that is, following other manifestations of the Lord. The disciples all knew now that Christ was very much alive and were convinced of that (cf. 20:26-29).

But compare Matthew 26:32—He would meet them in Galilee so they were to go to Galilee. Also note Matthew 28:7, 10, 16. Here we see He designated a particular mountain where they were to wait for His arrival and manifestation. This was their responsibility and need for the present. They were to assemble and wait; they weren't ready for service. Activity and work wouldn't solve their restlessness. What they needed was Christ—waiting and looking for Him.

“But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach” (vs. 4). This manifestation occurred after a long night of futility and frustration. WOW! WHAT TIMING! Note the Lord's words here in the passage which calls attention to their lack and failure, but also offers His fellowship and provision.

Why Was This Done? As the Prologue, chapter 1, reveals Jesus Christ as the pre-incarnate God who became flesh that He might reveal God and become the perfect substitute for man, so chapter 21, the epilogue, reveals what Christ means to us as the incarnate and glorified God-man in our life and ministry. It reveals the frustrations we have with life, the way life never satisfies when we are not operating out of fellowship with the resurrected Christ as a result of not following His instructions and being involved in His purposes. It illustrates the failure we experience when we operate by our schemes as well as the success we can experience when we operate by His directions or the 'Master's Plan.' Finally, it demonstrates the importance of fellowship to our mission and ministry and our ability to effectively use the Master's Plan.

But the Great Commission does not end in the gospels. It is picked up immediately when we come to the book of Acts which is a continuation of all that Jesus began to do and to teach. So, in the very first chapter, the Lord tells the disciples, “but you shall ...” (1:8). What exactly is the Great Commission? What exactly is our mission? The most complete presentation of the Great Commission is Matthew 28:18-20.

I do not mean to imply by what has been said that our only mission or purpose in life is the Great Commission. I don't believe that it is. But it is such an integral and indispensable part of our purpose as believers in Christ that without it, trying to live as Christians is like trying to build a house without nails

and mortar or the things needed to hold it together. It is one of the prime reasons for being and it provides added meaning, peace, and purpose.

There are probably very few who have never heard a message on the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. While I am confident that the greatest problem with our failures in evangelism and outreach is not information, but motivation, burden, courage, and availability, still, there is a lack in our understanding regarding our mission and a proper understanding of this passage.

And even where that is not the case, we need reminding as Peter put it in 2 Peter 1:12-13. If we are to be effective in our mission, we do need to understand exactly what that mission entails. This must become our vision, the goal and purpose of the church. Goals are what drive and motivate us. But if our goals are unclear or wrong, then we will lack the drive and direction we need as God's people (Pro. 29:18; cf. Jud. 21:25).

Though I won't be following this particular outline, a good way to look at this passage is through the perspective of the following outline: (1) Armed with His Authority and Power (vs. 18); (b) Aligned with His Aim or Purpose (vss. 19-20a); and (c) Assured of His Attendance or Presence (vs. 20b).

The Structure and Meaning

To properly grasp the mission or aim of this Commission given to the church, we need to understand both the structure of these sentences and the meaning of this structure. Without this we are left with an unclear understanding of what the Lord is calling us to do as the church.

Verse 18 introduces the commission with a statement concerning the Lord's authority and power which forms the foundation for courage, comfort, and motivation for the mission to which the Lord has called us.

Verse 20b, concludes with the assurance of Christ's continued presence providing us with another word for courage, comfort, and motivation. The mission itself is spelled out in verses 19-20a.

What exactly is the main thrust and aim of the Great Commission given us by our Lord? What's the core?

The original Greek has one main verb supplemented by three participles. The one main verb, "make disciples," points us to the primary mission and aim. The three participles, "go," "baptizing," and "teaching," tell us what is involved in making disciples. Literally, the text says, "going, make disciples, baptizing them, ... teaching them to observe all that ..."

The First Participle "Go"

The difficult part of the structure is deciding how to take the first participle, "going." There are two views prevalent today. One is to give this participle the character of an imperative or command in which it would mean "go." The other is to give it an adverbial character like "having gone" or "in your going" or "as you go make disciples." Apart from a specific context, both ideas are grammatically legitimate. Greek participles can be used like an imperative, but only the context and usage can determine if a particular instance has the meaning of an imperative.

The usage of this construction and context does indicate this should be understood as a command, "go," but while this is true, we must never lose sight of the fact that the main command and mission is that of making disciples.

The following are illustrations to show this means “go,” as an imperative, from usage:

- Genesis 27:13 in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, we have *poreuthentes enegke* which means, “go, bring.” The Hebrew has two imperatives. There are plenty of other examples of this in the LXX (Gen. 37:14; Ex. 5:18).
- Matthew 9:13, “go, learn what this means.” The Lord was not saying here, “In your going, learn what this meant.” The same concept is true in the following verses.
- Matthew 11:4, “go, report to John,” Matt. 28:7, “go quickly, tell his disciples,” Mark 16:15, “go into all the world and preach ...” and Matthew 2:13 and 20, “arise, take the child.” Certainly the angel was not saying something like, “when you go, take the child,” or “in your going, take the child.” This was an urgent command.

Then, why this construction? Why not use two regular imperatives? Is it just an idiom without significance? First, the participle with the main verb is used in order to stress that there is one primary objective—making disciples. Making disciples is the core or heart of the commission. Second, the use of the participle shows the action of the participle is closely connected or vitally related to the main verb. It proposes the necessary way to fulfill the main verb.

Without going, the command to make disciples is impossible, especially when it involves all nations. Going is not a secondary option. You don't catch fish in a barrel. We must do something that puts us in contact with people so we can win them to Christ and begin the process of making disciples. The going involves anything we do from hosting outreach Bible studies, getting acquainted with neighbors, or by crossing oceans to take the Gospel to lost tribes.

Both words, “go” and “make disciples” are in aorist tense which, in Greek, makes the action definite and urgent. The idea is “go and perform your calling.”

The Next Two Participles, “Baptizing” and “Teaching”

These two are not so problematic. They tell us the means or method for making disciples. How do we make disciples? By two activities—by baptizing them and teaching them which is equivalent to evangelism and edification. As Ryrie points out:

Baptizing is a single act; teaching is a continuous process. Disciples have to be baptized (an evidence of salvation—therefore, one may say that disciples must first be saved); then they have to be taught over and over to obey (observe all things).

In New Testament times, baptism served as one of the clearest proofs that a person had accepted Christ. Baptism was not entered into casually or routinely as is often the case today. Although it is clear in the New Testament that baptism does not save, to be baptized was to signify in no uncertain terms that one had received Christ and was also associating himself with the Christian group, the church.¹

See 1 Corinthians 1:14-17; 15:3 which show that baptism, though important, was not a part of the Gospel message. In other words, baptizing men and women in the name of the Father, etc., must naturally include and be preceded by the ministry of evangelism by which people come to know Christ and can then profess their faith through baptism.

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1989, p. 103.

The Setting and Context

Since the main verb and primary command of the commission is “make disciples,” we next want to focus our attention on this command for this is the heart of the Great Commission.

What does it mean to make disciples? To grasp this we want to focus on the cultural and contextual setting out of which arises the meaning and use of the Greek word *matheteuo*.

The Cultural Setting

The Basic Meaning: *Matheteuo* can mean “to practice the duties of a disciple,” that is, “to be a disciple (pupil or learner).” Or it can have a causative meaning, “make a disciple,” which is the meaning here. In general, a disciple was one who bound himself to another in order to acquire his knowledge and understanding.² The use of this word by our Lord brings to mind the Rabbi-student context and setting, for it is in this cultural context that He used this term.

The word was used of students who lived in close fellowship with their teacher, they traveled with him, ate with him, attended festive occasions with him. The students of a teacher were characterized by complete submission to the authority of the teacher, as well as by a devotion to him which was to surpass devotion to father or mother and which displayed itself in service to the teacher.³

The teaching or learning method was to sit at the feet of the teacher listening to him; to engage in a question and answer encounter with the teacher; to observe the actions of the teacher, especially how he conducted himself in regard to the Law or solved problems of conduct through his knowledge of Law and tradition.⁴

After the strenuous studies the student was ordained through the laying on of hands and received the right to be called Rabbi. He then had the responsibility to pass on that which he had learned from his teacher and to make disciples himself.

The Biblical Context

The word *disciple* itself means “learner or pupil.” **A disciple is one who is under instruction.** It always involved a teacher-student relationship. John the Baptist had his disciples (Matt. 9:14), the Pharisees had theirs (Matt. 22:16), even Paul had his (Acts 9:25), and of course, the Lord had many disciples (Luke 6:17). **A New Testament disciple is one who is under biblical instruction.**

Some followed the Lord only a short time and then dropped off because of the cost. There was Judas who was unsaved, Joseph of Arimathea who was a secret disciple for some time, and there were others who belonged to the inner circle. The Lord expected discipleship to involve total commitment if one was going to be able to fully follow through as a disciple, but being a disciple and being a believer are not one and the same.

² Cleon Rogers, “The Great Commission,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 130, No. 519, Jul 1973, 262f.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Salvation is a free gift but being a disciple means counting the costs. All believers should be disciples, but not all believers actually follow through as disciples.

Now, look back at the words of the Great Commission. What is the core assignment here? Win converts, hold great evangelistic rallies, pass out tracts, hold Bible classes and teach theology so we can defend the faith? No! One thing stands out, especially in the Greek, and only one: **“Make disciples.”**

Making disciples is the heart and center of the command. The three other actions tell us how, by **going**, **baptizing** (which assumes giving the Gospel and winning people to Christ), and **teaching** them as believers.

The Significance of the Setting and Context

When the Great Commission is viewed against the setting in which it is given, we not only find some significant insights, but some tremendous motivations.

(1) The Adoration by the Disciples (vs. 17)

Present in this scene is the risen and glorified Lord with the disciples bowing down to Him in worship and adoration. Though some were doubtful because it was hard for them to grasp the reality of the resurrection, the majority recognized this was the risen and glorified Lord, and as a result, they worshipped Him as Lord. The significant point is that the Great Commission was given in a context of worship and obedience. Responding to the Great Commission is naturally the product of worship and submission to the lordship of Christ. If we truly recognize who He is and truly worship Him in Spirit and in truth, we should commit ourselves to the propagation of the message of Christ to the world since He is its sovereign Lord and Savior.

(2) Assurance of His Authority (vs. 18)

The command to make disciples is based on the fact of His Authority. Note the “therefore” of vs. 19. This means the Lord’s unlimited authority in all areas. In the light of the cultural and rabbinic context or setting, making disciples under the authority of Christ includes the following:

- He alone is the master teacher and has the right to make binding interpretation and authoritative statements. He Himself is our ultimate teacher, a ministry He carries out through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the body of Christ, and the gifted teachers He gives to the body (John 16:12-15; 1 Cor. 4:4-6; Eph. 4:11-16).
- He alone has the right to reveal the will of the Father and teach His followers. All of us are to be in submission to His authority through the Scriptures, our authoritative index for truth. He alone has the right to be judge and make decision in accord with the righteousness of God.
- It means living daily in continual fellowship with Him, listening to His Word, learning from Him and putting His teaching into practice, and letting His life be manifest in our daily life. Discipleship calls for complete submission to Him with total devotion and service as we learn to pick up our cross and submit to His authority and leading.
- It means proclaiming His Word and seeking to bring others into this relationship, training them to in turn win and train others (2 Tim. 2:1-2).

Baptizing believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the sign or symbol that the old life and its connections have been broken and the person has entered into a new life by faith in Christ and a new fellowship with Jesus as their teacher and master.

Teaching is the instruction new converts are to go through to build them in the Word of the Master that they might become obedient students as well as disciples makers. They are to learn, put into practice, guard, and pass on that which Jesus commanded.

(3) Assurance of His Continual Attendance and Presence (vs. 20b)

Verse 20b gives us the promise of the Savior's continual presence and teaches us He is available for our protection, provision, and guidance. But that's not all. He is also present as our Teacher for constant fellowship, to receive our devotion, obedience, and ministry through the Spirit's enablement as He promised. However, as His followers, unlike in the Jewish rabbinical tradition, though we teach others, we do not become rabbis, but remain His students with the command to make others students of the Master.

Conclusion

This, then, is the Great Commission and our mission. The Lord calls his church, and us as individuals to make disciples. In summary, what does this involve?

- It means going, getting out into the world to love and reach men and women for Christ. It means being involved through prayer, through loving neighbors, through building bridges or common ground, and from that, sharing the Gospel.
- It means baptizing them as a public declaration of their new life in Christ after winning them to the Lord through the Gospel message.
- It means building them in the Word, teaching them to know, guard, and apply the Word to their lives so they can in turn become disciple makers who are involved in this multiplication process through the ministry of the local body.

This is a call to commitment, to fellowship with the Lord, fellowship with other believers, time in the Word and prayer, along with a commitment to doing those things that will enable us to reach others for Christ and engage as many as possible in the process of making disciples.

We each need to ask the question, "where am I in this process?"

Understanding Our Means

Enablement for Accomplishing Christ's Plan

Earlier I made reference to the way the early church, as it is recorded for us in Acts, grew by leaps and bounds with great power. In one place we read that the Lord added 3000 to His church, and shortly after that about 5000 (Acts 2:41; 4:3). But the important question is simply how do we account for such a phenomenon?

The book of Acts is often called the Acts of the Apostles because in it we see the work and ministry of the Apostles of our Lord continuing that which He began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1). But it is much more accurate to call this book *the Acts of the Holy Spirit* for the ministry and power of the Spirit is eve-

rywhere present and seen as the cause and source of the spread of the Gospel through the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Behind the work of the Apostles the executive activity of the Spirit of God was seen everywhere. The book of Acts is the story of men who both established the church and led the missionary enterprise. As Oswald Sanders remarks,

It is of more than passing significance that the central qualification of those who were to occupy even subordinate positions of responsibility in the early church was that they be men "full of the Holy Spirit." They must be known by their integrity and sagacity, but preeminently for their spirituality. However brilliant a man may be intellectually, however capable an administrator, without that essential equipment he is incapable of giving truly spiritual leadership.⁵

In view of our Lord's teaching and promise to the Apostles in Acts 1:4-8, we should not be surprised at this. There He declared to them and to us that the means for our ministry and effectiveness lies totally in the ministry and power of the Spirit of God. Our success, our boldness, our courage, our ability is dependent on the Spirit of God. It is to be as it was in the days of Zechariah when the Word of the Lord came to Zerubbabel, "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

Why is the ministry of the Spirit of God so important? Because of our insufficiency and because reaching others for Christ requires the miraculous work of the Spirit of God to convict and break through the hardness of the human heart, to illuminate the darkness of the human mind, and to regenerate the spiritual deadness of the human spirit. Nothing short of the power of the Spirit of God is sufficient. Making disciples, reaching and building men and women in Christ can be effectively accomplished only by spirit-filled people. Other qualifications are of course desirable, but to be Spirit-filled (controlled by the Holy Spirit) is indispensable.

The Age of the Spirit

From the standpoint of the believer's walk with the Lord, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is one of the most important doctrines and promises of the Word for the church age. This age, the church age, is the age of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's special administrator, gift, and means of power to glorify and reveal Jesus Christ and to experience the Christian life.

The Promise of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the object of many marvelous promises in both the Old and New Testaments (Ezek. 36:24-27; 37:14; Isa. 44:3; 59:21; John 7:37-39; 14:16, 17; Acts 1:4-8).

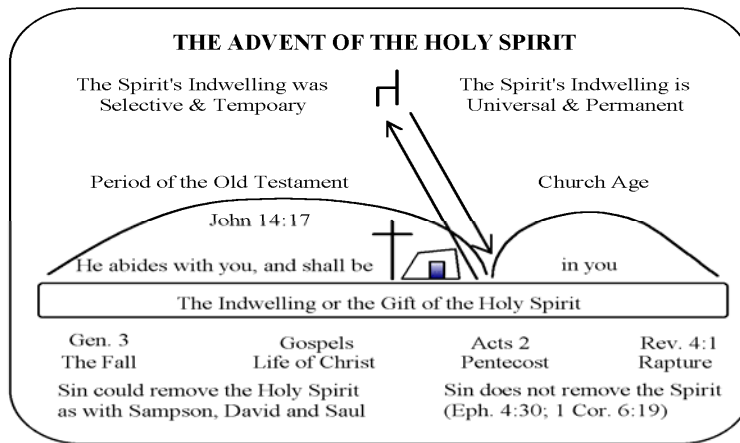
The Fact of the Spirit's Coming

The following passages describe the fact of the coming of the Holy Spirit as promised by the prophets and by the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:1-33; 10:43-44; 11:15-18; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Gal. 5:5-25).

⁵ Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1986, p. 97.

The Age of the Spirit Illustrated

The following diagram illustrates the distinctive ministry of the Spirit for church age believers in contrast to Old Testament saints.



The Ministry of the Spirit in Acts

The importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit for this age is quickly obvious from a consideration of the following facts: (a) The words "Holy Spirit" are used 40 times in Acts, (b) "the Spirit," referring to the Spirit of God, 14 times, (c) "by the Spirit" emphasizing agency, 4 times, (d) "filled" or "full" emphasizing His control is used in connection with the Spirit 8 times, and (e) in the majority of these passages, the Spirit of God is seen as the *agent of action* enabling and directing the church primarily in its missionary enterprise on earth. Also, compare the following: Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:10; 8:29, 39; 10:19; 11:12, 28; 13:4, 9, 52; 16:6, 7; 21:4.

Ministries and Purposes of the Spirit

Some see the purpose of the Spirit in our lives as power, some as performance, some as unity, some as the administration of the gifts of the Spirit, some as teaching, some as His miraculous workings and so on. All of these either are or have been ministries of the Spirit and are important to the body of Christ. However, to emphasize any one of these to the exclusion of the others, and especially to the exclusion of the chief emphasis of the Word, is to go off into error.

Jesus Christ is our life, the hope of glory. Therefore, the **chief focus** given to us in the Word is that the Holy Spirit in all His ministries is given to us to mediate the presence of Christ. He is given to manifest the person and work of Jesus Christ, to make Him known, and to make us aware of all He is to us (cf. Heb. 2:1-4; 6:4; 10:29 and the theme of the book).

The ministry of the Spirit is Christ-centered. It is neither man-centered, with an emphasis on our gifts, personalities, and experiences, nor is it Holy Spirit centered with an emphasis on His miraculous activities. Please note the following Scriptures: John 7:37-39; 14:26; 16:8-14.

The Holy Spirit, therefore, calls attention to neither Himself nor to man, but focuses all attention on Jesus Christ and what God has done in and through His Son. His purpose via all His ministries is to develop our faith, hope, love, adoration, obedience, fellowship, and commitment to Christ.

This thus becomes a criterion by which we may judge any spiritual movement and its biblical authenticity.

Summaries of the Spirit's Ministries:

(1) Who the Spirit is: He is not simply a force or an influence or simply a power. He is a person and He is God the third person of the trinity, who as a person, can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), lied to (Acts 5:3-4), obeyed (Acts 10:19-21), resisted (Acts 7:51), and blasphemed (Matt. 12:31).

(2) What the Spirit is to believers:

- A seal (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13)
- An anointing (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 John 2:20, 27)
- A pledge (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:14)
- A helper (John 14:16, 26)

(3) What the Holy Spirit does for believers:

- Convicts and reveals Jesus Christ to men (John 16:8-11)
- Regenerates believers to new life (Tit. 3:5)
- Baptizes believers into Christ (1 Cor. 12:13)
- Reproduces the character of Jesus Christ in those who submit to Him (Gal. 4:19; 5:5, 16-23)
- Promotes spiritual maturity (Gal. 3:1-3; 5:1-5; Heb. 5:11-6:6)
- Teaches, gives understanding in the Word (1 Cor. 2:9-16; Jn. 14:26; 16:11f; Eph. 3:16-18)
- Applies truth to our experience (Rom. 8:16; John 14:26; Eph. 6:18)
- Gives power to our prayer life (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20; Jn. 15:7; cf. Ps. 66:18)
- Gives meaningful worship (Jn. 4:23, 24; Eph. 5:18f; cf. Isa. 1:11f; 59:1f; Ps. 50:16f)
- Gives capacity, direction, ability, and burden for witnessing (Acts 1:8; 13:4; 16:6; 1 Thess. 1:5)
- Gives ability in service (1 Cor. 12-14; 1 Pet. 4:10—Refers to gifts of the Spirit to be exercised in the power of the Spirit from the motive of love, a work of the Spirit)

All these ministries demonstrate the importance of the ministry of the Spirit to our daily walk and particularly to our witness. Our responsibility and need, then, is to walk and minister by means of the Spirit (Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 5:18). (For a more in-depth study on how to be controlled by the Spirit, see Part 2, Lesson 5.)

Conclusion

To be sure, we must understand that our means for fulfilling our calling or commission as believers in Christ is the filling of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of God in control of our lives. We must not think of this only in term of witnessing as though when we get ready to witness, we must get filled with the Spirit like plugging a cord into an electric socket. It doesn't work that way.

It should be noted, however, that nearly every intervention of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts had as its objective the spread of the Gospel to men and women. His great preoccupation, then as now, was to make the church a missionary church. Should His preoccupation not be ours too?⁶

Since the Holy Spirit is so vital to the experience and character of Christ in our lives and to our witness, shouldn't our walk by the Spirit of God become a priority in our lives, not that we might experience the ecstatic for selfish reasons, but that we might fulfill God's calling? Without the filling of the Spirit, we fail. One tendency we face is to lean on our own abilities—our training, personality, looks, persuasiveness, or whatever. But we must remember God's word to Zerubbabel, our effectiveness is "not by might (human resources) or power (human strength, ability, or efficiency), but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). Another tendency is that of fear, but God's word to Zerubbabel is just as pertinent against fear as with self-confidence for the word to Zerubbabel was actually to give him courage in the face of hostility (see 2 Tim. 1:6-7).

Then exactly what is the filling of the Spirit and how do I get it?

Reduced to its simplest terms, to be filled with the Spirit means that, through voluntary surrender and in response to appropriating faith, the human personality is filled, mastered, controlled by the Holy Spirit. The very word *filled* supports that meaning. The idea is not that of something being poured into a passive empty receptacle. "That which takes possession of the mind is said to fill it," says Thayer, ... That usage of the word is found in Luke 5:26 (KJV): "They were filled with fear," and John 16:6: "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." Their fear and sorrow possessed them to the exclusion of other emotions; they mastered and controlled them. That is what the Holy Spirit does when we invite Him to fill us.

To be filled with the Spirit, then, is to be controlled by the Spirit. Intellect and emotions and volition as well as physical powers all become available to Him for achieving the purposes of God ... The now ungrieved and unhindered Spirit is able to produce the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the leader, with added winsomeness and attractiveness in his service and with power in his witness to Christ. All real service is but the effluence of the Holy Spirit through yielded and filled lives.⁷

The **mission** the Lord has called us to in the Great Commission is to become an integral part of His program of making disciples. We will have neither the motivation nor the ability to do so with success without the **means** He has supplied—the indwelling Spirit whom He has given to each believer to take charge and enable us for Christ's life in ours, a life motivated by His love and enabled by His power.

⁶ Sanders, p. 100.

⁷ Sanders, p. 101.

Lesson 5: The Stewardship of God's Truth Through Evangelism (Part 2)

Understanding Our Method

The Household (*Oikos*) Principle

As Christians and as a Church, the Lord has given us a commission, the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. Our commission is to make disciples by going into all the world, by leading people to Christ and then baptizing them, and then by teaching them to obey the Lord. This means we need to reach out to non-Christians with the message of the Gospel, but the very mention of that causes us to experience a parade of fears. The fear of what it might cost us, the fear of rejection, the fear of being thought odd, the fear of what to say, the fear of questions we can't answer, the fear of how to present the Gospel, the fear of alienating someone, and on the list goes.

We know we need to go forward with the message of the Savior and we want to, but the question is how? How do we go forward effectively so more and more people who have trusted Christ as Savior become anchored in the Word and then become reproducers themselves in a way that is continuous, contagious, and compelling?

Most churches and Christians really want to see people come to Christ and grow, but the problem comes when we try to translate this into specific plans, plans that work on a continuing basis. What can we as churches or individuals really do that is significant? Do we put together an evangelistic committee? Do we start a visitation night so we can go from door to door and hit people cold turkey? Do we call in specialists for an exciting life-changing witnessing clinic or conference to teach us how to witness? What do we do?

Is there a biblical method and pattern that we can follow that will help us? I think there is. It is an approach that is not new though it has been gravely neglected in favor of other approaches that are far less effective and harder to execute. It is a process not a method. It is natural to the way society functions and operates and has for centuries. It is a process that builds on the natural "webs" of relationships which exist in every church. It is a process that has been called, "The Master's Plan."¹

The Master's Plan is an application of New Testament principles which, by the way, coincide with insights of modern research by both church growth specialists and contemporary anthropologists concerning the way we are able to most effectively influence others. People are influenced the most by three universal units of societies' social systems. These are (a) common kinship, (b) common community, and (c) common interests. As we study the New Testament, we find that the apostolic church used the interlocking social systems of common kinship, community, and interest as the vehicle for reaching the world with the Gospel.

¹ See Win and Charles Arn's excellent book, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, Church Growth Press, Pasadena, CA, 1982.

The basic thrust of evangelism in the New Testament was not individual evangelism, it was not mass evangelism, and it was definitely not child evangelism. Then what was it? It was what has been called *Oikos* Evangelism.²

Before we define and describe what *oikos* evangelism is and how and why it works, let's be reminded about the spiritual dimensions of evangelism and ministry lest we put too much emphasis on the plan of evangelism rather the spiritual principles by which men are reached for the Lord.

The Forces of the Harvest: The Spiritual Principles at Work in Evangelism

As the Bible uses analogies to teach spiritual truth, so it also uses analogies to portray the process of reaching men for the Lord. These include pictures taken from the harvest—the seed, the sower, the soil, and reaping the harvest. The soil is the human heart, the seed is the Word of God, the sower is the believer with the seed of the Word, and the reaping is when a person comes to Christ by faith. Based on this analogy, there are four things involved in the process:

Preparing the Soil

The soil of the human heart must be prepared. This is done through:

- (1) Walking by the Spirit (Acts 1:8; 4:31; Eph. 5:18)
- (2) Praying for four things: (a) for laborers for the harvest (Luke 10:2); (b) for open doors or opportunities (another analogy) for the Word (Col. 4:3); (c) for courage to share the Gospel at the right time (Eph. 6:18; 4:29); and (d) for clarity: the ability to make the Gospel clear (Col. 4:4)

Living to Demonstrate the Power of Christ

Simply put, the problem is this: You can't give away what you don't have. If we as Christians lead lives of frustration, neurosis, moral lapse or failure, strife and division, we cannot expect to be too effective at convincing others of the truth of the Christian faith. (Cf. Col. 4:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:15-17.)

Sowing and Watering the Seed

We have the responsibility to share the message, to communicate the truth of Scripture in accord with specific needs knowing and believing that the Word is alive and powerful and will do the work God has sent it to do (Isa. 55:8-11). While a good testimony is essential and is often used by God to give an open door for the Gospel, no one can be saved without hearing the Gospel message. (Cf. Mk. 4:1-20, 26-29; John 4:35-42.)

Reaping the Harvest

The harvest is people receiving Christ by personal faith. Evangelism is a process that brings a person to a decision to trust in Jesus Christ, but evangelism is not just a decision. In our work with people, we become a part of the process of preparing, sowing, watering, or reaping, but we can't hurry the process. We must learn to care about people just as did the Lord. Then, when the right time comes, as led by the Spirit, begin to tell them about the person and work of the Savior. We must remember that, in the

² Arn, p. 37f.

final analysis, God uses the Word and the transformed life, but it is the Spirit of God alone who can break through the barriers of the blindness and hardness of the human heart to bring a person to faith in Christ. (Cf. John 4:35-42.)

The (*Oikos*) Principle Explained

What is *oikos* evangelism? *Oikos* is the Greek word most often translated house or household in the New Testament. But let's be careful and not assume we know what that means. In the culture of New Testament times, *oikos* described not only the immediate family, but it included servants, servants' families, friends, and even business associates. One's *oikos* was one's sphere of influence, his/her social system composed of those related to each other through common kinship ties, common tasks, and common territory.³ The New Testament *oikos* included members of the nuclear family, but extended to dependents, slaves and employees. The *oikos* was the basic social unit by which the church grew.

An *oikos* was the fundamental and natural unit of society, and consisted of one's sphere of influence—his family, friends and associates. And equally important, the early church spread through *oikos*—circles of influence and association. With only a moment of reflection, we begin to realize a significant difference of thrust, tone, and tenor between much contemporary evangelism and early church outreach.⁴

As we turn to the New Testament, Scripture focuses us on the household (family, friends, and associates) in the spread of the Gospel to mankind. The Gospels, Acts, and Epistles illustrate that the link of communication from person to person was the *oikos*. Here was the bridge used regularly as a natural means for spreading the message of Jesus Christ.

The following passages are illustrations of *Oikos* evangelism

- Mark 5:19. "Go home to your people (*oikos*) and report ..."
- Luke 19:9. "Today salvation has come to this house (*oikos*)."
- John 4:53. "... and he himself believed, and his whole household (*oikos*)."
- Mark 2:14-15. We can't be certain, but "his house" probably refers to Levi's. If so, Levi invited his friends to come and meet and hear Jesus. Here is a typical household bridge—the inclusion of associates within the confines of Levi's own home.
- John 1:40-45. The Apostle Peter came to Christ as a result of someone in his *oikos*. And Nathanael came to Christ because his friend Philip told him about the Savior.

Following Christ's resurrection and ascension, it was this same pattern of the Gospel moving through the *oikos* which caused the early church to explode. Noted church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette has observed that, "the primary change agents in the spread of faith ... were the men and women who earned their livelihood in some

³ Arn, p. 37.

⁴ Tom Wolf, "Church Growth America," Jan/Feb. 1978, p. 13.

purely secular manner, and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion.”⁵

- Acts 10:22f. Cornelius invited his relatives and close friends (his *oikos*) to come to his own home to hear Peter tell about the Lord.
- Acts 10:15 and 31. Here two households came to know the Savior through the influence of Lydia, a business woman, and the jailer at Philippi. When most people read about these two incidences, they normally think of just the immediate family. It was probably much more.

It seems that *Oikos* evangelism is the God-given and God-ordained means and key for **naturally** sharing our **supernatural** message. This is the way the early church spread and it is the way the Gospel is most naturally shared today. Research and statistics back up this claim.

Research Statistics

Before we look at these statistics, remember that the Great Commission is not simply evangelism, but making disciples; reaching people, pulling them into the church, and building them up in Christ to become reproductive believers.

(1) Campus Crusade

Research conducted by The Institute for American Church Growth shows that of the hundreds of thousands of so called “decisions” from the *Here’s Life* emphasis, 97 out of every 100 were never incorporated into a church. Somewhere they were lost by the wayside.⁶

(2) Billy Graham Crusade

Statistics taken in connection with the Billy Graham Crusade in Seattle back in 1976 are also very enlightening. Some 434,100 persons passed through the gate to attend the crusade and 18,136 walked down the aisle. Of the 18,136, 53.7% went forward for rededication, not salvation. 30.6% went forward for conversion, and 15.7% was unknown as to the purpose. Only 7% of those who went forward for conversion, had become associated with a church when the research was done several years later.

(3) Institute for American Church Growth

Research from a questionnaire taken by The Institute for American Church Growth showed that when over 4000 people in 35 states and three countries were asked why they became part of a local church, 75% to 90% responded that friends and relatives were the “door of entrance.”

The conclusion is clear ... churches encouraging and equipping their members to reach the existing webs of friends and relatives, and then building them into the fellowship of the local church will experience the greatest results for their time and effort.⁷

We are not saying that we should limit our concerns just to our *oikos*. The Great Commission says “go.” We start in Jerusalem—our home base—then branch out. We begin with our *oikos*, but then we

⁵ Arn, p. 39.

⁶ Statistics from Campus Crusade’s “Here’s Life America” conducted in the late 1970s.

⁷ Wolf, “Church Growth America,” p. 7.

need to expand our *oikos* by loving concern so as to begin and grow new relationships. How can we begin new relationships to expand our web? Here are some ideas from *Common Ground*.⁸

Relationships begin with common ground (such as summer soccer league) but they are built on communication and shared experience.

Perhaps the most important aspect of communication is conversation. You can develop good conversational skills by understanding these three levels of conversation.

Level One: General—*Be in touch*. You can usually begin a conversation with anyone on this level. Such things as current events, sports, or the weather are natural and easy ways to begin a conversation. It can be as simple as Bill's comment about Sally's good soccer play.

The key to being a good conversationalist on this level is to *be in touch* with your community. The way to be in touch is to read, listen, and watch. A local news paper or radio station is an excellent source of information on what is happening in the community.

Level Two: Personal—*Be Interested*. The key in this area is to *be interested*. Listen for clues as to what is important to the person to whom you are talking. Janet discovered that Arlene opted not to work outside the home until the children were in school. This says something about what is important to Arlene and Ron. When you are in someone's home take notice of the surroundings. If you are in their office, what sort of plaques or curios do you see. Again this will indicate what is important to this person. What is important to them is something that is easy to talk with them about.

Level Three: Crucial needs—*Be Informed*. Crucial needs deal with the critical issues in a person's life. The key to having an eternal impact in a non-Christian's life is to *be informed*. Everyone has a world view that shapes and directs their every attitude and action. Most people are not willing to reveal themselves on this level. however, when a relationship begins to build it is not uncommon for there to be opportunities to explore spiritual issues.

If we were just using and developing our *oikos*, our growth would be phenomenal through the laws of multiplication.

The following statistics conducted by the Institute of American Church Growth of Pasadena, California illustrate why people come to Christ and get involved in a Church. The research shows that "Webs of common *kinship* (friends and neighbors) and common *associates* (special interests, work relationships, and recreation) are still the paths most people follow in becoming Christians today."⁹

Over 14,000 lay people have been asked the question: "What or who was responsible for you coming to Christ and your church?" One of eight responses were given, but the key issue is what percentage of people came to Christ and the church through each category listed. Here are the results.

⁸ "Common Ground," September, 1990, produced by *Search Ministries*, 101 W. Ridgely Rd. St. 5-A, Lutherville, MD 21093 (301-252-1246).

⁹ Arn, p. 43.

Special Need	1-2%
Walk-in	2-3%
Pastor	5-6%
Visitation	1-2%
Sunday School	4-5%
Evangelistic Crusade	1/2 of 1%
Church Program	2-3%
Friend/Relative	75-90%

The conclusion is clear. The great majority of people in these studies can trace their “spiritual roots” directly to a friend or a relative as the major reason they are in Christ and their church. Let me ask you a question. How about you? How many of you came to know Christ and got involved in your church or both through the *oikos* principle?

There seems to be no question where we should be placing our emphasis and focus. The real question is, are we? Regardless of what method we say we believe in, it is meaningless unless we are using it and using it under the motivation and power of the Spirit of God. We must be using the harvest principles we briefly mentioned at the beginning of this study.

Just why and what makes the *Oikos* principle so effective?

Foundational Principles of the Plan

In *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, the Arns discuss a number of principles which they describe as the cornerstone of disciple-making for the local church. I have summarized several of these in what follows.¹⁰

Principle Number One: Disciple-making is most effective when it is an intentional response by the local church to the Great Commission.

As it pertains to the things that direct and shape our lives, there are two things that tend to characterize the church today and both are often true at the same time. Rather than purposefully following the Lord and resting in His provision, we tend to be a driven people, driven by the wrong forces. Remember, the Lord does not drive. He leads. If you feel driven, you can bet it's not the Lord, but some conscious or unconscious faulty force that's driving you. We are driven by the desire to succeed but usually for the wrong reasons. We want to impress, to get ahead, to be accepted, to be important, to out-do someone or to play “king of the mountain” be it spiritual, material, or whatever.

But second, while driven, we also tend to go with the flow of the world and its values and objectives. Like small sticks in the midst of a swollen and raging stream, we are swept along without well-defined biblical, personal goals. Intentional, purposeful living with a view to reaching people for Christ is a key component in our availability to fulfill the Great Commission. Living intentionally with a view to making disciples is a response to our Lord's command. It is an act of obedience which acknowledges His lordship.

¹⁰ Arn, pp. 58-79.

To be effective and mature servants, those who take the Great Commission seriously, (a) we must know who we are, (b) we must have an identity derived from God and His standards, and (c) we must know why we are here. We must have a sense of God's destiny and purpose for our lives, i.e., we must serve with a view to doing God's will no matter what, and fortified by a view to heavenly treasures and rewards, not those based on earthly goals (1 Cor. 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 4:18; 5:9; Matt. 6:19-21).

Principle Number Two: Intentionality in evangelism is most effective when focused on the *oikos* (natural networks) of existing Christians.

As we have seen, our **webs of common ground:** common kinship, common friendship, and common associates are the means by which most people become Christians. This forms the solid foundation which allows God's love and salvation to flow naturally and intentionally.

Here are eight important reasons why identifying and using natural networks of relationships should be the foundation for the outreach strategy of every church:

1. It is the natural way churches grow;
2. It is the most cost effective way to reach new people;
3. It is the most fruitful way to win new people;
4. It provides a constantly enlarging source of new contacts;
5. It brings the greatest satisfaction to participating members;
6. It results in the most effective assimilation of new members;
7. It tends to win entire families;
8. It uses existing relationships.¹¹

Principle Number Three: Disciple-making is most effective when based on and permeated with love and caring.

It is more effective because when we are motivated by love we are going to put forth more effort to reach out to people. It is also more effective because it produces the kind of tangible, specific actions that have a greater impact on those we love and care about. When our efforts are based on genuine love rather than legalistic motives or peer pressure, we see people and treat them as people with needs. They are no longer just a notch in our evangelistic belt. Loving or caring for people means building relationships and spending time with people.

Principle Number Four: Disciple-making through the *oikos* method is most effective because each Christian has a part in responding to the Great Commission.

Anyone can do it! Any church member who can identify an unchurched friend, relative, neighbor, or associate can be a disciple-maker. The average church member has between seven and nine friends and relatives outside of Christ and the Church. Newer Christians and members of newer churches average twelve. Older Christians and members of older churches can list an average of four unchurched friends and relatives.¹²

This kind of participation has a lot of side benefits. It contributes to the overall spiritual health and vitality of each person involved. It gives a sense of purpose and meaning. It causes believers to have to

¹¹ Arn, p. 60.

¹² Arn. p. 62.

rely more on the Lord and to seek His power and work in their lives and in the lives of those they are seeking to reach.

Participation in the process of disciple-making may be as worthy for its role in the maturity of the Christian as it is in reaching the non-Christian. A Christian remains spiritually immature if he/she is not actively involved in the greatest task the Master called us to do. ... Christlikeness can hardly be an achievable goal if there is no participation in the basic reason for Christ's mission.¹³

Principle Number Five: Disciple-making, as with all aspects of ministry, is most effective when it is a "team effort."

One or a few simply cannot have the outreach or do what a team of people committed to outreach can do. All the believers in any local church have a far greater outreach potential than just a few.

Perhaps the most important reason the "team effort" works through the *oikos* principle is the friendship factor. Research indicates that in most cases, new Christians who soon "drop out" of active church involvement never made new friends in that church. Evangelism based on the *oikos* concept and that works through the church as a team brings people to Christ and into the church through the "friendship factor."

Principle Number Six: Disciple-making is most effective when unique needs and individual differences are recognized and cared about.

One of the things that hinders our outreach and effectiveness with people is our failure to treat them as individuals. We must realize people have different needs and come to Christ in different ways and for different reasons (see Paul's commitment to get involved with people where they were in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Yes, everyone needs Christ and all must put their faith in the person and work of Christ, but the process to this varies dramatically according to various needs and the circumstances of people.

Here are some important questions and factors that are helpful in reaching people for the Lord.

- What is the level and depth of my relationship with this person? Do they trust me? Can they discern I care about their needs? Have I built rapport with them?
- What other Christians does he/she know well?
- What are his/her understandings of Christianity? What are his/her misunderstandings?
- What are his/her problems and how can I show that Christ can help them deal with their problems?
- How receptive is the person to becoming a Christian?

A study of the Gospels reveal that Christ Himself was a powerful demonstration of meeting people where they were. He addressed the unique needs of each person and presented the Gospel in a relevant and meaningful way. When he was with the woman at the well, he talked about living water; when he was with fishermen, he talked about catching fish; when he was with people familiar with the agricultural world, he talked about sowing seed. He often began with the hurts and needs and interests of people. He found and used common ground to perk their interest.

¹³ Arn, p. 64.

Compared to a total stranger, church members involved in reaching their web are better able to understand the individuality of each person, the needs he/she may have, and the appropriate ways to introduce how Jesus Christ can bring them into a relationship with the living God who alone can meet their needs (cf. 1 Cor. 9:22, “Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him” {LB}).

Principle Number Seven: Disciple-making through the *oikos* principle is most effective because it builds on a natural and continuing process.

Continuous disciple-making requires prudent stewardship of church members' time and energy. It requires an evangelistic process that renews rather than exhausts laity. It requires a process that is a natural part of life, rather than a contrived event. It requires a process that is not dependent on volunteers, but occurs because people have a vision of their purpose and can use it in the normal process of life.

When does disciple-making become a natural part of the Christian's life?

(a) When it builds on natural human relationships. A natural survey asked the question: “What do you enjoy doing most in your spare time?” The answer, from seventy-four percent of the people surveyed, was “spending time with family and friends.”¹⁴

God made people to enjoy other people. He made the family and the relationships that result. The family is the basic organizational structure and God uses this natural human network of family and friends to most effectively spread the Good News.

(b) When it builds on the need to love and be loved. Both Christians and non-Christians need caring and love. The *oikos* method responds to this need in the lives of both church members and the people in their web of influence. In the disciple-making process, Christians learn how to strengthen relationship with non-Christians and communicate God's caring through their own caring.

(c) When it becomes part of the entire organizational structure. Effective, continuous disciple-making does not translate into a program to be adopted, organized, and carried out by a few select members of an evangelism committee or calling team. It becomes a *process* which becomes a natural part of each organization in the church body.

(d) When it is self-perpetuating. Effective disciple-making can't help but be self-perpetuating. Indeed, not only does it continue, but the process naturally enlarges. It happens when one person (in a member's web) comes to Christ, and then that new member has his/her own web of relationships of friends and relatives outside of Christ. It is a natural process of multiplication.

Seven Steps For Making Disciples

Each day most people come in contact with people with whom they have an on-going relationship that has been established, many of whom are unreached with the Gospel or, if saved, they are not growing in the things of Christ. These people make up our *oikos*, our network of friends and family. This becomes our extended family and we have a responsibility to them. Read through the New Testament and you will quickly discover that the Gospel spread through relationships. When Andrew heard about the Savior he first went and found his brother Simon Peter. Philip immediately contacted his friend, Nathaniel. Matthew held supper for his friends, other tax collectors. And what did the woman at the well

¹⁴ According to Syndicated News Report KFVB, Los Angeles, June 4, 1981.

do? She immediately went back into the city and told her friends. It seems obvious that the most effective method of evangelism is to go to those with whom we already have something in common.

How can we go about reaching them? The Arns suggest seven steps for reaching these people with the Gospel which I have also drawn from their excellent book, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*.

1. Identify Your Extended Family, Your Network.

Analyze the regular contacts you have with people in your day-to day life. Consider the people in each of the following groups: common kinship, common friendship, and common associates.

Those people who are related biologically or through marriage constitute the *common kinship* area of your Extended Family. One person's immediate family may be composed of a spouse and children. For another, it may include parents, brothers, or sisters. Other family members, such as cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, nieces, nephews, and grandparents may be part of an Extended Family

Close friends are also part of your Extended Family. Through *common friendship*, you can identify people with whom you share plans and experiences, joys and sorrows. These are friends with whom you regularly communicate in person or by phone. ... Those you invite over for a backyard barbecue or social event, those you look forward to being with, are all part of the *common friendship* segment of your Extended Family.¹⁵

Obviously, there are other categories of people with whom we come in contact in the course of our everyday life, people with whom we share family news, or discuss current events, or sports, or cooking, or gardening. All of these are a part of our Extended Family. Our need then is to identify and make a list of a number of these people (6-10) and recognize that this comprises our network, our Extended Family.

2. Develop a Personal Profile of Each Extended Family Member.

Franklin D. Roosevelt made it a point to become a personal friend to every dignitary he met. Before the foreign leader came to visit, the President would study the person's hobbies, special interests, and areas of personal concern. When the diplomat and the President met, they first talked on an official, political level. But then the conversation often changed. The President would praise the diplomat for any special achievements he had made, direct the discussion to the diplomat's own hobbies or interests, and listen attentively as the person spoke. Through expressions of genuine interest, Roosevelt built friendships that endured a lifetime.

Knowing a person on a level beyond biographical details of age, marital status and occupation is part of effective disciple-making.¹⁶

From a heart of love, this is simply a matter of developing common ground as a bridge for caring for people and developing a relationship through getting to truly know them in their concerns, burdens, and interests. In the process of this, we also learn something about their spiritual life and beliefs. Are they

¹⁵ Arn, p. 83.

¹⁶ Arn, pp. 84-85.

interested in spiritual things? What do they understand about the Bible, about Jesus Christ, and the Christian life? Do they understand who Jesus really is as declared in the Bible? Have they trusted in Christ as their personal Savior according to the Scripture? If they are not a believer in Christ, a point of information important to your profile of them is why are they not a believer?

You may not know the answer to all these questions. If not, this is an important place to begin the disciple-making process—simply getting to know the person in a more meaningful way.¹⁷

3. Focus Your Efforts.

As you review the list of names in your Extended Family, you may want to identify several people with whom you have a natural, warm relationship. They are people with whom you get along well. You enjoy doing things together and have a variety of common interests. ... These people should be ones you feel to be potentially receptive to the Gospel and who could easily find a home in your congregation.

The number of people you can focus on may differ according to the amount of time you give to consciously sharing God's love. A busy executive, for example, may have time to work effectively with only one or two people at a time, whereas a retired person could easily focus on six or more non-Christians in their Extended Family.¹⁸

The issue is to prayerfully study your Extended Family and begin with those with whom you might naturally have the greatest rapport much as Andrew first sought out his own brother, Simon Peter (John 1:40-41). Generally, with others, we need time to build friendships, to demonstrate Christ's love, and to develop their trust. Of course, sometimes God opens the door of a person's heart without such a process, and we need to be open and receptive to such opportunities, but by-in-large, it is our Extended Family that becomes the most receptive since they best have a chance to see God's love and character at work in our lives.

4. Develop a Disciple-Making Plan.

Scripture's admonition to plan carefully is particularly applicable to making disciples: "Any enterprise that is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts" (Pr. 24:3-4, Living Bible). Introducing non-Christian friends and relatives to Christ, and directing their attention to the opportunity of new life, demands our best efforts. Yet often we tend to run ahead in our evangelistic methods without first considering insights that might increase our effectiveness.

Our disciple-making plans need to begin with meeting people at their point of need. Paul said, "I have become all things to all people, in order that I might win some" (1 Cor. 9:22, LB). Effective plans for communicating the Gospel need to recognize the unique ways hearers perceive and personally relate the Good News to their lives and needs.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Christ's approach to introducing the Kingdom to people was highly individualistic. It was often based on events with which the listener could readily identify. He met people on their own ground. He respected them as individuals with unique interests and needs. He asked the woman at the well for a drink of water. He told stories about sowing and harvesting to people who understood such things.¹⁹

As we build bridges, develop a profile of the person(s), and put together a plan for reaching them, we need always to bear in mind that in the final analysis, reaching a person for Christ, or motivating someone to move forward in their walk with Christ, is dependent on the ministry of the Spirit of God. Our basic trust needs to be in Him, not in our plans.

5. Work the Disciple-Making Plan.

As you begin to implement the steps of your disciple-making plan (Step 4), be sensitive and aware of the events in your Extended Family member's life. There could be a right time and a wrong time, a right way and a wrong way to communicate Christ's love.

Here are some suggestions for developing skills in effective communication with Extended Family members:

A. Attentive Listening. A prominent theologian once said "The first duty of love is to listen."²⁰ Almost everyone is born with a capacity to hear. However, the ability to listen must be deliberately learned and cultivated through practice ...

What is "attentive listening"? It is concentrating on what the other person is saying rather than letting our mind race ahead to what should be said next. Attentive listening is putting ourselves in the other person's shoes. It's seeing things from their perspective rather than our own. Attentive listening is empathetic, comprehending, and non-judgmental.

Another element of attentive listening is your body language—eye contact, an encouraging nod, and understanding smile. A study in communication effectiveness showed that words alone carry only about seven percent of the communication message. The tone of delivery contributes thirty-three percent. Yet the non-verbal aspects—the body language—comprises fifty-five percent of the communication process.²¹

Attentive listening has no "hidden agenda." Listening is not geared toward turning the conversation to spiritual matters at the first opportunity. Rather, attentive listening seeks to understand the non-Christian friend's dreams and ambitions; to discover his needs and his problems; and to develop a level of understanding that builds a mutual respect and personal empathy.

¹⁹ Arn, p. 87.

²⁰ Paul Tillich, *The Friendship Factor*, Augsburg, p. 109.

²¹ Albert Mehrabian, "Communicating Without Words," *Psychology Today*, September 1978, p.

B. Relating to Needs. God's love is the greatest need-meeting resource on earth. Be alert to the unique areas of need in your Extended Family members. A close and meaningful relationship includes mutual sharing of experiences ... happiness, sadness, success, failure, irritation, disappointment. It is around the personal experiences of life that the importance of faith and fellowship in the church often become apparent. Points of need in your own life, or the lives of your Extended Family members, provide a natural point for demonstrating your Christian faith, relating your experiences to theirs, and discussing the solution Christ has provided you. "I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us ..." (Isa. 63:7, KJV).

C. Identifying Receptive Periods. God's love and caring is especially appropriate during significant changes in lifestyle (such as marriage, birth of a child, new job, retirement, etc.), or incidents of stress in our Extended Family members' lives (death of a spouse, divorce, family crisis, injury, etc.). These times are called "periods of transition." A period of transition is a span of time in which a person's or family's normal, everyday behavior patterns are disrupted by some event that puts them into an unfamiliar situation. The more recent the transition-producing event in the person's life, the more receptive he or she will be to a new lifestyle which includes Christ and the church.²²

Consequently, it is important to stay in close touch with your Extended Family members and respond immediately in a time of transition. Being aware of these periods of transition in our non-Christian friends, and responding by showing them the caring love of Christ and the Church, can be an important step in seeing them become new Christian disciples.

The antithesis of this receptivity principle is also a factor in your disciple-making activities. That is, Extended Family members in a personally stable situation, with few complications or unusual interruptions in their life, are generally not as open to becoming disciples. Often the only way to reach an Extended Family member not presently open to the Christian faith is to be alert to a "period of transition" when their receptivity will increase, then respond in love by sharing Christ's love.

D. Appropriate Timing. A fourth important point in effectively responding to your Extended Family member is that of timing. When you communicate God's love and the Christian experience can be as important as what you communicate. The most effective witness is at the appropriate moment. For example, when Fred explained his difficulty with their daughter to Chuck in the gym, it was an appropriate moment for Chuck to relate how his faith guided him in similar circumstances. The timing was ideal for Chuck to communicate the church's support and suggest a Christian alternative to Fred for an important question he was facing.

E. Understandable Language. Sharing the realities and benefits of Christ in everyday language, in the context of our everyday experience, gives a credibility and relevance to the Christian faith that is uniquely important to an Extended Family member. As

²² W. Charles Arn, "How to Find Receptive People," *The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook*, Pasadena Church Growth Press, Pasadena, CA, 1979, p. 43.

you mention your faith, and the difference in your life because of it, speak in words and phrases the person will understand. Sharing your own experience helps your non-Christian friend sense that your relationship with Christ has an important influence on your attitudes and actions in everyday circumstances. Paul told the Christians at Colossae: “Make the most of your chances to tell others the Good News. Be wise in all your contacts with them. Let your conversations be gracious as well as sensible, for then you will have the right answer for everyone” (Col. 4:5-6).

Each of the areas mentioned above will help you understand and respond more effectively to the unique concerns of your Extended Family member.

6. Pray Regularly and Specifically for Each Extended Family Member.

“The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results” (Jam. 5:16).

Prayer must be at the very heart of the disciple-making process. The importance of regular prayer for specific members of your Extended Family cannot be overemphasized. It is a crucial part in the process of making disciples. If this vital step is overlooked, the chances of ever seeing your Extended Family member come to Christ and the church are slim.

After you have identified each person in your Extended Family by name, as part of your daily prayer life, pray for each of them specifically and for their needs. Ask God for the opportunity to let His love for them be experienced through you.

Do you remember the definition of “caring”? “Allowing God’s love to flow through you to people, especially those in your network of relationships.”

Through prayer, we express our specific concerns for each person in our Extended Family. We should pray according to their unique needs, attitudes, and situations. It may well be that the person in our Extended Family has never before been held up to God in prayer. What a thrill to be the first one to have that privilege! And it is impossible to talk daily with the Lord about a person and not become genuinely concerned about them and aware of caring/sharing opportunities you have with them.

One of the most important activities of a church organizationally committed to helping members disciple their Extended Family is regular prayer offered by Christians for each other’s Extended Family members. Rev. Wayne McDill, a pastor in Portland, Oregon, has correctly observed that “greater strength can be brought to bear in your prayers as you involve others in praying for your friend.”²³ Jesus provided a promise at this very point “If two of you agree on earth about anything that you may ask, it shall be done for you by My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19).

Each lay person involved in making disciples should pray not only for the non-Christians in his/her own web, but for specific people in other members’ Extended Families. Sharing prayer concerns, asking God for a sense of awareness to opportunities that arise, and thanking Him for answered prayer are important parts of each person’s role in making disciples.

²³ Wayne McDill, *Making Friends for Christ*, Broadman, Nashville, 1979, p. 96.

7. Accept Your Accountability to Others and to God.

A final major step in the disciple-making process is to meet regularly with other Christians similarly involved in the process. As you discuss goals and individual experiences in regular meetings, you will find an important sense of support, fellowship, and accountability.

No member's caring relationships with Extended Family members will be quite identical. Thus, sharing individual successes and failures can provide rich learning experiences for every church member involved. One person's insights sharpen another's understanding. And the probability of each member continuing as an active disciple-maker is vastly increased when he/she is part of such a regular group.

In these meetings, members share their prayer concerns for each person in their Extended Family. These concerns become the subject of intercessory prayer for the entire group. Likewise, experiences of answered prayer are shared with the group and expressed in praise and thanks to the Lord.

Praying for fellow church members is an encouraging and enabling aspect of these times together. Thanking God for the opportunity to demonstrate His love and Word through a caring witness helps members keep their disciple-making ministry at the forefront of their Christian lives. As Christians ask God for guidance, wisdom, insight, and sensitivity, they build a confidence and self-worth in being ambassadors of God's love. These times of prayer together are a mutual expression of dependence, anticipation, and assurance of God's ability to direct His people.

Church members may want to become prayer partners with one another. Each agrees to pray for his/her partner and the people in his/her Extended Family. The disciple-making process is strengthened immeasurably as each Extended Family member is daily held up by others before the Lord in prayer.

Your Opportunity ...

A denominational leader has observed, "If you and I are to enjoy our disciple-making opportunities, we need to take our witness out from behind the walls of our church building and into our neighborhood. ... Life's greatest satisfactions are found as we witness to what Christ is doing in our lives while we engage in the normal activities of the day."²⁴

Is it possible to see the lives of friends, relatives, and associates really change as they encounter the miraculous love of Christ? Can you, as an "ordinary layman," have a meaningful and purposeful role in reaching these people with Christ's love? The answer is a resounding, affirmative "YES." You can do it! In fact, you are probably the best person able to show these Extended Family members the burden-lifting power of Jesus Christ.²⁵

²⁴ Roland E. Griswold, *By Hook and Crook*, Advent Christian General Conference of America, Charlotte, NC, 1981, p. 97.

²⁵ Arn, *Master's Plan*, pp. 87-95.

Developing a Plan to Reach Our Oikos Network

I will do little more than mention each of these for most of them pretty much speak for themselves. Again, I am indebted to the Arns and their book, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*.²⁶

Caring

Nothing we do will have a greater witness and impact like showing the love of Christ, really caring for the Extended Family. But what do people usually think of as the most vital ingredients to a powerful witness? Usually high on the list are things like being articulate, a debater, and a very outgoing kind of personality. God's call is to become a channel of His love to others.

Strengthening Relationships

How do we strengthen relationships with people? By getting involved in their lives through common ground experiences. Think of how much the Lord impacted people while sitting with them around the dinner table or other relational experiences. We need to look for opportunities to do those things that are in keeping with our Christian standards that will allow us to strengthen relationships. This includes sports, garden clubs, backyard barbecues, lunch, coffee breaks, helping a neighbor with a project like building a fence, planting a garden, and a host of other opportunities.

A helpful research study²⁷ identified two hundred forty (240) new Christians presently active and involved in their churches. In addition, a second group of 240 people were identified who could be classified as "drop-outs" (they had made a recent decision but had since lapsed into inactivity). A third group of 240 people were identified who had been presented with the Gospel message, but had chosen not to make a positive decision. In individual interviews with these 720 people, each was asked to classify the person who had presented the Gospel into one of three categories: "Friend," "Salesman," "Teacher."

The results of the study provided some startling conclusions: The people who saw the church member as a "friend" were almost all now Christians and active in their churches (94%). On the other hand, those people who saw the church member who presented the Gospel as a "salesman" often made an initial decision, but soon dropped out in large numbers (71% later dropped). Finally, those who saw the church member as a "teacher" generally tended to not respond at all (84% said "no thanks"). The implications are clear. The non-Christian person who perceives your relationship as one of a "friend" is far more likely to eventually respond to Christ's love than the person who sees you either as a "teacher"—instructing on doctrine, sin, and morality; or as "salesman"—manipulating them toward an eventual decision.

Your greatest resource in developing a meaningful and caring friendship is in simply being yourself—natural and unmasked. The phrase "I'm not perfect, just forgiven"²⁸ reflects a healthy attitude in recognizing the shortcomings each person has ...

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 98-123.

²⁷ Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., "Research for the Growing Church," *Church Growth America*, January/February 1981, p. 10.

²⁸ Arn, *Master's Plan*, pp. 104-105.

Using Other Members of the Body

The Christian life is a teamwork enterprise and requires the input and help of the body of Christ with its varied and gifted members.

One important resource for disciple-making found in your church is other church members, particularly your close friends. Encouraging and building personal relationships between your Extended Family members and other Christian friends in your church is a highly effective way to introducing your non-Christian friends to the variety of ways Christ works in the lives of people.²⁹

How do you help such relationships flourish between your Extended Family members and others in the congregation? Informal social gatherings at your home, or group outings to special events can include both Christian and non-Christian friends
...³⁰

Enhancing Our Witness

Paul told the Colossians to season their witness as with salt (Col. 4:5-6).

Jesus, in teaching His disciples to be fishers of men, used many different models. From Nicodemus, the religious ruler who was told he needed to be “born again” (John 3:3), to the woman of Samaria who was offered water of eternal life (John 4:14), to the thief on the cross who asked only to be remembered when Christ came into His kingdom (Luke 23:42). Each situation presents different needs, portrays different relationships, uses different words, brings a different response. Each situation was unique.³¹

While our approach should vary with individuals and circumstances, certain elements need to be present in our witness, especially as it pertains to the message of the Gospel. The following provide some of the common denominators that need to be present.

(1) Man's Condition: Scripture stresses that all men are sinners and separated from God because of sin (Isa. 53:6; 64:6; Rom. 3:9-23).

(2) God's Solution: God's solution for man's predicament is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the focal point. The goal is to bring people to see their need to put their trust in Jesus Christ who died in their place and was raised to authenticate His person and work (John 3:16-18, 36; Phil. 3:8-9; Rom. 3:23-26; 1:4; 4:25-5:1).

(3) The Starting Point: The models of evangelism in the New Testament were different because they began with the various personal needs of individuals even though the ultimate needs were the same—turning from self-trust to Christ in personal faith. The Lord ultimately pointed people to Himself as the solution to their need, but He started with whatever their problem was and used that as a beachhead to show His love and to point them to Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 107.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 108.

³¹ Ibid., p. 110.

(4) The Instrument God Uses—People: God could reach people by many means, but He has chosen to use human beings (mere earthen vessels) to be the instruments of His light (2 Cor. 4:5-7). Conversions do not take place in a vacuum. Philip was there to interpret the Scripture for the Ethiopian. Peter was there to help Cornelius. Paul was there to help Lydia. When people in the New Testament came to faith, they came through the influence and help of others.³²

(5) The Message: If we do not get the message right according to the Scripture, we end up preaching a false gospel which is not really a gospel at all. The Apostle Paul was deeply concerned that we know and preach the true message and not distort the Gospel of Christ (see Gal. 1:6-10). The message is the message of grace, the message of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. The next lesson will be devoted to this very issue.

Patience

We need patience and dependence on the Spirit of God in seeking to bring people to a point of decision about faith in Christ. In our sales-oriented society where people are taught the need to close the sale, we should not take it upon ourselves to force a decision. Understanding the Gospel and coming to faith in Christ is a work that can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 3:6-7; 2 Thess. 2:13-14).

Illustration of Evangelism (John 4)

Scripture describes believers as partners with the Lord and with one another. We share together in His life, but we are also to share together in His enterprise here on earth. We are His representatives who are to share His love and plan of salvation from sin's penalty and power with a lost and dying world. But for this to occur, we must truly share in His life and have His vision. We must see **what** He sees and **as** He sees.

John 4 and the story of the Lord's encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria is a classic passage on evangelism, not only for the model it gives us of one of the ways the Lord shared His life with others, but because it also challenges us to grasp His vision in this passage, He told the disciples, "lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest." It is a call for us to see as Jesus sees. In this passage the Lord will illustrate and model the four important factors of evangelism and outreach discussed in this study.

- He was controlled by the Spirit—"He had to go through Samaria." Our Means
- He utilized, and the passage illustrates, the *oikos* principle. Our Method. But the Lord shows us that while evangelism involves a method, it is primarily a spiritual process of sowing and reaping.
- He demonstrated keeping the message pure and clear. Our Message
- He was controlled and driven by the Father's mission. Our Mission

³² Ibid., pp. 111-112.

The First Necessity

The first necessity was passing through Samaria (John 4:1-26). Christ was controlled by the Spirit (our Means).

(1) Wearied At The Well

God uses our humanness as opportunities (John 4:1-6). Jesus found and used common ground that rose out of His own humanity and what He had in common with the woman. He used His thirst as a bridge for crossing the gap that existed between Himself and this Samaritan woman. What exactly is common ground?

Common ground consists of shared areas of interest, background, or concerns—anything that people might hold in common that will serve as the basis for developing a relationship that will form a basis for earning credibility to share the Savior. Common ground is the key to beginning and growing relationships. But we often do not see the common ground opportunities because we just aren't looking, we lack vision, or because we are blinded by our own prejudice as were the disciples who marveled that Jesus was speaking with this woman (4:27).³³

Verses 1-4. Since it was not yet time for the cross, the Lord withdrew from Jerusalem to avoid unnecessary confrontation with the Pharisees. His objective was Galilee. He had two routes open to Him. He could go straight up through Samaria to Galilee or He could go around Samaria through Perea east of the Jordan.

But the text tells us (vs. 4) “He had to pass through Samaria.” “Had” is the Greek word *dei*, an impersonal verb meaning, “it is necessary, one must.” It reflects a sense of determining constraint exerted by the will of God. It carries the idea of both a logical and a spiritual necessity arising from the Father's purpose for Jesus. He must pass through Samaria. The question is why since this was not the normal course for a Jew who went out of his way to avoid going through Samaria. Let me suggest two reasons.

First of all it was necessary because He was driven and directed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit had been preparing a village for the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit was the agent and power behind all that Jesus did (Matt. 4:1; 12:18-21, 28) and throughout the New Testament. He is likewise the agent and power behind all effective evangelism (Acts 1:8). Note the following illustrations:

- It was the Holy Spirit who led Philip to the Ethiopian.
- It was the Holy Spirit who sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.
- It was the Holy Spirit who directed Paul away from Asia to Macedonia.

If we are going to be a people involved effectively in evangelism, we must be a Spirit-controlled, Spirit-led people.

Second, the Lord had to go through Samaria because of the prevalent attitude of prejudice toward Samaria and Samaritans found in the Jewish community of which the disciples were obviously a part.

³³ For excellent insights on common ground ideas, contact “Common Ground,” a division of Search Ministries, 101 W. Ridgely Rd. Suite 5-A, Lutherville, MD 21093 (301-252-1246). They have bulletin inserts with great ideas for motivating and helping Christians grasp the vision for common ground.

This needed to be corrected. Christ came for all the world, for the despised and outcasts. If His disciples were to carry on His ministry after He departed, they must have His vision and purpose. So the Lord went through Samaria to both reach this village with the Gospel and to teach the disciples some important lessons.

Verses 5-6. Being wearied from travel, hot and thirsty, the Lord pulled in at Jacob's well for water and for rest. He was there for human reasons, but it was precisely this humanness that became a common ground, the bridge or avenue for contact with others and a means of reaching out to people in need of His life.

We need to capture this. We have many things in common with people all around us and each of these can become contact points if we will just become caring and sensitive to them as people; if we will just open our eyes and see the fields white unto harvest.

(2) Witnessing at the Well

God wants to use us to love and win people to Himself (John 4:7-26; cf. John 17:18).

To demonstrate Jesus' varied approaches in evangelism, His approach with the woman at the well is often contrasted with His encounter with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a cultured, powerful, and righteous Jew. This woman was an unknown and immoral Samaritan peasant. But the Lord cared for and led both to know Himself as the water of life.

- This encounter reminds us the Lord cares about everyone (He came to save sinners and that includes all of us regardless of religious background, race, gender, or character).
- This encounter shows us how the Lord used common ground to break down cultural barriers, demonstrate personal interest in others, and ultimately win a soul to the Savior.

Verse 7. His request for water. Note how He broke with cultural and religious convention and prejudice and used the common ground of their need of water to capture her attention and stimulate her curiosity so He could establish a base for reaching this woman with the message of who He was and what He could do for her.

Verse 8. The absence of His disciples. They were absent at this point, but this would become a training aid on their arrival.

Verse 9. Her response. She was startled at His request. He was breaking with Jewish prejudice. Edwin Blum writes:

The NIV margin gives an alternate translation to the Greek sentence with the word *synchronotai* ("associate" or "use together"); the Jews "do not use dishes Samaritans have used." This rendering may well be correct. A Rabbinic law of A.D. 66 stated that Samaritan women were considered as continually menstruating and thus unclean. Therefore a Jew who drank from a Samaritan woman's vessel would become ceremonially unclean.³⁴

Verse 10. The Lord's Reply—His answer was somewhat an enigmatic saying to cause her to further think.

³⁴ Edwin A. Blum, "John," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the New Testament Edition, Editors, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1983, p. 285.

It was as if He had said, “Your shock would be infinitely greater if you really knew who I am. *You-not I-would be asking!*” Three things would have provoked her thinking: (1) Who is He? (2) What is the gift of God? (3) What is living water? “Living water” in one sense is running water, but in another sense it is the Holy Spirit (Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8; John 7:38-39).³⁵

Time and my purpose in this study will not allow me to pursue it, but this passage is loaded with principles of personal evangelism. Our purpose and one of the emphases of the passage, if not the primary one, is one of catching the vision of our Lord—seeing as Jesus sees. People who need Christ are all around us. We rub shoulders with them nearly everywhere we go, but somehow we become blind to them as objects of God's love and blind to the fact God wants to win them to the Savior through us—you and me (John 17:18).

Christ's purpose in the world is to become our purpose, the all-consuming and driving force of our lives. But for this to occur, we must have His vision, we must see as He sees, care as He cares, and become devoted to that which He is devoted. Jesus was wholly concerned with God, and because of that, He was wholly concerned with people.

So, being led by the Spirit of God, the Lord used this event to pass on a vision to help the disciples and us see as He sees. He wants to heal our eyesight and give us a 20/20 vision for the world that begins with us in our everyday encounters. We tend to be far sighted. We can see the need for missionaries in Africa (the far picture), but when it comes to our *oikos*, our neighbors, work buddies, the kids on the block, or the runaways downtown, we have blurred vision. We just see blobs moving about. We don't see them as hurting people in desperate need of the Savior and His love.

In a men's discipleship training class that I was teaching a number of years ago, one of our men asked for prayer regarding his job which had become very difficult because his supervisor had become very overbearing and hard to work for. The prayer request was for the elimination of the irritation. But I suggested that the change in his supervisor's behavior could have been because he was hurting and that maybe God wanted to use him to minister in this hurting man's life. I suggested that, in dependence on the Lord, he might look for an opportunity to ask his supervisor if he was okay. He might tell him that he hadn't seemed like himself lately and ask if there was anything he could do. That night we all prayed for the supervisor and my friend tried this very approach during the next week and came back to class the following week excited because it not only changed the working conditions, but it opened up a great opportunity to share Christ with his supervisor. I was simply seeking to impart the vision of fields that were white unto harvest.

The Second Necessity

The second necessity is passing on a vision (John 4:27-38).

(1) The Disciples' Astonishment

In this encounter with the Samaritan woman, the Lord was breaking with convention and going against both Jewish and Samaritan prejudice. Note the woman's response in John 4:9. The Greek text is emphatic. “How is it you, being a Jew, from me ask for a drink, since *I* am a Samaritan woman.” “You” and “from me” are emphatic by word order and immediately sets Christ off from her both as a woman

³⁵ Ibid.

and as a Samaritan woman. Her words were words of surprise and scorn. Lightfoot quotes a rabbinical precept, "Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no, not with his own wife."

But we might ask how did she know Jesus was a Jew and how did the disciples know she was a Samaritan? Edersheim, the great Jewish historian, points out that "the fringes of the Tallith of the Samaritans are blue, while those worn by Jews are white."³⁶ Perhaps also by facial features and by accent.

The point is, Christ, whom the disciples viewed as a rabbi, a teacher of the Law, was talking with a woman in public and one who was a Samaritan at that! This astonished them, yet because of their respect for the Lord, no one questioned him about this.

What they saw as **madness**, He saw as **ministry**. So what does this teach us about ourselves? It reminds us how our culture and personal prejudices against others because of dress, character, color of skin, cultural differences, or personal differences whatever they might be, can literally blind us to their needs and to our responsibilities as ambassadors of the Gospel. Such people have become invisible to us.

Concerning the problem of seeing those who have become invisible to us, Frank Tillapaugh has the following to say:

One of our Lord's constant frustrations was that his followers did not see what He saw. All they saw in Zacchaeus was a despicable little tax collector. But Jesus saw someone who needed a friend and, more than that, someone who needed deliverance from his sin.

At Jacob's well one day, Jesus' followers saw a Samaritan woman who looked as though she had been through the mill. But He saw a precious, hurting human being who could be the key to spreading the gospel in Samaria. Over and over again He saw what was invisible to those around Him. ...

A major task for the local church body then is to help one another see hitherto invisible segments of our society. Thousand of refugees, for example, can melt into a major city and hardly be noticed. Even though they still receive mention occasionally in the media, most people, including those in our churches, scarcely know they exist.

We need to condition ourselves to see what Jesus saw. It doesn't come naturally, even for the believer. We need to ask ourselves as we move about the city, Who are these people? What is their contact point with the gospel? Is there something God would have me do?

One possible means of making ourselves aware of the needs of the city is to take "seeing-as He-saw" field trips. For example, go sit in the emergency room of the publicly financed hospital in your community, preferably between 11:00 P.M. and 5:00 A.M. Watch as people come in with gunshot wounds, knife wounds, drug overdoses or battered bodies. Listen as they grope to give their addresses or the name of their next of kin. Sometimes they don't even know their own names. Then, remember that their names are a part of the "whosoever" in John 3:16.³⁷

³⁶ Hershel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Four Gospels*, Vol. 4: The Gospel of John, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1968, p. 98.

³⁷ Frank R. Tillapaugh, *The Church Unleashed*, Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1982, pp. 48-49.

(2) The Invitation of the Woman

Having met the Savior and having become confident of who He was, the woman left her water pot and rushed into the city to spread the news (John 4:28-30). Isn't this the kind of response to knowing Christ that we should all experience?

Many people are convinced that Christianity is true and that Jesus is the Savior, but somehow it doesn't have the binding consequences on their lives that it should. Because of poor spiritual pediatrics or spiritual help and growth, it's simply business as usual. Note verse 10. If we really know the gift that God gives us in Christ and who He is, the Lord and Savior, if we are really abiding in Him daily, how can it continue to be business as usual? How can we continue to live without dramatic and binding life-changing consequences? If we are not experiencing life-changing consequences it is either because we haven't truly come to know the Savior, or we are not abiding in Him and experiencing His life through the control of the Spirit.

This provided a wonderful example of instruction for the disciples and for us.

(3) The Instruction of the Savior

In John 4:31-38 we see Christ's declaration about purposes and values (vss. 31-34).

Verse 31. Eating is a normal necessity of life and one that provides pleasure and enjoyment by God's own creative blessing for mankind. Because we enjoy it, most of us make sure we don't miss a meal. But in the process of this, and because of our carnal bent, we tend to become preoccupied not only with eating and its pleasures, but with all the details of life. As our Lord warned in Matthew 6:31, we tend to be anxious over what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or with what we shall clothe ourselves.

Verse 32. The Lord's answer did not mean that He did not need food or enjoy food from the standpoint of His humanity. He did. What it means is that there were other forces and aspirations that were His greatest motivations and that guided His life.

God has "given us all things to enjoy," the Apostle Paul tells us (1 Tim. 6:17). These things, however, are not to consume us or possess us or distract us or bind us or blind us to God's vision and purpose for our lives (cf. 2 Pet. 1:8-9).

Verse 33. In this verse we see both the misunderstanding and perplexity of the disciples. They completely missed His point. They thought He was talking about physical food when in essence He was referring to spiritual concepts and objectives.

Verse 34. By the words "my food" the Lord was saying that which nourished His soul, which sustained Him, which kept Him going, and which turned Him on, was doing the will of God and accomplishing the Father's purposes for His life. Do you see what He is saying to us? Ministry to this woman had fed His own soul because He was doing that for which He had been sent into the world. Pursuits that have as their objective the world's pot of gold, whether wealth or health, or power or success, cannot satisfy. Life must consist in more than the things we possess (Luke 12:15, 23).

(4) His Exhortation

In verses 35-38 we have Christ's exhortation about seeing, having vision.

Negative: "Do not say ..." This probably represents a rural proverb used in connection with planting and the harvesting. First you plant (prepare the soil and sow the seed), and then four months later, you reap. The process of waiting four months is true in cultivation and harvesting of grain, but it is not true in

relation to bringing people into the kingdom of God. God's plan of harvesting souls involves an entirely different plan of action. It involves a different spiritual process that means people are ripe for the harvest now.

What God's people need is vision and spiritual perception. If God's people would look around, they would see people with spiritual hunger. Some have thought the Samaritans in their white garments coming from the village (vs. 30) may have visually suggested a wheat field ripe for harvest.

Why did the Lord make this statement to the disciples? Because this represents our tendency. We tend to treat the harvest of souls into the kingdom of God like the farmer treats the sowing and reaping of his harvest. We tend to put off God's present purposes for our lives and to live a schizophrenic life. We may see the needs, but we make excuses and say, "They are not ready for the Gospel." We may have an attitude that is so typical for much of the church today. It's the perspective: We are saved from sin's penalty and confident of the future kingdom, being in glory with the Lord, but in the meantime, we are working hard for a piece of the rock and our part in fat city.

The effect of this is distraction and blindness as to our real purpose in life and the place God's purpose should occupy in our lives. In his book, *Why Settle for More and Miss the Best*, Tom Sine has a chapter entitled, "Discerning Half Truths and False Visions." If we are going to avoid the rat race of the world that puts us on a course that causes us to miss God's purpose and the very best, we need the right perspective.

So note our Lord's next words and counsel.

Positive: "Behold, ... lift up your eyes, and look." In other words, learn to see as Jesus sees, develop God's vision to guide you.

Without God's perspective, His vision to sift out the false visions of the world that place people on a gerbil wheel of fruitlessness (without the right values and purposes for life) we become blind and insensitive to the needs of people all around us. We develop tunnel vision which limits the potential of ministry opportunities that surround us.

So, what happens without God's viewpoint? It results in spiritual dullness, personal unhappiness, unfulfilled lives, and numerical stagnation. It results in a people who become occupied with themselves, who become complainers in the church, and in general, nit pickers. Or, it results in the religious cushion syndrome.³⁸ (Compare Heb. 10:24-25 with Tit. 2:14; 3:1, 14.)

What exactly is our problem today? False visions that lead men and women to feverishly work to climb to the top of a mountain that cannot satisfy. And in the struggle up this mountain for the goodies of this world, we not only hurt ourselves, our health and spiritual lives, but we stay oblivious to those around us in need as we climb this barren mountain.

(5) His Explanation

In verses 36-38 we have Christ's explanation.

People usually make contact with God in the same way we screw a light bulb into an electrical socket ... step-by-step and stage-by-stage. We turn the bulb a little at a time, until contact is made and the light goes on. People are normally prompted to

³⁸ C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 20.

turn their attention toward God in the same gradual manner. They are nudged and prodded by God and circumstances, again and again, until contact is made and Christ's forgiveness and love light up their lives.³⁹

Jesus spoke of this process, as did the Apostle Paul, under the figure of sowing and reaping (cf. John 4:37-38; 1 Cor. 3:6-8).

The important principle in reaching men and women for the Savior is a process that is going on at all times. It is a process that involves soil preparation, sowing, watering, and reaping, but the fields are always white to harvest. There are those out there, sometimes the most unlikely, that are ready for reaping like the woman at the well and this Samaritan village.

We need to relax about this through understanding our responsibility. Certainly, the ultimate goal is to lead people to the Savior, but we must recognize this involves a process and never see people simply as an evangelism project. Our job is to love people as people, to reach out to them, and as we have opportunity share the riches of Christ. We are to sow, water, and reap, but in the final analysis whether we are sowing, watering, or reaping, only God can lead them to Himself. The fields are white. Some are ready for harvesting and some are not, but as Christians, God wants us all to be involved in the process.

A Pattern for Evangelism Acts 2 and 4

In a world portrayed by Scripture as dark and full of people described as blind and walking in darkness (John 3:19; 12:35; Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8; 6:12; Col. 1:13), in a day that is described as evil and full of demonic powers dedicated to man's deception (Eph. 5:16; 6:10-13; Rom. 16:18; Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3), it is so easy to lose our way, become deceived, disoriented, and lost in the many delusions of our times.

Thus, the Bible has much to say about light and sight (or vision). God's people are challenged to walk in the light and to watch carefully how and where they are walking. This certainly includes the need to understand and live in the light of our purpose and mission as the people of God. We need to sharpen our focus, or as the Lord put it in Matthew 6:22-23, we need clear vision, a single eye for the kingdom of God and God's purposes, or our lives will be full of darkness. In John 12:35 the Lord said, "he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going."

The point is that both members and church leaders can lose sight of their mission, their calling and purpose in the world as disciple-makers and change agents. As Richard Lovelace put it:

... Pastors gradually settle down and lose interest in being change agents in the church. An unconscious conspiracy arises between their flesh and that of their congregations. It becomes tacitly understood that the laity will give pastors special honor in the exercise of their gifts, if the pastors will agree to leave their congregations' pre-Christian lifestyles undisturbed and do not call for the mobilization of lay gifts for the work of the kingdom. Pastors are permitted to become ministerial superstars. Their pride is fed and their congregations are permitted to remain herds of sheep in which each has cheerfully turned to his own way.⁴⁰

³⁹ Don Posterski, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You I Am a Christian?* pp. 54-55.

⁴⁰ John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, p. 19 quoting *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL, 1979, p. 207.

So what happens? Churches lose the elementary principles of faith and vision that stimulate and motivate God's people to qualitative and quantitative church growth and outreach.

The goal of this part of *Understanding Our Method*, is for us to get a glimpse of the vitality of the church in Acts in some of its early chapters, hopefully, as a motivation to examine our life together as a part of God's people. As a preparation, let's first take a look at the **theme, purpose, and place** of Acts in the Bible, and then look at patterns of early church life from some of the key verses in these chapters.

The theme of Acts is given for us in 1:8. As a historian, Luke summarized his first work on the life of Jesus Christ in Acts 1:1-3, but then sets forth the theme of his second volume through the words of the Lord in 1:8. But while 1:8 is the theme, we must not forget that 1:1 is both a reminder and a warning that the ministry of the Spirit is to be viewed as continuing the ministry of the Lord Himself through His people.

In effect, 1:8 is the outline of the book showing the spread of Christianity as a work of the Lord through a Spirit-empowered church. These are like concentric circles:

Purpose of Acts

- To give a record of the spread of Christianity through a witnessing church from the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to Paul's arrival and ministry in Rome.
- To reveal patterns of church life which become both examples for spiritual vitality and warnings of things that can kill the vitality and missionary purpose of the church today.
- To furnish principles for missionary work and church growth.

Place of Acts in the Bible

Old Testament	Preparation
Gospels	Manifestation
Acts	Propagation
Epistles	Explanation
Revelation	Consummation

This gives us a clear picture of the place and emphasis of Acts. The facts of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, which constitute the Gospel, need to be propagated, proclaimed, and spread to the ends of the earth.

Patterns of Church Life Found in Acts

(1) Acts 2:41-47

Verse 41. Numerical Growth: In keeping with the theme of the book of Acts, we have in the center of this section an emphasis on the adding of souls to the body of Christ. This is a result of the events of Pentecost and the preaching of Peter (2:1-36). But contrary to what our Pentecostal brethren teach, Pentecost would be recorded for us as Luke has done, but it would not be repeated. Speaking with other tongues—actual languages unknown to the speakers but understood by the hearers—would occur until the cessation of that gift before 70 A.D. in keeping with its purpose as a special sign to the Jews (1 Cor. 14:20-22), but without all the phenomena of Pentecost (1 Cor. 13:8).

The question naturally arises, how will the church continue to have a dynamic witness to the world? Through the Spirit, of course. But what are the essential characteristics and ingredients for maintaining a Spirit empowered or controlled church?

Verse 42. The Pattern of Early Church Life: It is not by accident that Luke immediately takes us to the pattern of worship and life in the early church. He seems to make a connection between numerical church growth and its spiritual growth. If there was to be real spiritual growth and the continuation of numerical growth, a certain pattern of life was essential. So, Luke begins to describe the early church by telling us that the believers in it were distinguished by their devotion to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship, and to worship in the form of observing the Lord's table and prayer.

The words "continually devoting" are from the Greek word *proskartereo* which denotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action (cf. 1:20 and 6:4). In this word we see the earnestness, commitment, zeal, and faithfulness of the early church to assemble and fellowship together around the things of Christ. They were deeply involved in the things of Christ. But what is involvement? Someone has said that idealism increases in direct proportion to one's distance from the problem. The church must get involved with God and with others if it is to truly impact the world.

There are four areas of involvement: (a) with God, (b) with family, (c) with other Christians, and (d) with non-Christians. Involvement includes: love, faith, spontaneity, vulnerability, and accountability.

I know of no more potent killer than isolation. There is no more destructive influence on physical and mental health than the isolation of you from me and us from them. It has been shown to be a central agent in the etiology of depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, rape, suicide, mass murder, and a wide variety of disease states.⁴¹

In Webster's dictionary, we find that being involved means "to draw in as a participant, to relate closely, to connect, to include." It means fellowship, being partners together in an enterprise. Their fellowship was the reality of the unity of faith and love and joy that so characterized these early believers.

Verses 43-47. The Pattern of Daily Lifestyles and Values: Note an important connection: Within the community of believers there was a spirit of unity in commitment and rejoicing and generosity. Outside, they enjoyed good will or favor from the people with the Lord adding to the church daily.

Verse 43. "Everyone" may well refer to more than the Christian community and is contrasted to "all those who believed" in vs. 44. It thus calls attention to the impact the early Christians were having on their community because of the authenticity of their walk with the Lord and the way it was changing their lives.

Verses 44-45. First, we see involvement: as believers, they were together (lit. unto the same place). In this we see a new commitment for fellowship with believers. Second, they possessed a new value system. This was all voluntary and based on their love for each other, their love for the Lord, and the single-minded perspective of heavenly treasure. This new value system not only led to generosity, but to new priorities in the use of their time with each other in the pursuit of spiritual things.

Verse 46. We find the favorite meeting place of the early believers was in the temple at the eastern edge of the outer court called Solomon's Colonnade. There, they met formally and carried on their worship, teaching, discussions, and praise. Then, they took their meals in their own homes (lit. "by house-

⁴¹ Charles Swindoll, *Strengthening Your Grip*, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1982, p. 29.

holds” or “in various houses”). They met formally to study and worship together in the temple and then they would meet together in various homes for food and closer fellowship.

We also see they met daily or day by day. This text does not command every day meetings. They may have alternated between the temple and their homes, but the point is they were consistent and they joyfully assembled together for worship, encouragement, and fellowship. All of this was to a large degree the product of their sincerity of heart. Above reference was made to their single-minded perspective. This is evident in the “one mind” of verse 46 and in this phrase, “sincerity of heart.” “Sincerity” is *aphelotes*, “without a stone, even, smooth.” It means sincerity, singleness, without that which causes one to stumble as perhaps in Hebrews 12:1 and Matthew 6:19-22.

Verse 47. “Praising God” is a further matter of perspective and singleness of mind. They were a church that exalted the Lord by praise. Indeed, they lived by praise because their trust and hope was in the Lord and not in the details of life—fame and fortune, and power and pleasure. I am reminded of Psalm 34:1-4.

A further outcome of all of this is found in the rest of Acts 2:47, favor with all people and the numerical growth of the church by the work of God.

(2) Acts 3:1-26

In this chapter we have recorded the miracle of the man lame from his mother’s womb which is followed by another message by Peter. This is a message to Jewish people, but it would be well to note verse 26. In this we see the nature and character of the true blessing of God, to turn us from our wicked ways.

But what are wicked ways? Too often we have a distorted view of this. We tend to unconsciously see the wicked or sinful as people who sin differently from us. We often think of drunkenness, murder, drugs, fraud, lying, stealing, pornography, and maybe even gossip and criticism. But what about spiritual apathy, false values, pursuits, and priorities that keep us from fellowship, praying together, from the study of the Word, and ministry?

(3) Acts 4:1-12

Persecution began to break out because of the jealousy of the religious leaders who had rejected the Lord. But the church thrived in the midst of persecution while today the church is, for the most part, dying in the midst of luxurious living. Our preoccupation with comfort, pleasure, and independence is killing our witness in the world. Either our pursuits keep us from seeking the kingdom of God or they blind us to those in need of our ministry.

Regardless of the persecution, Peter boldly proclaimed the Lord as the sole source of salvation (Acts 4:12).

(4) Acts 4:13-14

What kind of men did the Lord use in the early church who literally turned the world upside down? While literacy was high among Jews of the first century, theological disputations required rabbinical training. Since the Apostles had no such training, they were thought incapable of having the ability to carry on theological discussion. But here were Peter and John, whom the council observed to be “un-schooled, ordinary men,” speaking fearlessly and confidently before the Jewish supreme court and senate. Their judges could not but wonder at these ordinary men having such a mastery of biblical

argumentation. So, they had to fall back on the only possible explanation—“these men had been with Jesus.” *Nothing speaks louder than authenticity!*

(5) Acts 4:23-31

The church's response to the release of the Apostles was a spontaneous outburst of praise, practical application of truth, and petition.

Most significant is the fact that these early Christians were not praying for relief from oppression or judgment on their oppressors but for enablement “to speak your word with great boldness” amid oppression, and for God Himself to act in mighty power “through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” The concern was for God's Word to go forth and for Christ's name to be glorified, while they rested their circumstances in God's hands. What a pattern and an example for us!

Verse 31 gives us the effect: As an evidence of the sure answer of God to their prayer, the place was shaken. This does not seem to be an earthquake. Whatever it was, it may picture the shaking up of our lives that we all need through the work of God in our hearts—new concerns, new priorities, new values, new commitment, and new sources of trust versus our old strategies for living. They were all filled with the Spirit. Note the “all.” They were given boldness to speak and represent the Lord.

(6) Acts 4:32-37

Going back to the theme of 2:42-47, Luke again illustrates the nature and character of the life of the early church. He gives examples of that which made it so effective in its mission to the lost, the single-minded generosity, the unity of mind and heart, and commitment of the people as a whole, with Barnabas as a specific example.

Verse 32. “Of one heart and soul” is the root of what was happening here—Unity. But what does that mean? One happy family? No! We might compare two oxen at work pulling a plow. They may be the best of buddies, but if one is lazy or does not have his mind on his purpose, there is no unity nor the ability to do what they were designed to do.

“And not one of them claimed ...” is the fruit. Again, this is not calling for Christian socialism as chapter 5 verses 1 and following clearly shows. It simply demonstrates the single-minded devotion and values of the early church. They were not divided in their allegiance.

Right in the midst of this description, as though to emphasize that meeting the physical needs of the group was not the primary consideration, attention is called to the public witness borne by the Apostles to “the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” Above all, this was a witnessing community, and for this reason it enjoyed “abundant grace” from the Lord.

(7) Acts 5:1-11

In these verses Luke gives an example of the kind of thing which could and would kill the impact of the church in its calling and mission, the greed and deceit of Ananias and Sapphira.

Verses 1-2. “A certain man named Ananias” (His name means “God is gracious”). Luke uses the verb *nosphizo*, “kept back, purloined, put aside for oneself.” In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) it is used in Joshua 7:1 of Achan's sin. Perhaps Luke meant to draw a parallel between the sin of Achan as Israel began their conquest of Canaan as the people of God (they too had a mission to the nations as a priesthood nation [see Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 4:6-7]) and the sin of Ananias and Sapphira as the church began its mission to the nations (Acts 1:8).

“Satan” (Greek, *ho Satanas*; Hebrew, *ha satan*) was originally a common noun meaning “adversary” (1 Kings 11:14; Ps. 109:6), but later it became a personal designation for the angel who accuses and opposes God and His people (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7), and tempts man to evil (1 Chron. 21:1).

We see four things in Ananias and his wife that pose a warning to us, things that are devastating to not only our walk with the Lord, but to our witness and mission in the world. (a) We see greed or covetousness, caused by (b) a false hope or trust—trusting in the uncertainty of riches, a form of idolatry, (c) hypocrisy, a false front, wanting to appear more generous than they were, and (d) a false source of significance, seeking the praise of men for their self-worth and impact rather than resting in their new acceptance in the Lord.

As we reflect on these verses, isn’t there a call here for an evaluation of our personal values, our sources of trust, our priorities, and pursuits? Don’t we need to ask ourselves, what am I seeking from life, from my career, from my ministry, from my family, from my church?

Am I looking to any of the four deadly desires of the heart for my security and significance, the desires of **fame**, **fortune**, **power**, and **pleasure** and all that these are supposed to supply? Each of these are like heavy weights or entangling vines that cripple our capacity and ability to run the race that has been set before us (Heb. 12:1-2).

Has Satan been successful in deluding us to seek from such futile things what only God can give? Are they keeping us from the pattern of fellowship and gathering together we see in the early church?

**Lesson 6:
The Stewardship of
God's Truth Through Evangelism
(Part 3)**

Understanding Our Message

The Message of Grace

The fourth major area of importance in the doctrine of evangelism is a clear understanding of the message God has called us to proclaim. Obviously, if salvation is dependent on one's understanding and reception of the message, it's vital that we properly understand the message. Our message is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the message of salvation through His person and work. That sounds simple enough, but it is not nearly as simple as it sounds because of the many messages being proclaimed as "the Gospel." The message, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31) has been assaulted from early on. Since the message is crucial to salvation, and if we are to be true to the Bible and to the grace of our Lord, we need to know the message, be able to share it clearly, and avoid the distortions. Concerning the problem of stating and misstating the Gospel, Ryrie writes:

Observe this random sampling of expressions of the Gospel taken from tracts, sermons, books, and radio and TV messages. I list them without documentation since the point is not who said these but what was said, and to illustrate how varied and confusing these statements are. If we gave even half of them to an unsaved person, which and what would he be expected to believe?

Here they are:

- (1) Repent, believe, confess your sin to God, and confess Him before men and you will be saved.
- (2) The clearest statement of the Gospel in the New Testament is found in Luke 9:23: "If any man wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."
- (3) Perhaps the most comprehensive invitation to salvation in the epistles comes in James 4:7-10: "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."
- (4) May the Lord reveal to the sinners that the only way for them to be saved from their sins is to repent with a godly sorrow in their hearts to the Lord.
- (5) Utter the prayer of the prodigal son—ask Jesus to be your Lord and Master.
- (6) Come forward and follow Christ in baptism.

- (7) Place your hand in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus.
- (8) Find Christ by praying through to Him.
- (9) Believe in Him, trust Him, accept Him, commit your life to Him.
- (10) We have the warning of Christ that He will not receive us into His kingdom until we are ready to give up all, until we are ready to turn from all sin in our lives.
- (11) God offers eternal life freely to sinners who will surrender to Him in humble, repentant faith.
- (12) Do we literally have to give away everything we own to become Christians? No, but we do have to be willing to forsake all.
- (13) Matthew 7:13-14 is pure Gospel: "Enter by the narrow gate ..."
- (14) No one can receive Christ as his Savior while he rejects Him as his Lord.
- (15) Give your heart to Christ.

Not all these statements are incorrect or equally good or bad. But they are not all saying the same thing. They are not expressing the same truth only in different words. The differences cannot be harmonized by saying, "It's only a matter of semantics." And yet they all purport to explaining the way of salvation.¹

Certainly this illustrates the need to truly know the Gospel and be able to state it in a clear and precise manner. Much of this disparity in the way the Gospel is stated or misstated is found in the grace nature of the Gospel which is so contrary to man's proud bent to depend upon himself rather than God.

Swindoll writes:

For the next few minutes let's think about heresy. To begin with, answer this question: What would you consider *the most dangerous heresy on earth*? Stop and think before you answer. The one I have in mind is not so bold and ugly that it would make angels blush. This one is subtle, rather attractive. For a long, long time it's been a favorite of many. Actually, it has been around since the Garden of Eden. Let me give you a few hints:

It is philosophy found in numerous self-help books, many poems, and most rags-to-riches biographies.

It is a recurring theme in political speeches and commencement addresses. It flourishes in academia.

It feeds our pride, it fuels our self-centered bent, it pleases our flesh.

In a word, it's humanism.

He then quotes a poem written by William Ernest Henley, a poem often heard, at least in part, in commencement exercises designed to motivate graduates to do their best, to work harder, to give it all they have and never give up. The last part of the poem you will recognize:

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1989, pp. 23-24.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

Swindoll goes on to say:

What seems so right is, in fact, heresy—the one I consider the most dangerous heresy on earth. What is it? *The emphasis of what we do for God, instead of what God does for us.* Some are so convinced of the opposite, they would argue nose to nose. They are often the ones who claim that their favorite verse of Scripture is “God helps those who help themselves” (which doesn’t appear in the Bible). Talk about killing grace! The fact is, God helps the helpless, the undeserving, those who don’t measure up, those who fail to achieve His standard. Nevertheless, the heresy continues louder now than ever in history. Most people see themselves as “masters” of their own fate, “captains” of their own souls. It’s an age-old philosophy deeply ingrained in the human heart. And why not? It supports humanity’s all time favorite subject: self.²

The Problem We Face

Perversion of the Gospel Message

In Acts 15:1, very early in the life of the church, we read these words: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Verse 5 tells us that these were men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed. They were members of the church, but from within the ranks of the church itself, a controversy arose concerning the exact nature and content of the message of the Gospel.

Reasons for the Problem

Should we be surprised at these attempts to add to the Gospel message? No, not at all. Not if we seriously believe the Bible and believe its teaching regarding Satan, man, and the many warnings regarding false prophets and teachers. Let me suggest several specific reasons:

(1) The Condition of Man

Second Corinthians 4:3 says, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.” First Corinthians 2:14 says, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

The message of the good news is hidden from the lost or the unregenerate because of their natural spiritual blindness. It’s a message so unique and beyond human understanding that apart from the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, it could never reach man’s heart or his head. Why is that?

(2) The Nature of the Message

² Charles Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1990, pp. 17-19.

Because it is a message of the cross and it is a message of pure, unadulterated grace. It is contrary to man's heart. To man, the message of the cross is either a stumbling block or foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). As a message of grace, which excludes works as a means of obtaining salvation, it goes against the grain of proud, self-dependent humanity. Mankind is inherently religious and always thinks in terms of what he can do and earn before God and before men (John 6:27-29; Rom. 4:1-6; 10:1-4; 3:23; 11:6).

(3) The Activity of the Adversary

Added to man's inherent blindness and natural bent is the blinding activity of Satan, who as the god of this world, blinds the minds of the unbelieving to keep the glory of this message of grace from man's understanding (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). The attack on the Gospel is not fundamentally a work of man, but a work of man's adversary. For this purpose, Satan employs his own agents and may even use well-intentioned, but misguided Christians. So, there is a fourth cause of this siege against the Gospel of grace.

(4) The Agents of the Adversary

Connected with Satan's desire to blind men to the grace message of the Gospel are Satan's agents or ministers, people who are generally counterfeits themselves and who seek to pass off a counterfeit message. Second Corinthians 11:1-4, and 13-15 teach us that Satan has his own ministers who appear as harmless ministers of light, wolves in sheep's clothing. They may be well meaning, sincere, and unaware of who they are serving, but being themselves deceived, they are nevertheless serving the purposes of the devil by distorting the simplicity of the Gospel message in one form or another.

Satan, whose very name means *adversary*, is called "that old serpent." This pictures him as deceiving and deceitful. The Lord called him a liar and the father of lies. He is God's number one adversary and thus the number one adversary of the message of the Gospel. As such, we should expect him to do everything in his power to confuse, distort, and deceive men with regard to the key issues of *salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone*.

Thus, 1 Peter 5:8 warns us to be on alert because our adversary the devil walks about seeking whom he may devour. Then in 2 Peter 2:1f he warned against false teachers. Paul likewise warns against false teachers in 1 Timothy 4:1f and again in 2 Timothy 4:3f. But what are we to look for? How do we recognize them? When it comes to the Gospel message we should be looking for a counterfeit, something that looks very much like the real thing, but is not. What do we look for to determine a counterfeit? The best defense against a counterfeit is alertness along with an accurate and precise knowledge of the authentic message. I understand that bank tellers, rather than studying counterfeit money, study genuine money in preparation for discerning the counterfeit bills. The better they know the real thing, the better they become at discerning the false. The same is true with the Gospel.

As a part of understanding the authentic message of the Gospel, let's look first at its nature. This will help us to define it more precisely and protect us against adding to its message.

The Nature of the Gospel Message

If we can determine the basic nature or essence of the Gospel message, then we will not only be more able to accurately define it, but be more on alert to anything that is contrary to its nature or essence. God's program of salvation is theocentric—God centered. God's main purpose according to Ephesians 1:6 and 2:7 is to bring praise to the glory of the exceeding riches of *His grace*. As a part of that, several things stand out in the New Testament revelation of God's grace in salvation through Christ.

By Grace Through Faith

Salvation is by grace through faith *ALONE* in the work of God in Christ *ALONE*, not by religious or moral works which men perform.

Paul defines it as the Gospel of the grace of God in Acts 20:24:

But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

Every salutation in Paul's letters and Peter's begin with "Grace to you," and many of them close with a similar emphasis as 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." (The following passages draw our attention to this: Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:21-28; Rom. 4:1-16; Rom. 5:1-11; Rom. 11:6; Gal. 1:6; Gal. 2:21; Gal. 5:4; Eph. 2:5, 8-9; 3:2; Col. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:16-17; 1 Tim. 1:13-16; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 2:11; Tit. 3:5-7; Heb. 12:15; 13:9.)

A Free Gift

As a work of God's grace, it is also *A FREE GIFT*. The words 'grace' and 'gift' stand opposed to the concept of works as a means of receiving what is given. The Scripture make this clear in bold statements and by the many references to salvation as a *free gift* from God *without cost* to us. Salvation in Christ **is free, but it is not cheap**. Salvation cost God the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus. Someone put it this way: Grace is not grace and free is not free if I must pay some price. Cheap suggests something which we purchase at a great discount relative to its value. Free suggest something which we don't purchase at all—it's something we get as a *GIFT!!!*

The Word is very clear in its emphasis on this matter. Carefully note Paul's bold statements and emphasis in Romans 4:1-5 and 11:6. Note also the uses of the word 'gift' in relation to salvation drive home this principle even more (cf. John 4:10; Rev. 21:6).

G. H. Lang said regarding Revelation 21:6, "The water of life is not acquired by the process of fighting a life-long battle and conquering at last. It is a *free gift*, imparting spiritual life to the spiritually dead" (*Revelation*, p. 94). Compare also Revelation 22:17.

The Apostle Paul called eternal salvation a *free gift* (or *gift*) no less than nine times (Rom. 3:24; 5:15 [twice], 16 [twice], 17; 6:23; 2 Cor. 9:15; Eph. 2:8). James also spoke of the new birth as a gift from God (Jam. 1:17-18). The author of Hebrews spoke of eternal salvation as "the heavenly gift" (Heb. 6:4).

As one pastor put it, "There is nothing left for us to pay. No cost to count. Just a free gift to receive by placing our faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. Now that is good news."³ There are costs to discipleship and for eternal rewards, but not for salvation. Many today are confusing the calls to discipleship with the message of salvation. This is a perversion of the free Gospel of grace.

Received by Faith

As a work of grace, salvation is received by faith or belief in the person and work of Christ. As John 6:28-29 makes clear, faith is not a work any more than the hand of a beggar who reaches out to receive a

³ Brad McCoy, "Free, Not Cheap," *Grace Evangelical News*, Oct.-Nov. 1988, p. 1.

gift of bread is a work. The great emphasis of the New Testament is that salvation is received through faith in Christ. Discipleship is costly, but salvation is free through faith. Matthew, Mark, and Luke deal primarily with the costs of discipleship written in a context to believers to challenge them to become committed disciples. These three gospels are basically manuals of discipleship, and the calls for discipleship in these gospels should never be construed as teaching us how to be saved.

On the other hand, the Gospel of John is concerned primarily, though not exclusively, with salvation. In John 20:31, the Apostle John states his purpose and that purpose is to point people to salvation through faith in Christ (see John 1:7, 12; 2:11, 23; 3:15-18, 36; 4:39, 41). The word 'believe' is found 85 times.

The Analogy of the Faith Principle of Interpretation

One of the most basic principles of interpretation is the 'analogy of faith.' This principle says that unclear passages should be understood in light of clear ones, not the other way around. The difficult passages need to be explained in harmony with clear ones. In other words, if a passage has two or more possible interpretations, and only one fits well with the Scriptures as a whole, the Bible student is bound to select the interpretation which is in harmony with the rest of biblical revelation. Thus, though a passage may have two possible interpretations in isolation from other passages, when placed alongside clear, unambiguous passages, only one interpretation exists. The passages mentioned above are very, very clear, and should guide us in our understanding of the Gospel message and the rest of the Scripture. God's Word does not contradict itself. When we find a passage that could be understood contrary to these clear passages on salvation by faith alone, we need to recognize that such a contradictory understanding of these unclear or more difficult passages must be wrong, and we need to examine them more closely in the light of other factors.

Those who argue that something other than faith is a necessary condition for salvation apparently either simply ignore or do not agree with this principle of interpretation. Instead, they base their view of the conditions of salvation on a few difficult 'problem passages' while they ignore or twist the clear ones.

As an illustration, compare Galatians 6:8-10. To say that Paul is saying that we can reap eternal life (that is get saved by doing good) is to contradict the theology and purpose of the rest of this epistle as well as the rest of Paul's writings. Rather, Paul is speaking about the rewards and the quality of life we will experience both now and in eternity. For a similar passage and emphasis, compare 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

In writing about the Judaizers who wanted to add the works of the Law to the Gospel message, Zane Hodges writes:

Of course, the Judaizers must have appealed to the Scriptures. The authority of the Mosaic law rested in the written revelation of the Old Testament. But this appeal was misguided. It misconstrued both the Old Testament itself and the new revelation which had been made through the Son of God.

In a quite similar fashion, contemporary attacks on the complete freeness of the Gospel of God's grace likewise appeal to Scripture. But invariably the appeal rests on a misconstruction of the passages in question. This is usually accompanied by the fail-

ure to face the plain meaning of the most direct statements about the way of salvation. The confusion that results is enormous. The consequences are calamitous.⁴

Again, speaking about Satan's attack on the freeness of the Gospel message Hodges writes:

But the attack has been launched again and again down through the centuries and in no age more often than in our own. The specifics may vary widely, but the format remains fundamentally the same.⁵

Here are just a few of the ways the attacks come:

- “Unless you believe and are baptized according to biblical custom, you cannot be saved.”
- “Unless you believe and persevere in good works, you cannot be saved.”
- “Unless you believe and yield your life to the lordship of Christ, you cannot be saved.”
- “Unless you believe and come forward and profess Christ publicly, you cannot be saved.”
- “Unless you believe and repent and turn from your sins, you cannot be saved.”

But against these claims and others, “the true saving Gospel stands in profound and majestic contrast: ‘And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.’”⁶ (Rev. 22:17).

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Bearing in mind ‘the analogy of faith’ principle, Chafer has some interesting insights:

Approximately 115 New Testament passages condition salvation on “believing” and 35 passages condition salvation on “faith,” the latter being an exact synonym of the former. These portions of Scripture, about 150 in all, include practically all that the New Testament declares on the matter of human responsibility in salvation.⁷

Later, Chafer had this to say in connection with public confession plus faith as a means of salvation:

First, to claim that a public confession of Christ as Savior is required in addition to believing on Christ is to contend that 150 passages in which believing alone appears are incomplete and to that extent misleading. A certain type of mind, however, seems able to construct all its confidence on an erroneous interpretation of one passage and to be uninfluenced by the overwhelming body of Scripture that contradicts that interpretation.⁸

⁴ Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, Redención Viva, Dallas, TX, 1981, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Vital Theological Issues*, Roy B. Zuck, General Editor, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 1994, p. 122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

What then is the Gospel message? The word “gospel” is the translation of the Greek *euangelion* which means “glad tidings” or “good news.” But the word is used to describe various types of good news, so one needs to know what good news is in view in any passage contextually.

- 1 Thessalonians 3:6 describes the good news of their faithfulness.
- In Matthew, gospel is used concerning the gospel of the kingdom all but once and the one exception speaks of the good news of Christ’s death.
- Mark’s use of gospel uniformly speaks of the person of Christ.
- Luke’s use underscores the centrality of Christ and also the kingdom of God which was being offered to Israel.
- John does not use the word gospel at all.
- In Galatians 1:6-7, Paul talks about a gospel which is a different gospel, but not really a gospel at all because it is a perversion of the true gospel of God’s grace in Christ or salvation as a gift without cost through faith alone in Christ alone.

As we turn to the epistles, we find that it is Paul who gives us the precise definition of the Gospel as we use it today in terms of the message of salvation and the good news about Christ’s death and resurrection. He died and He lives. Dr. Ryrie writes:

In days past (and even today) we heard much about the “full Gospel” which included experiencing certain ministries of the Holy Spirit. To be saved one not only had to believe but also, for example, receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Churches which taught this doctrine were sometimes called “full Gospel” churches.

Today we hear about the “whole Gospel,” which includes redemption of society along with the redemption of individuals. But Paul wrote clearly that the Gospel that saves is believing that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. This is the *complete* Gospel, and if so, then it is also the true full Gospel and the true whole Gospel. Nothing else is needed for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.⁹

With this in mind, let’s look at Paul’s clear definition of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15.

The Gospel Defined and Defended (1 Cor. 15:1-11)

Declaration and Warning (vss. 1-2)

“Now” introduces the new subject which Paul now addresses, the resurrection, which Paul intends to show as an integral part of the Gospel message. There were those at Corinth who were denying the doctrine of the resurrection as Paul had taught it. As a Greek city, this denial among the Corinthians probably came from the influence of Platonic philosophy and Orphic teaching.

This philosophy refused to accept the resurrection of the body and held that the body is only evil and a prison, a bond, a dungeon or grave of the soul, a body tomb and that at death the soul is freed. When a Greek with this background heard the Gospel, he was ready to believe in the immortality of the

⁹ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, pp. 39-40.

soul, but balked at the resurrection because to him resurrection meant to again be in bondage. They also thought resurrection meant resurrection to a body far inferior to the glorified body Christians are promised through Christ (Phil. 3:20-21).

In the process of answering these denials of the resurrection, the Apostle Paul gives us what is in essence the Gospel in a nutshell. He points us to the most fundamental and essential parts of the Gospel message of the Bible.

Let's look at some of the details of 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

"I make known" is a causative verb, *gnorizo*, "to make or cause someone to know" and not simply to remind. In essence, in view of what he says next, he was reminding them of what they already knew and should have been grounded in. In this choice of words, however, there seems to be a slight rebuke. As the rest of this verse shows, he is writing to cause these believers to know again or to relearn what they had already heard and received.

"To you" is, in this context, what we call in Greek grammar a dative of advantage. Making known the Word is always an advantage if men will respond and eagerly and carefully apply it. But like the Corinthians, people are too ready to put other things first, or to either subtract from or add to the message of the Word as with the Gospel. Or we hinder it by being occupied with the personality presenting the message and miss the message, or we hinder it by our prejudices.

"The Gospel" focuses on the specific issue that Paul wanted to make known and clear, the content of the Gospel message. Concerning this message Paul says four things: (1) We preached it to you, (2) which also you received (the past), (3) in which also you stand (the present), (4) by which also you are saved (present sanctification and ultimate glorification).

"You are saved." The Greek has the present continuous tense which may refer to continual salvation from the power of sin in the lives of believers. It may also refer to the day-by-day salvation of the inhabitants of Corinth as they received the message and became part of the church of Jesus Christ. Also it could be a futuristic present stressing the certainty of salvation through faith in Christ.

"If you hold fast the word which I preached to you." This takes us to the important issue of the message or what is believed. Literally, "by what word I preached unto you if you hold fast or possess." The Greek text places stress on the content or the exact substance that was delivered by the apostle. If they possess or hold to that message, then salvation and deliverance is theirs to receive and experience. In the Greek text, the "if" is a first class condition which assumes the fact of what is stated. Paul assumes and believes they do possess the message by personal faith, but if one does not hold (possess) the exact message he delivered to them, then their faith is vain.

"Unless you believed in vain." This certainly does not indicate the loss of salvation as a possibility, nor that a faith that does not persevere is not true saving faith. Instead, Paul is saying that (a) faith that does not encompass the whole Gospel, the Gospel as it was delivered to them, is a faith that is to no purpose or is futile; or (b) that a faith lodged in a purported resurrection of the Messiah would be groundless if the message of Christ's resurrection were untrue. If Christ was not crucified and resurrected, salvation is impossible (cf. vs. 15, 17).

By way of application, let's consider two points:

(1) Faith is worthless unless the content and object of faith is valid. There are two aspects of this: (a) The object of faith must be able, willing, and available to save. “Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). (b) Faith in Christ which saves involves thoughtfully trusting in the entire message of the Gospel. You cannot trust in part of the message and reject the rest of it. You cannot trust in the person of Christ and reject the work of Christ. You cannot trust in the work of Christ and reject the person of Christ. You cannot trust in the death of Christ and reject His resurrection.

(2) We have a grave and vital responsibility to make the issues crystal clear as they are revealed in the Word. We must present the true message of the Gospel as it is given to us in the Bible neither adding to it nor subtracting from it because of our background or traditions or human prejudice.

So, what is the Gospel? In the words that follow, Paul expounds on the derivation, definition, and defense of the Gospel he preached or delivered to the Corinthians.

Derivation of the Gospel (vs. 3)

With the words, “For I delivered to you ... what I also received,” Paul affirms that what he delivered was what was imparted to him by others, by the Lord himself on the Damascus Road, and by those apostles who had personally been with the Lord as eye witnesses and with whom Paul had met and talked (cf. Gal. 1:1-18 and 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Definition of the Gospel (vss. 3-4)

The centrality of what was delivered is set forth in the words, “of first importance” (vs. 3a). “Of first importance” (*en protos*) may point to first in time or first in importance. Here, it stresses not time, but importance, the primary and vital essentials of the Gospel message, the doctrines foremost in importance for salvation.

The central declarations of the Gospel message is:

(1) “Christ died for our sins” (vs. 3).

- The Gospel concerns the death of a person, the person of Messiah of Old Testament expectation, the God-man, the one and only one qualified to die as man’s representative and substitute.
- The Gospel teaches His death was for sins, ours. This is necessary because, as Scripture teaches us, “we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and that “there is none righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). Connected with this is the fact of God’s perfect and absolute holiness, that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity (Hab. 1:13). The death of Christ was to pay the penalty of sin and to satisfy the holiness of God (1 John 2:2).

(2) “He was raised on the third day” (vs. 4).

The Gospel declares that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead to authenticate Christ’s person as God’s Son and prove the value of His death as our means of forgiveness and justification through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:4; 4:24-25).

Defense of the Gospel (vss. 3-10)

The testimony and evidences for the historic events of the Gospel message:

These historic events were anticipated in the Old Testament (vss. 3, 4). This states the fact that both the death and resurrection of Christ was anticipated by the Old Testament Scripture as foretold by the prophets. This even includes His burial: For His death there is Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. For His resurrection we have Psalm 16:8-11; 22:22f; Isaiah 53:10-12. For His burial, Isaiah 53:9.

The matter of Christ's burial (vs. 4). Why mention the burial of Christ? Because it is a strong testimony for the fact of His death. He was buried only after the Roman soldiers were sure he was dead, was wrapped in burial clothes and spices, and laid in a sealed tomb guarded by Roman soldiers. Then, after the resurrection, there was the evidences of the empty tomb with the grave clothes (John 20:3-10).

The eyewitness reports (vss. 5-10). Finally, Paul points to the many eye witness accounts of the fact of Christ's resurrection as the final evidence which includes five hundred brethren at one time.

Declaration of the Gospel (vs. 11)

With verse 11, the Apostle calls our attention to our responsibility in view of the facts. We must proclaim this wonderful message so people can believe and be saved. It is not an easy message, however. It is a message that goes contrary to man's natural bent, to man's own human wisdom. I remember one conversation with my supervisor when I was in seminary in the 1960s. I worked with underprivileged youth in West Dallas, and though he never tried to keep me from witnessing to the kids, for him, the message of the Bible concerning the death of Christ was nonsense. He was as nice a guy as you would ever want to meet and work for, but in one of our conversations concerning the Gospel, he said, "Hey Doc (for some reason he like to call me Doc), you don't really believe all this stuff concerning the necessity of the shedding of blood and the sacrifice of Jesus for sin, do you? That's antiquated religion! We need to get beyond that and progress in our religious thinking. We just need to follow the example of Jesus in learning to love people." But just listen to what Paul said about this kind of thinking in 1 Corinthians 1:20-31.

What then is the message we must proclaim to save those who believe? What are the essential ingredients that must be made clear?

(1) All people are lost, separated from God and in need of God's salvation. Why? Because "all have sinned and come short of God's glory," His perfect holiness. God is holy and sin separates man from God and the penalty of sin is death (Isa. 59:2; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). All men, immoral, moral, and religious have sinned and come short of God's holiness and God can accept no one who falls short of His holiness.

(2) No one can be saved by their good works whether religious or moral. No matter how hard one tries, no one can save themselves by their own religious works or wisdom. Men have nothing, no religious works, no personal righteous, no human goodness, with which they can boast before God or that will gain them eternal life (Isa. 64:6; Ps. 143:2; John 3:3-6; Tit. 3:5-7; Rom. 4:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:30-31).

(3) But God loved the world and proved it by giving us His Son to die in our place. God's Son became true humanity that He might die in our place and pay the penalty for our sins in order to bring us to God and give us eternal life as a free gift without cost (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; Eph. 2:8-9; Rev. 21:6; 22:17). Jesus Christ alone is man's means of redemption and access to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

(4) How then do we receive this gift of salvation? By faith in this Gospel message, by faith alone in Christ alone; faith in the person (the God-man Savior) and work of Christ who died for our sins, who took our place, and was then raised on the third day as a proof of our redemption and justification through faith, personal trust, in Him (John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 4:25-5:1; Eph. 2:8-9).

Regarding the 'Terms of Salvation' often used in presenting the Gospel which misstate the Gospel message, Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote:

Outside the doctrines related to the Person and work of Christ, there is no truth more far-reaching in its implication and no fact more to be defended than that salvation in all its limitless magnitude is secured, so far as human responsibility is concerned, by believing on Christ as Savior. To this one requirement no other obligation may be added without violence to the Scriptures and total disruption of the essential doctrine of salvation by grace alone.¹⁰

¹⁰Chafer, *Vital Theological Issues*, p. 117.

Lesson 7:
The Stewardship of
God's Truth Through Evangelism
(Part 4)

Common Assaults on the Gospel

By assaults we are talking about additions to the message of faith alone in Christ alone. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are responsible to be His representatives. We are ambassadors of Christ who are to give testimony to the person and work of the Savior.

Even though household evangelism still seems to be the most effective method, other methods are used effectively. When it comes to the message, however, there is only one message (or Gospel) that we may proclaim and remain faithful to the Bible. Unfortunately, confusion abounds with respect to the content and presentation of the good news of God's grace in the person and work of Christ.

Our message is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the message of salvation through His person and work. That sounds simple enough, but it is not nearly as simple as it sounds. The simple message, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," has been assaulted from early on. Since the message is crucial to salvation, since anathema is pronounced on those who misrepresent it or change it (Gal. 1:6-9), we need to know the message. If we are to be true to the Bible and to the grace of our Lord, we need to be able to share the Gospel clearly and avoid the distortions.

Outside the doctrines related to the Person and work of Christ, there is no truth more far-reaching in its implications and no fact more to be defended than that salvation in all its limitless magnitude is secured, so far as human responsibility is concerned, by believing on Christ as Savior. **To this one requirement no other obligation may be added without violence to the Scriptures and total disruption of the essential doctrine of salvation by grace alone.** Only ignorance or reprehensible inattention to the structure of a right Soteriology will attempt to intrude some form of human works with its supposed merit into that which, if done at all, must, by the very nature of the case, be wrought by God alone and on the principle of sovereign grace.¹ (Emphasis mine.)

From the early days of the church, the church has faced the problem of those who wanted to add to the message. In Acts 15:1 we read these words: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Verse 5 tells us that these were men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed. They were members of the church and so, from within its own ranks, a controversy broke out concerning the exact nature and content of the message of the Gospel.

The Gospel by nature is a God-centered, grace-centered message which offers salvation as a free gift, a gift without cost, through faith in God's work through His Son rather than by man's work or works whether religious or moral (1 Cor. 1:30; John 4:10; Acts 8:20; Rom. 11:6; 15:15-18; Rev. 21:6). The nature of the message, the condition of man (dead in sin and born spiritually blind [Eph. 2:1; 1 Cor. 2:14;

¹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, Dallas Seminary Press, Dallas, TX, 1948, p. 371.

John 9:39]), and the activity of Satan (2 Cor. 4:4; John 8:43-45) make this a difficult message to accept. Man naturally thinks he must add something to his salvation for it to be bonafide.

As a result, certain accusations are often leveled against faith alone in Christ alone: it is sometimes called “cheap grace” or “easy believism.” But this is nonsense. The claim of “easy believism” so often aimed at those who preach “faith alone in Christ alone” is a misnomer. Simple faith is not easy for mankind who wants to add something to the work of God. Furthermore, **salvation in Christ is free, but it’s not cheap.** It cost God the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

This study will be devoted to some of the more common ways the Gospel is being assaulted or perverted, very often, by well-meaning and sincere people. This is no new problem. As mentioned above, it was a problem in the early church starting in Acts 15 and it has been a problem throughout the history of the church. When I was in Seminary in the mid-sixties, one of my professors, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, taught a brief series on this in the church where my wife and I were attending in Dallas, Texas. It was an issue then, it is still a serious issue today, and it will continue to be an issue until the Lord returns.

While the debate over the issue of “faith alone in Christ alone” is not new, it has recently been brought to the forefront by the writings and preaching of John MacArthur, especially by his book entitled *The Gospel According to Jesus* in which he attacked the writings of: Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary; Dr. Charles Ryrie, author of *The Ryrie Study Bible* and a number of other books including *Basic Theology* and the book, *So Great Salvation*, which was written as an answer to MacArthur’s book setting forth a clear presentation of the free salvation position; and Zane Hodges, former professor at Dallas, who is a strong proponent of the free grace salvation position and author of *Absolutely Free* and *The Gospel Under Siege*. Other well-known proponents of the lordship salvation position are Dr. J. I. Packer, well known for his books, *Knowing God*, and *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, and Dr. James Boice, author of *Foundations of the Christian Faith*.

While MacArthur’s books and preaching have created a furor of controversy with a number of debates resulting, it has had a good result in that it has caused the church to more clearly study and define issues and passages that are fuzzy to many people, and to defend the faith against these errors of evangelism or common assaults on the pure Gospel of God’s grace which is faith alone in Christ alone.

Assault 1: “Believe and Repent of Your Sins”

In this assault, repentance is conceived as a separate act and is consistently added to believing as a human requirement for salvation. In other words, rather than seeing repentance as a synonym for believing, one is saved by repenting (which in this view means a turning from sin) and by believing (putting one’s trust in Christ).

Few issues are of more vital interest to those who believe in heaven and hell than the question of what man must do to gain entrance into heaven. Answers to this question nearly always include a reference to repentance. Throughout church history nearly every theologian has taught that repentance is essential for salvation from hell. However, several disparate understandings of repentance have been advocated.²

² Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation,” Part 1, *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Autumn 88, p. 11.

The Word “Repent” in English Translations

- In the NASB, some form of the word (repent, repentant, repented, repentance, etc.) is found 73 times with 56 of these occurring in the New Testament.
- In the ASB, some form of the word occurs 103 times with 61 in the New Testament.
- In the KJV, some form of the word occurs 112 times with 66 in the New Testament.
- In the NIV, some form of the word occurs 74 times with 55 in the New Testament.
- In the New KJV, some form of the word occurs 72 times with 58 in the New Testament.
- In the RSV, some form of the word occurs 99 times with 59 in the New Testament.
- In the New RSV, some form of the word occurs 72 times with 57 in the New Testament.

Clearly, repentance is a prominent concept of Scripture, but it is obvious from the difference in the above numbers that the words of the original are not always translated in the same way by the translators of the different versions because some of the translators didn't believe our English word repent always conveyed the right idea. Why? Because of the misconceptions about this word. In fact, because of our preconditioned ideas about this word, very often “repent,” is not the best translation at all.

Important Questions to Ask

The issue facing us is what exactly does it mean to repent? And related to this are other important questions and issues. What are we to repent of and for? Does it mean to feel sorry for something? Does it mean to feel sorrow for sin? Does it convey a resolve to turn from sin? Ryrie writes:

Since many consider sorrow for sin and repentance to be equivalent, the question could be worded, What is the place of repentance in relation to salvation? Must repentance precede faith? Is it a part of faith or a synonym for it? Can one be saved without repenting?³

Basic or Generic Meanings

Many, if not most, terms have basic or generic meanings that must be understood within their context. In other words, the context is vital to a proper understanding of most words. Within the context most terms make immediate sense. Without the context you either misunderstand what is meant or you are left wondering. Two common English words we use regularly will illustrate the point. If we say someone opened the trunk, we could mean the trunk of a car, an elephant's trunk, the trunk of a man's body, a tree trunk, or something you store things in. Or if we say, someone walked on the bed, it could mean the flower bed, a bed of leaves, the bed we sleep in. The ingredient needed to make the meaning of the word clear is the CONTEXT. The following are two scriptural illustrations:

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1989, p. 91.

Salvation

The Word “salvation” is the Greek, *soteria* and *soterion*. The basic, unaffected meaning of the word *salvation* is “to rescue” or “to save, deliver.” But we must ask a further question about this basic meaning if we are to understand its meaning in a particular context: To be rescued from what? In Philippians 1:19 Paul uses the word “salvation,” *soteria*, to mean rescue from his confinement in Rome. Except for the KJV, most versions translate this word “deliverance.” In that text salvation does not mean rescue from eternal damnation but deliverance from his present confinement in Rome. But, of course, in other contexts salvation does refer to being rescued from eternal condemnation [Acts 4:12] (Ryrie, p. 92).

Compare also Luke 1:71 referring to deliverance from Gentile domination, Acts 7:25 referring to rescue from Egypt, but Acts 13:47 by the context refers to salvation from sin and the gift of eternal life.

Redeem

Concerning the word “Redeem,” Ryrie writes:

What does it mean to *redeem*? It means “to buy or purchase something.” To purchase what, one must ask, in order to tailor this generic meaning to its use in a particular passage? In Matthew 13:44 a man redeems a field; that is, he buys it. This use has no relation to the redemption our Lord made on the cross, though the same word is used of the payment He made for sin when He died (2 Pet. 2:1). The basic meaning remains the same—to purchase—whether the word refers to paying the price for a field or for sin.⁴

Compare also Matthew 14:15 (buying food); 21:12 (buying in the temple); 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23 (Christ purchasing our redemption or salvation on the cross).

The basic meanings of these words remain the same, to save whether from a physical disaster or from eternal judgment, or to purchase whether to pay a price for a field, buy something in the market, or to pay the price for our sin. It’s the context, however, which makes the difference as to the exact meaning.

Obviously, the same principle must be applied to the word *repentance*. The first question is, what is the basic meaning for the word repentance as it is used in the New Testament? For many people, *repentance* carries with it two ideas: (a) sorrow for sin, and, based on that, (b) turning from sin and going in a different direction.

These two ideas, sorrow for sin and turning from sin, are then added to believing in Christ, or it is explained that this is what faith in Christ means. In other words, you must feel sorry for your sins, turn from your sins, and trust in Christ for salvation. Then, added to all this is often a fourth—there must be a willingness to continue to turn from sin or you cannot be saved or you are not really saved.

⁴Ryrie, p. 92.

The Meaning of Repentance in the New Testament

The Greek Words in Question

Since our English word is a translation of the Greek of the New Testament, we need to look at the original language. “There are two New Testament Greek words which are translated *repentance* in the modern English translations: *metanoia* (and its verbal counterpart *metanoeo*) and *metamelomai*. The former term is so translated fifty-eight times in the New Testament; the latter only six times.”⁵ This study will be concerned primarily with *metanoia*.

Metamelomai means “to regret, change the mind” and may connote the idea of sorrow, but not necessarily. It is translated by “regret, change the mind, and feel remorse” in the NASB and NIV, and in all but one of the passages where it is used, the primary idea is a change of mind (cf. Matt. 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2 Cor. 7:8; Heb. 7:21).

Metanoia, the primary word, without question, means “a change of mind.” It refers to the thinking of people who thought one thing or made one decision and then, based on further evidence or input, changed their minds. So, the basic sense is “**a change of mind.**” This is its meaning and use outside the New Testament and in the New Testament. It is a change of mind that leads to a different course of action, but that course of action must be determined by the context. In a context that deals with forgiveness of sin or receiving eternal life as a gift from God, the course of action is a change of trust because one now sees Jesus as the only means of salvation from sin.

Ryrie writes:

Sorrow may well be involved in a repentance, but the biblical meaning of repentance is to change one's mind, not to be sorry. And yet that change of mind must not be superficial, but genuine. The presence or absence of sorrow does not necessarily prove or disprove the genuineness of the repentance.⁶

That sorrow does not necessarily prove or disprove the genuineness of repentance is clear from 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. Sorrow may lead to a genuine change of mind, or as in the case of Judas, it may not. The point being that **sorrow and repentance are not same thing.**

But again, the nature of the change and what is changed must be determined by the context. So, another question must be asked. About what do we change our mind? Answering that question will focus the basic meaning on the particular change and issue involved.

The Object of Repentance

Many today make repentance and faith two distinct and necessary requirements for salvation. In his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer writes:

The demand is for repentance as well as faith. It is not enough to believe that only through Christ and His death are sinners justified and accepted. ... Knowledge of the

⁵ Bob Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation,” Part 3, *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Autumn 89, p. 13.

⁶ Ryrie, p. 92.

gospel, and orthodox belief of it, is no substitute for repentance ... Where there is ... no realistic recognition of the real claims that Christ makes, there can be no repentance, and therefore no salvation.⁷

Is this what the Bible really teaches? Believe and repent are never used together as if teaching two different requirements for salvation. When salvation from eternal condemnation is in view, repent (a change of mind) and believe are in essence used as synonyms. Lewis Chafer wrote:

Too often, when it is asserted—as it is here—that repentance is not to be added to belief as a separated requirement for salvation, it is assumed that repentance is not necessary to salvation. Therefore it is as dogmatically stated as language can declare, that repentance is essential to salvation and that none could be saved apart from repentance, but it is included in believing and cannot be separated from it.⁸

Roy B. Zuck writes:

Repentance is included in believing. Faith and repentance are like two sides of a coin. Genuine faith includes repentance, and genuine repentance includes faith. The Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) means to change one's mind. But to change one's mind about what? About sin, about one's adequacy to save himself, about Christ as the only way of salvation, the only One who can make a person righteous.⁹

In Luke's rendering of the Great Commission he uses repentance as a single requirement in the same sense as believing in Christ (Luke 24:46-47). As Dr. Ryrie says of this verse, "Clearly, repentance for the forgiveness of sins is connected to the death and resurrection of Christ."¹⁰ The repentance comes out of the recognition of one's sin, but the object of repentance is the person and work of Christ, or faith in Christ. Interestingly, in Luke 8:12 he uses believe alone, "Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."

A comparison of other passages clearly supports the fact that repentance often stands for faith in the person and work of Christ. Compare Acts 10:43 with 11:17-18; 13:38-39 with 2:38. Also, note Acts 16:31 which uses "believe" alone.

The stated purpose of the Gospel of John is to bring men to faith in Christ (20:31), **yet John never once uses the word repent, not once**. If repentance, when used in connection with eternal salvation, is a separate or distinct requirement from faith in Christ, then John does not give the whole Gospel. And if you can believe that, you can believe anything. Speaking of the absence of John's use of repent in His Gospel, Ryrie writes:

And yet John surely had many opportunities to use it in the events of our Lord's life which he recorded. It would have been most appropriate to use *repent* or *repentance*

⁷ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL, 1961, pp. 72-73.

⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Vital Theological Issues*, Roy B. Zuck, General Editor, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 1994, p. 119.

⁹ "Kindred Spirit," a quarterly publication of Dallas Seminary, Summer 1989, p. 5.

¹⁰ Ryrie, p. 97.

in the account of the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. But *believe* is the word used (John 3:12, 15). So, if Nicodemus needed to repent, *believe* must be a synonym; else how could the Lord have failed to use the word *repent* when talking to him? To the Samaritan harlot, Christ did not say repent. He told her to ask (John 4:10), and when her testimony and the Lord's spread to other Samaritans, John recorded not that they repented but that they believed (vss. 39, 41-42). There are about fifty more occurrences of "believe" or "faith" in the Gospel of John, but not one use of "repent." The climax is John 20:31: "These have been written that you may believe ... and that believing you may have life in His name."¹¹

What about Acts 20:21? "... solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Some would say, "Doesn't this passage teach that faith and repentance are not synonymous and that repentance is a separate requirement?" NO! Paul is summarizing his ministry in Ephesus and what he solemnly proclaimed to both Jews and Greeks, specifically, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The two words, *repentance* and *faith*, are joined by one article in the Greek text which indicates that the two are inseparable, though each focuses on a different aspect of the one requirement of salvation, namely, faith in Christ.

We can legitimately translate it like this. "Solemnly testifying ... a change of mind about God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance, *metanoia*, focuses on changing one's mind about his previous conception of God and disbelief in God or false beliefs (polytheism and idolatry) about God (see 1 Thess. 1:9). On the other hand, belief in Christ, as an expression of a change of mind, focuses on the new direction that change about God must take, namely, trusting in Christ, God's Son, as personal Savior.

It has also been suggested that in this summary Paul is emphasizing the distinction between the particular needs of Gentiles and Jews. Gentiles who were polytheistic needed to change their minds about their polytheism and realize that only one true God exists. Jews needed to change their minds about Jesus and realize that He is their true Messiah.¹²

Uses of the Concept of Repentance in the New Testament

A Synonym for Eternal Salvation

Metanoia is sometimes used through a metonymy as a synonym for eternal salvation. A metonymy is a figure of speech by which one name or noun is used instead of another to which it stands in a certain relation. These involve a metonymy of cause for the effect. The **CAUSE** is a change of mind about Christ and His Gospel. The **EFFECT** is eternal salvation.¹³ (Compare 2 Pet. 3:9, 1 Tim. 2:4, Luke 5:32.)

A Non-Saving Repentance (metamelomai)

Under this category we might also include repentance in the sense of remorse, regret with the use of *metamelomai*. This aspect of non-saving repentance is a repentance or change of mind that does not lead

¹¹ Ryrie, p. 98.

¹² Ryrie, p. 98.

¹³ Wilkin, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 18.

to eternal life or the spiritual blessings sought. Two examples are Judas (Matt. 27:3) and Esau (Heb. 12:17). Compare also Matt. 21:28-32.

A Salvation Repentance

Salvation repentance is a change of mind that results in eternal salvation. This involves a change of mind about self, about one's sinful condition and inability to save oneself combined with a change of mind about Christ, that He is the Messiah Savior and the only one by whom man can find salvation (Acts 2:38; 17:29-31). Salvation repentance means a change in confidence; it means turning away from self-confidence to confidence in Christ, faith alone in Christ alone. The irony of all of this is that any other viewpoint is really not biblical repentance because it virtually borders on faith in oneself. "In this use *metanoia* occurs as a virtual synonym for *pistis* (faith)."¹⁴

A Christian Experience Repentance

This is a change of mind regarding sinful behavior. An illustration of this kind of repentance is found in 2 Corinthians 7:8-11; 12:21; Revelation 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3, 19. By Paul's use of *lupeo* (to distress, grieve) and *metamelomai*, 2 Corinthians 7:8-11 clearly illustrates that *metanoia* does not mean to feel regret, but involves a change of mind.

For though I caused you sorrow (*lupeo*) by my letter, I do not regret (*metalomai*) it; though I did regret (*metalomai*) it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful (*lupeo*), but that you were made sorrowful (*lupeo*) to the point of repentance (*metanoia*); for you were made sorrowful (*lupeo*) according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow (*lupe*) that is according to the will of God produces a repentance (*metanoia*) without regret (*metamelomai*), leading to salvation; but the sorrow (*lupe*) of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow (*lupeo*), has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter (2 Cor. 7:8-11).

Wilkin writes:

On some occasions *metanoia* is used in contexts where the change of mind in view is clearly indicated as having to do with one's sinful practices. For example, in Luke 17:3-4 Jesus taught the disciples that they were to forgive all who sinned against them if they came and indicated that *they had changed their minds* regarding their sin. In this case and others like it "repentance" would be a good translation choice.¹⁵

Conclusion

Ryrie writes:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

To return to the main point of this chapter: Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is repentance or changing one's mind about Jesus Christ. No, if it means to be sorry for sin or even to resolve to turn from sin, for these things *will not save*. Is repentance a precondition to faith? No, though a sense of sin and the desire to turn from it may be used by the Spirit to direct someone to the Savior and His salvation. Repentance may prepare the way for faith, but it is faith that saves, not repentance (unless repentance is understood as a synonym for faith or changing one's mind about Christ).¹⁶

In the third of a series of excellent articles on the meaning of repentance, Wilkin writes:

I wish we could retranslate the New Testament. It would make teaching and preaching passages using *metanoia* simpler. It would eliminate the confusion many have when they read their Bibles and see the word *repent*...

In most cases when the English word *repent* occurs in the New Testament it is translating *metanoia*. *Metanoia* is not the equivalent of the Old Testament term *shub*. It certainly does not mean "penance." Nor does it normally mean "repentance." Rather, in the New Testament it retains its pre-Christian meaning of a change of mind. The English reader thus generally needs to read "change of mind"—not turn from sins—when he sees the word "repent" in the New Testament. The context must be consulted to determine the object of a person's change of mind.

The only times *repent* is actually a good English translation is when the object of *metanoia* is sinful deeds. A change of mind about sinful behavior is equivalent to repentance.¹⁷

Assault 2: "Believe Plus Make Christ Lord"

Similar assaults would also include "faith plus commitment" and "faith plus surrender to God."

The late H. A. Ironside tells the story of a lady missionary who, over a period of time, led a little Irish boy to the Savior.

Brought up a Romanist, he thought and spoke of penance and confession, of sacraments and church, yet never wholly leaving out Christ Jesus and His atoning work.

One morning when the lady called again upon him, she found his face aglow with a new-found joy. Inquiring the reason, he replied with assurance born of faith in the revealed Word of God, "I always knew that Jesus was necessary, but I never knew till yesterday that He was enough!"

It was a blessed discovery, and I would that every reader of these pages had made it. Mark it well; Jesus is enough! "He, of God, is made unto us wisdom, righteousness,

¹⁶ Ryrie, p. 99.

¹⁷ Wilkin, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 20.

sanctification and redemption.” “Ye are complete in Him.” “God hath made us accepted in the beloved.” These are only a few of the precious declarations of Scripture which show clearly that Jesus is indeed not only necessary, but enough.

You see, it is not Christ and good works, nor Christ and the church, that save. It is not through Christ and baptism, or Christ and the confessional, that we may obtain the forgiveness of our sins. It is not Christ and doing our best, or Christ and the Lord’s Supper, that will give us new life. It is Christ alone.

Christ and ... is a perverted gospel which is not the Gospel. Christ without the “and” is the sinner’s hope and the saint’s confidence. Trusting Him, eternal life and forgiveness are yours. Then, and not till then, good works and obedience to all that is written in the Word for the guidance of Christians, fall into place. The saved soul is exhorted to maintain good works, and thus to manifest his love for Christ. But for salvation itself, Jesus is not only necessary, but He is enough.¹⁸

The Apostle Paul told Titus, “And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful” (Tit. 3:14). Peter likewise challenged his readers to produce good works (cf. 2 Pet. 1:8-11). So it is entirely possible, indeed, if Christians do not diligently draw on their resources in the Lord, they will become unfruitful. Furthermore, the fact that the exhortation of Romans 12:1 occurs in the twelfth chapter and not in the third chapter of Romans clearly shows one can be a believer and still fail to be committed to the lordship of Christ. It shows commitment to the lordship of Christ is not a part of what is needed to be saved. If it is, then it seems the Apostle had a lapse of memory and left it out. The facts are, however, no one is ever totally committed to the lordship of Christ. There is always room for improvement.

But some say that in order to be saved, I must not only believe, I must also surrender to Christ’s lordship or I cannot be saved or I haven’t had a real work of grace in my life. Advocates of the lordship salvation position believe that a person must surrender every area of his or her life to Christ’s absolute control in order to be saved. It is believed that one cannot receive Christ as Savior from sin without also receiving Him as Lord of one’s entire life. Why is this view promoted? Very often, it is promoted because of concern over so many people who claim to be Christians, but give very little evidence through a changed life. I share their concern, as should every Christian, but the solution is not adding to the Gospel message as an incentive to Christlike living, but the communication of other Christian truth like the sanctification truths and the consequences of sin in the believer’s life.

Concerning the belief that we should add surrender to the Gospel message, we need to ask an important question. Since no one is ever 100% committed, how much commitment or surrender is enough to be saved? Is it 5%, 10%, 20%? Is it okay to be a little bit committed, but not a lot? Is that the idea? Doesn’t all sin fall short of the glory of God? Isn’t that why Christ had to die for our sins in the first place?

Some proponents of the lordship position will answer, “you must be *willing* to submit even though no one is ever totally committed.” Again we need to ask, “how willing?” Do you see what we get into when we think like this? The Scripture just does not teach such an idea! Yes, it calls upon the child of God to commit his or her life to Christ as Lord, but not as a means of receiving eternal life. The Bible

¹⁸ “The Grace Evangelical Society News,” Vol. 4, No. 10, Oct. 1989, p. 4, Taken from *The Sword of the Lord*, Feb. 3, 1989.

teaches that salvation comes by faith alone through Christ alone. Of this subtle tendency, Chafer/Walvoord write:

In presenting the Gospel it is a subtle temptation to urge people not only to believe but also to surrender to God because of course this is the ultimate objective of their salvation. However, in explaining the terms of salvation this brings in a confusing human work as essential to salvation which the Bible does not confirm.¹⁹

The Lordship Salvation View

While there are variations within the lordship camp, all the lordship salvation proponents seem to believe in three things:

1. The condition of eternal life is more than trusting in Christ

One or more of the following are also conditions of eternal life: turning from sins, being willing to turn from sins, total surrender or committing one's life to Christ, obedience, and persevering in the faith. Some include baptism in their list of conditions.

2. The condition of perseverance

Another idea that is promoted is if you do not persevere, then either you were not really saved, or your faith was only intellectual, or you lost your salvation.

Undoubtedly because of the strong emphasis in Scripture on faith or believing in Christ for salvation (about 150 passages in all), proponents of the lordship persuasion find themselves in a quandary. They will often redefine saving faith as consisting of several aspects which include some form of works as evidence of real faith. This forces them into a very contradictory position. Note the contradictory elements in the Doctrinal Statement of a church that teaches lordship salvation. The statement about faith is prefaced with the following:

Although there are several aspects that saving faith involves, the Scriptures clearly teach that it is not a work, but is itself solidly based on God's grace.

But then faith is defined in such a way that it includes works. According to the Doctrinal Statement saving faith includes:

- *Knowledge of the Facts*—Faith must be based on the content of the Word of God.
- *Assent to this Knowledge*—A person must agree that the facts of Scripture are true.
- *Repentance*—There must be a turning from sin and turning towards God.
- *Submission to Christ*—There must be a subjection to the person and will of Christ with a desire and willingness to obey.

¹⁹ *Lewis Sperry Chafer Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, Editor, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, *Consulting Editors*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1988, p. 195.

While new life should result in change or good works, works in the Christian life like turning from sin are a product of fellowship with the Savior or the Spirit-filled, Word-filled life. They are the result of abiding in the vine. Initial faith joins a person into the vine, but it is abiding that produces the fruit. This is why Jesus challenged His disciples to abide. Without it, we become unfruitful.

3. The promises of the Word are not sufficient for assurance

For assurance of salvation, one holding to this position must also look to his works. They say believers cannot have 100% assurance of salvation merely by looking to the promises of the Word. In fact, many if not most in this doctrinal camp say that 100% assurance is impossible since no one's works are perfect and no one knows if he will persevere.

Mike Cocoris, a former Dallas Seminary classmate of mine, writes of a conversation he had with a lordship proponent:

Recently a Lordship Salvationist and I engaged in a lengthy discussion concerning the question, "What must I do to be saved?" At one point I asked him, "If I led someone to Christ tonight, could that person go home, lay his head down on his pillow, and know for sure that he was going to heaven?" The man with whom I was talking replied emphatically, "No!"²⁰

But this is contrary to the clear statement of 1 John 5:11-13.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you **may know that you have eternal life**. (emphasis mine).

Care is taken to give lesser weight to John's Gospel than to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the New Testament epistles in formulating the gospel or the doctrine of salvation. This is very strange since the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, deal primarily with discipleship, and since John specifically tells us the purpose of his Gospel is that people may believe in Jesus Christ that they may have eternal life (John 20:31).

The Free Grace Salvation View

The sole condition for eternal life is personal faith in Jesus Christ alone as one's Savior. Christ is enough! This means faith in the person and finished work of Christ as the God-man who died for our sins is the sole basis of one's salvation. None of the faith plus someone's add-ons are conditions for eternal life. It is nonsense to speak of a free gift which costs us something or gives us something to do to get salvation (Rom. 4:1-6; 11:6).

The promises of the Word of God, based on the finished work of Christ, are sufficient for assurance of salvation (cf. John 6:37-40). While one's works can have confirmatory value and demonstrate the condition of our walk with the Lord, they are not essential for assurance. Any believer can have 100% certainty of his salvation if he will look to the promises of the Word like 1 John 5:11-13.

²⁰ "Grace Evangelical Society News," June-July 1988, p. 1.

The Gospel of John is given a great deal of weight in formulating one's view of the Gospel and how one is saved. Why is this? Three major reasons: (a) Because of John's explicit statement about the purpose of his Gospel (20:31), (b) because of his repeated use of "believe" (found some 98 times), and (c) because of the absence of any other condition. Not all of the uses of believe in John have reference to believing unto eternal life, but a large number do.

Finally, because salvation is by grace alone through the finished work of Christ (Rom. 4:1-5; 5:19; 11:6), free grace salvationists believe salvation or eternal life can never be lost (Rom. 8:32-39; John 6:37-40; 10:28-29).

Arguments Against the Lordship Position

A subtle form of legalism

This position is a subtle form of legalism and a direct attack on the free gift emphasis of the Gospel message so prominent in the New Testament. Proponents end up diluting the concept of salvation as a free gift.

In his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer writes, "It is not enough to believe that only through Christ and his death are sinners justified and accepted, ... In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything." I have a great respect for this man, but this is a flat contradiction. Just compare Paul's argument in Romans 4:4-5 and 11:6.

Writing with regard to Packer's statement, Bob Wilkin writes:

Frankly I find this view of the gospel appalling. It is gibberish to speak of a free gift which costs us everything. It is absurd to suggest that we should show an unbeliever all of the things which believers are commanded to do and not to do in Scripture and then have them promise to do the former and not to do the latter from now on faithfully. Such a gospel is not a free gift. It is an earned wage. Romans 4:1ff. and approximately 150 other passages which condition eternal salvation upon faith alone in Christ alone contradict such a view.²¹

Salvation by works

Ultimately, the lordship position leaves people trusting in their own record or performance and merit and not that of Christ. In the final analysis, under such a view, people are saved by their works, but the New Testament emphatically states that men are not saved by works (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5).

Roy Zuck has a good illustration on this point:

If I offer my wife a gift and then tell her it will cost her something to get it, it is no longer a gift. Salvation is a gift from God. But if someone says a person must commit, surrender, obey, forsake all, or deny self in order to receive that gift and be saved, that implies that salvation is not a gift after all.²²

²¹ "Grace Evangelical Society News," June-July 1988, p. 3.

²² *Kindred Spirit*, Summer 1989, p. 6.

Passages used to support lordship salvation can and should be explained in connection with discipleship or rewards in the kingdom—in these passages, it's not *entrance* that is in view, but *inheritance* or *rewards* (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

Salvation versus Sanctification

In other words, salvation is confused with sanctification or conversion with consecration. As Zuck writes:

The lordship view does not clarify the distinction between sanctification and justification, or between discipleship and sonship. It mixes the condition with the consequences. It confuses *becoming* a Christian with *being* a Christian.²³

These passages deal with the **consequences** of sin on fellowship, physical health, inheritance in the kingdom or rewards or their loss, but not on **entrance** into the kingdom of God.

An illustration is Luke 14:16-33. First, when those invited to the banquet find excuses not to come (a reference to unbelieving Israel), the servants are told to go out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come to the banquet. The banquet is a picture of the kingdom (vss. 16-24). In other words, there are no requirements. Entrance is free. However, in the next section, verses 25f, the Lord shows that in order to be His disciple, one must be willing to count the cost. This is not a call for salvation, but a declaration of what is involved in being His disciple. Furthermore, the emphasis is not so much that Christ would not let such a person be His disciple, but that such a person who had not counted the cost would not be able to be His disciple: when it came time to make those tough decisions, they would not be willing and able to do so because they had not dealt with their values and eternal priorities.

No room for carnality

The lordship position rules out the concept of carnal Christians (1 Cor. 3:3).

The lordship position leaves no room for spiritual regression in a believer's life or it is minimized. The fact is the Bible is full of examples where believers fell into sin and in some cases stayed in that condition for some time. David is a classic example. Lot, who is called a righteous man (2 Pet. 2:7), was actually one whom I would not want to use as an example to follow.

With the lordship salvation view, there is ultimately no room for the carnal Christian; only Christians who act in a carnal way. This is precisely the statement of John MacArthur in his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*.²⁴ Concerning 1 Corinthians 3:3f and MacArthur's view, Ryrie writes,

Notice that Paul does not merely say that Christians "can and do behave in carnal ways" (quoting MacArthur); he plainly states, "You are carnal." How then can one charge that "contemporary theologians have fabricated an entire category for this type of person—the carnal Christian" (again quoting MacArthur). Obviously, such a designation for some Christians is not a fabrication; it is a scriptural teaching.²⁵

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1988, footnote 2, p. 97.

²⁵ Ryrie, p. 61.

Clearly then, the text of 1 Corinthians 3:3 and the condition of the Corinthians as they are described in the book of 1 Corinthians shows the contrary. MacArthur is begging the question.

Misunderstands salvation passages

The lordship position misunderstands salvation passages which use “Lord” as a call to surrender one’s life to Christ’s lordship (Rom. 10:9).

In relation to Christ’s lordship, there are two aspects. There is first of all the objective. This recognizes the fact that Christ is God, the sovereign Lord of the universe. Then, there is the subjective which involves personal surrender of one’s life or commitment.

Does Romans 10:9 call for the objective fact or the subjective commitment or both? Concerning this question, Everett Harrison writes:

“Jesus is Lord” was the earliest declaration of faith fashioned by the church (Acts 2:36; 1 Cor. 12:3). This great truth was recognized first by God in raising his Son from the dead—an act then acknowledged by the church and one day to be acknowledged by all (Phil. 2:11). . . . Paul’s statement in vv. 9, 10 is misunderstood when it is made to support the claim that one cannot be saved unless he makes Jesus the Lord of his life by a personal commitment. Such a commitment is most important; however, in this passage, Paul is speaking of the objective lordship of Christ, which is the very cornerstone of faith, something without which no one could be saved. Intimately connected as it was with the resurrection, which in turn validated the saving death, it proclaimed something that was true no matter whether or not a single soul believed it and built his life on it.²⁶

Romans 10:9 is calling for the need to confess that Jesus is God. In this context Paul quotes the Old Testament a number of times and is dealing with Jewish unbelief, not lordship issues. “Lord” (the Greek *kurios*) certainly is used as the equivalent of *Yahweh* in the Old Testament. It is calling for the acknowledgment that Jesus is the “I Am” of the Old Testament and therefore God.

That Paul refers to confessing that Jesus is Lord is also supported grammatically.

The passage should not be translated as does the NASB, “Jesus as Lord,” or as the KJV, “the Lord Jesus,” but as the NIV, “Jesus is Lord.” This involves a fine point of Greek grammar involving the use of what grammarians call the “double accusative of object-complement” where one accusative is the direct object of a verb of “calling, designating, or confessing,” and the second accusative is the complement that makes an assertion about the direct object. Some grammarians would call the second accusative a predicate accusative.²⁷ Generally, the first accusative is the object and the second is the complement, but, as here in Romans 10:9, this is not always the case. Since *Jesus* is a proper name, even though it follows the noun *Lord* by way of word order, *Jesus* functions as the direct object of the verb confess, and the

²⁶ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, 10:112.

²⁷ A.T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, Harper & Bros., New York, 1933, p. 219.

other accusative, *Lord*, is its complement.²⁸ So the confession that is required is that “Jesus is Lord,” i.e., *Yahweh*, the God of the Old Testament.

Obviously, when a person confesses that Christ is God there is an underlying recognition or awareness that Christ has the right to rule one’s life, but the passage is not calling for a subjective commitment to Christ’s lordship in order to be saved. Instead, the passage is saying that for a person to be saved, he or she must acknowledge, believe, that Jesus was also God, God come in the flesh, the God-man and so the only one able to save.

Not all Scripture is relevant

The lordship position rules out a large portion of the epistles as being relevant like Romans 6 and 12.

If being a true believer includes commitment or total surrender, then why do we have these passages which were written to believers? If they were written, as it is claimed, simply to challenge us to more commitment, then how much is enough to be saved? Again we must ask the question, is it 10% or 50%, etc.? Where and how do we draw the line? The Bible say, “you shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart.” This is to be the goal, but does anyone ever measure up? And if so, for how long?

These passages in Romans and many others show us that saved people, true Christians whom Paul thought of as saved, do not settle the matter of the personal, subjective lordship of Christ until after they are saved. Paul deals with the Gospel and the how of salvation in Romans 1-3, but he doesn’t deal with lordship or commitment until chapters 6 and 12. If commitment or surrender to the lordship of Christ was a part of the Gospel, then the Apostle either didn’t know it or was careless in his responsibility. We know neither of these could be the truth for he wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Our good works are not always measurable and observable by men, not even by ourselves—especially when it comes to motives (1 Cor. 4:4-5). Further, unbelievers can and do point to their good works, but they are unsaved.

The issue of divine discipline

It is contrary to those passage which teach Christians can be disciplined unto physical death while still viewed as saved (1 Cor. 5:1f; 11:28f; 1 John 5:16-17).

These are passages written to Christians about Christians who were clearly not living for the Lord and would be disciplined as God’s children, in some cases, even unto physical death, yet they are still viewed as saved. Of course, these passages are usually applied to unbelievers by those in the lordship camp.

²⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 187-188.

Assault 3: “Believe and Be Baptized”

The Baptismal Salvation View

Baptismal regenerationists, as we might call them, are not simply promoting water baptism as an important responsibility for a believer in Christ. This position says that unless one is baptized with a view to salvation, i.e., unless he or she is trusting in baptism for salvation along with belief in Jesus Christ, he or she is lost. Simply believing in Jesus Christ does not save. Belief alone is not enough. In fact, some maintain, as I was once told by an advocate of this view, that even if you have been baptized, it has no value unless you were baptized with a view to salvation and trusting in the baptism to save you.

The Free Grace Salvation View of Water Baptism

Water baptism is a ritual act that symbolizes a spiritual truth or reality. It is a public confession which portrays one's faith in the person and work of Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit which joins the Christian into union with Christ and identifies him or her with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection unto new life. Baptism in water, a ritual, portrays that which is real, the baptism by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

The ritual itself cannot save, but the truth it represents does bring deliverance first from sin's penalty through one's faith in Christ, and then deliverance from the power of sin as one appropriates the power of Christ's death and resurrection by faith (Rom. 6:1-14).

Arguments Against Water Baptism as Essential for Salvation

It Is Contrary to the Emphasis in John

While some form of the word “believe” is found some 98 times in the Gospel of John, it is tremendously significant that this Gospel which is written that men might have eternal life and be saved (John 20:31) does not once mention baptism.

What about the Lord's words to Nicodemus in John 3:5? Can the “water” refer to water baptism as an essential part of regeneration? Regarding this passage Ed Blum writes:

Various views are given to explain Jesus' words about being **born of water and the Spirit**: (1) The “water” refers to the natural birth, and the “Spirit” to the birth from above. (2) The “water” refers to the Word of God (Eph. 5:26). (3) The “water” refers to baptism as an essential part of regeneration. (This view contradicts other Bible verses that make it clear that salvation is by faith alone; e.g., John 3:16, 36; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.) (4) The “water” is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). (5) The “water” refers to the repentance ministry of John the Baptist, and the “Spirit” refers to the application by the Holy Spirit of Christ to an individual.

The fifth view has the merit of historical propriety as well as theological acceptability. John the Baptist had stirred the nation by his ministry and stress on repentance

(Matt. 3:1-6). “Water” would remind Nicodemus of the Baptist’s emphasis. So Jesus was saying that Nicodemus, in order to **enter the kingdom**, needed to turn to Him (repent) in order to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit.²⁹

But even if Blum is correct, repent, especially in view of the emphasis in John, is a synonym for believing in Christ.

Rather, it is better to understand that the Lord intended Nicodemus to think in terms of Old Testament passages like Ezekiel 36:25-27 and the cleansing and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Greek has only one preposition with both nouns, “water” and “Spirit” connected by “and” (*kai*). We can translate “of water, even the Spirit.”

This fits with Titus 3:5, “. . . by the washing produced by regeneration (rebirth), even the renewal by the Holy Spirit.” (See below for an explanation of Titus 3:5.)

It Is Contrary to the Teaching of Paul

Romans 4:1-12: Verses 1-6 clearly show how a man is justified by faith apart from human works. Then, in verses 7-12 Paul uses Old Testament circumcision to illustrate the fact salvation has always been the same in every age. Men of every age are saved by walking in the steps of Abraham. He shows that Old Testament saints were justified by faith alone before circumcision was ever instituted.

But the truly important principle is that circumcision is to the Old Testament believer what water baptism is to the New Testament believer.

The following parallels are instructive:

CIRCUMCISION	Physical, by a knife, by human agency, and visible to others.	A sign of faith in God’s work, but not the means of salvation.
BAPTISM	Physical, by water, by human agency, visible to others.	A sign of faith in God’s work, but not the means of salvation.

The point is, people are saved by faith alone apart from any kind of law, ritual, or ordinance.

Colossians 2:11-12. This passage also illustrates the above parallel. Circumcision in verse 11 is one “made without hands.” It is a spiritual work of God. It follows by the natural parallel that the baptism of verse 12 is the spiritual work of God, one made without hands. It is the baptism accomplished by the Holy Spirit of which water baptism is only a picture. The rite of circumcision of the Old Testament and the ordinance of baptism in the New Testament both illustrate the work of God for man through Jesus Christ. The rituals are only pictures of the real which alone saves through faith alone.

1 Corinthians 1:14-16. In this passage the Apostle somewhat de-emphasizes water baptism. The Apostle can hardly be said to have viewed baptism as indispensable to the Gospel message. Not only was it his practice not to baptize his own converts, but he shows us here that water baptism as necessary for salvation is not a part of the Gospel as is faith. The Gospel message is that Jesus Christ, the God-man Savior, died for our sins, was raised from the dead, and that we can receive eternal life as a gift through

²⁹ Edwin A. Blum, “John,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the New Testament Edition, Editors, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1983, p. 281.

faith. If baptism was necessary to be saved through the Gospel, Paul could hardly have said “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, ...”

Ephesians 2:8-9. Baptism is clearly a human work that man does. Here the Apostle clearly declares that the basis of salvation is God's grace through faith alone.

Titus 3:5. We should immediately be suspicious of an interpretation which understands the “washing” here to refer to any human ritual or work because of the emphasis of verse 5a. No mention is made here of faith perhaps because the emphasis is totally on what God has done rather than on any kind of religious or ritual work that man could possibly do—including water baptism. Unfortunately, some see the words “washing of regeneration” as a reference to baptismal regeneration even though this context is prefaced by, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done ...” Can this refer to water baptism? Not on your life! Why?

- The immediate context is emphasizing that salvation is a work of God and not man.
- Water baptism, no matter how you slice it, is a religious work. If water baptism is the basis of our regeneration, then it is a work of our righteousness or a righteous act produced by us.
- The passage is telling us that regeneration results in a spiritual cleansing, the forgiveness of sin and this is part of the rebirth work of the Holy Spirit. We can translate the last part of verse 5 as “by the washing produced by regeneration, even the rebirth produce by the Holy Spirit.”³⁰

It Is Contrary to Luke 23:43

The thief on the cross was saved by faith alone. He obviously could not be circumcised or baptized. The principle applies regardless of whether one wants to argue that he was still in the Old Testament economy. He was saved by *faith alone*. The corresponding ritual or ordinance for the Old Testament period was circumcision, yet the thief on the cross was neither circumcised nor baptized, but he did get saved.

³⁰ We have two parallel phrases which are genitive constructions in the Greek text: 1) “washing of regeneration” and 2) “renewing by the Holy Spirit.” “Regeneration” and “Holy Spirit” are both in the genitive case. There are several uses of the genitive case in Greek, but with nouns of action like washing and renewing, the noun in the genitive points to the thing to which the action is referred, either as subject or object of the verbal idea. Question: Are washing and renewing objective genitives or subjective genitives? If subjective, they produce the action as is evidenced by the translation of the NASB and the NIV, “renewing/renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Paul is writing of a renewing accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and not vice versa, i.e., “a renewing which produces the Holy Spirit,” an obvious absurdity. Both of these clauses are preceded by only one preposition “by” (*dia*), and are connected by “and” (*kai*). This would suggest two things: (1) Because of the parallel arrangement, we would expect both genitives to be the same, either objective or subjective, and since the second phrase can only be a subjective genitive, “a renewal by the Holy Spirit,” so must the first, “a washing by regeneration.” (2) The “and” (*kai*) is ascensive or explicative meaning “even,” or “namely,” so that the second clause is a further explanation of the first. We could render it grammatically, “the washing produced by regeneration, even (or namely) the rebirth accomplished by the Holy Spirit.” Regeneration results in a spiritual cleansing, the forgiveness of sin and this is part of the rebirth work of the Holy Spirit.

Answers to Passages Used to Support Baptismal Regeneration

Mark 16:16

First, there is a manuscript problem. The older and what many believe to be the better manuscripts do not contain verses 9-20. So there is some question as to whether these verses were a part of the original manuscript of Mark. First, it is theologically unsound to try to build a doctrine or support one on verses where there is a manuscript problem.

Second, assuming that these verses were a part of Mark's Gospel, does this passage teach that baptism is essential for salvation? Verse 16b, "but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" answers our question. It is the unbelief that results in condemnation, not the failure to be baptized. Furthermore, "baptized" could be a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Water baptism is an evidence of one's faith and a public testimony of what one believes. For this reason Mark included the concept of baptism with belief. But since it is not water baptism that saves, since belief is the issue, he quickly added the last half of verse 16.

Acts 2:38

First, we should recognize there are two possible grammatical ways this passage may be understood. The preposition "for" (Greek, *eis*) in the clause "for the forgiveness of your sins" can mean "with a view to, in order that," (pointing to *purpose*), or it can mean "on the basis of, because of" (pointing to *result*) as it is used in Matthew 12:41, "they repented at (on the basis of, as a result of) the preaching of Jonah." This simply shows that Acts 2:38 can mean "Repent, and each of you be baptized ... as a result of the forgiveness of your sins ..." Rather than saying, "Repent and be baptized in order to receive the forgiveness of sins," Peter was saying, "Repent, and on the basis of receiving forgiveness, be baptized."

Chafer/Walvoord have a good explanation of this difficult passage:

As previously mentioned, in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, he included baptism along with belief as a way of salvation (Acts 2:38). It should be remembered that as baptism is mentioned in Scripture, sometimes it refers to real baptism, that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurs at the moment of faith and in other cases to the ritual of water baptism. It is possible to take this verse in either sense. If it refers to real baptism, then Peter was saying that if the Jews believed and had this belief confirmed by being baptized into the body of Christ, they would be saved. Or if it refers to water baptism then Peter was saying that that ritual was an outward confirmation of their faith. In any case immediately afterward, Peter baptized 3,000 (v. 41), who were by this token publicly aligning themselves with Christ and indicating that they were leaving their former Jewish confidence in the Law.

For Jews to confess Christ publicly was a real problem because they often lost their families, their employment, and their wealth. For their faith to be confirmed by water baptism in this case made clear that they were genuinely saved. In any event ritual baptism does not save, and the reference to baptism in verse 38 does not suggest that water baptism was a requirement for salvation. The many instances in which faith is mentioned as a condition of salvation without reference to baptism should make this clear. Even Peter himself later said that forgiveness of sins is based on faith alone (10:43; 13:38-39).

In Acts 19 some Jews in Ephesus had been baptized by John the Baptist but had not put their trust in Christ. When they were informed that it was necessary for them to believe in Christ, the Scriptures recorded, “On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5). This again makes clear that water baptism in itself does not save but is a token or evidence that a person has put his trust in Christ.³¹

Acts 22:16

There are two commands (Greek imperatives) in this verse, but only one brings about the removal of sin, “calling upon the name of the Lord,” i.e., telling God you believe and trusting in His Son. The sentence, “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name” should, according to Greek grammar, be divided into separate clauses with a semicolon placed after “be baptized.” “Arise, be baptized (clause one); and wash away your sins by calling on the Name of the Lord” (clause two). Baptism cannot wash away one’s sins. It is calling on the Lord, telling God you believe in His Son which is simply a way of expressing one’s faith in Christ.

1 Pet. 3:18-21

In this passage, Peter tells us that baptism is prefigured by the deliverance of Noah’s family by water (cf. 3:20). Saving by baptism, therefore, is symbolic here, not actual. Peter quickly adds two statements lest he be misunderstood. Salvation in this passage is not based upon water baptism, but upon “the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” It is not based upon “the putting away of the filth of the flesh.”

**Assault 4:
“Believe and Confess Christ Publicly”**

The late Dr. Chafer wrote regarding this issue:

The ambition to secure apparent results and the sincere desire to make decisions for Christ to be definite have prompted preachers in their general appeals to insist upon a public confession of Christ on the part of those who would be saved. To all practical purposes and in the majority of instances these confessions are, in the minds of the unsaved, coupled with saving faith and seem, as presented, to be of equal importance with that faith.³²

Two passages are often used in order to justify public confession, Matthew 10:32-33 and Romans 10:9.

Matthew 10:32-33

Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

³¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 194-195.

³² Lewis Sperry Chafer *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 378-79.

Does this passage call for the public confession of the Savior as a part of the Gospel message and as one of the requirements for salvation? If so, the 150 plus passages in the New Testament that call for simple faith in Christ would have to be wrong. Rather, the Lord was challenging, not unbelievers, but His own disciples with regard to the commission He gave them to go to the lost sheep of Israel (vss. 1-15). Such a task, due to the hostility of the religious leaders of Israel and the world in general (vss. 15-20), especially in the days of the Tribulation just before the return of Christ (vss. 21-23), would put them at risk of persecution. So there is the warning that if people maligned and persecuted the Savior, the disciples too could expect persecution (vss. 24-25). He then encouraged them against fear (vss. 26-31), challenged them to confess Him before men, and warned them against denying Him before men (vss. 32-33). This challenge and warning in this context refers to the commission of the disciples and, by application, to the responsibility of believers (those already saved) to be witnesses of the Savior.

To deny Christ before men would indicate that either (a) the one denying Christ was not truly saved, in which case, they would not be owned by Christ as one of His in His work as advocate before the Father, or (b) evidence that they were out of fellowship and operating in fear rather than in faith, in which case Christ would deny them rewards at the Judgment Seat (*Bema*) of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-15; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:11-13). Peter, who denied the Lord during His trial before the High Priest (Matt. 26:57-75), is a good illustration of how believers may deny the Savior.

Romans 10:9

This is perhaps the primary passage used to defend adding the need of confession, so the focus here will be to give an overview of Romans 10:1-21.

The Prayer and Desire for Israel's Salvation (10:1)

In these verses we see the subject of the passage—the salvation of Jewish people. However, it obviously has application to the subject of leading men and women to Christ.

The Problem of Israel's Self-Righteousness (10:2-3)

It is essential to note that the verses in question, verses 9-10, are often used to teach men must make some kind of public confession to be saved, perform a human work. These verses are set in a context where Paul shows this is precisely the problem with the nation of Israel as a whole: the problem of trying to do something to gain the favor of God. So rather than supporting public confession as a work that men do, the context supports the opposite conclusion.

The Provision of Righteousness Through Faith Alone (10:4-8)

(1) Christ's Termination of the Law for Righteousness (vs. 4). Christ brought an end to the Law as a means of righteousness or acceptance with God. The purpose of the Law was to show man's sinfulness. But a further outworking of this is that neither the Law nor any works system can gain merit or favor with God. The reason is seen when we compare Romans 8:1-3. All systems of law are dependent on man's weakness to fulfill them and man always falls short and misses the mark (Rom. 3:23).

(2) Moses' Declaration About Those Who Practice the Law (vs. 5). If a person seeks acceptance with God by keeping the Law, he must live by it, i.e., he must perfectly obey it or he becomes condemned by the Law itself (cf. Jam. 2:10-11; Gal. 5:3; Rom. 2:25 with Rom. 3:19-20; 7:7). Since no man

can fulfill the Law, all men miss the mark and become condemned by the Law which finds man guilty (2 Cor. 3:6, 7, 9; Rom. 7:10-11).

(3) God's Initiation of Salvation by Grace Through the Message of Faith (vss. 6-8). Regarding these verses Ryrie writes: "Quoting Deuteronomy 30:12-14, which emphasized the initiative of divine grace and humble reception of God's word, Paul applies this truth to the Gospel, which is *near*, ready for a man to take on his lips and into his heart (Rom. 10:9)."³³ Note carefully that this word which man is to take on his lips and into his heart Paul defines as "the word (message) of faith which we are preaching." The message is not one of works, but one of faith in God's work brought down to man in grace. But what exactly is this message of grace?

Paul's Description of the Grace Message (vss. 9-13)

(1) The Message Described (vs. 9)

"Confess," *homologeo*, means "to agree with, say the same thing, acknowledge." As the context will show, the confession here is not to men, but to God and involves, as an outworking of faith in Christ, acknowledging to God one's faith in Christ as God come in the flesh. It involves agreeing with God's witness about Jesus as God's own Son. Literally the text says, "the Lord Jesus," but as explained above, it means acknowledging that *Jesus is God*. The passage is talking about acknowledging the deity of Christ and thus the fact of the incarnation (cf. 1 John 2:22-23; 4:2, 15 which uses the same word, *homologeo*). This passage is not calling for submission to Christ in the sense of lordship salvationists.³⁴

"And believe in your heart ..." This is the root—believing in the fact that God raised Him from the dead. Here we have the finished and efficacious work of Jesus Christ, His death for sin, authenticated by Christ's resurrection. Remember, the resurrection declares that Jesus is God's Son and that His death successfully dealt with man's sin. Perhaps the point here is that this belief in Christ, that He is the God-man Savior, causes men to confess their faith to God in a prayer for salvation as the context will show (vss. 12b-13).

(2) The Message Explained (vss. 10-13)

"For with..." Note the word *for*. This introduces this section, verses 10-13, as an explanation of verse 9 and the words "confess" and "believe." Note that Paul now begins with "believe," not "confess." He began verse 9 with "confess" because of the order of the Old Testament quote used in verse 8—mouth and then heart. But with verse 20, Paul reverses the order and deals with "heart" and "believe" before "mouth" and "confess" because this is the main issue.

In this he uses a chiasm, an arrangement of the clauses, in such a way that they bring out the most important and central element of the passage.

³³ *The Ryrie Study Bible*, NASB, Moody Press, Chicago, 1976, 1978, p. 1716.

³⁴ See Assault #2, for a discussion of this verse as it pertains to the word "Lord," or see Ryrie's, *So Great Salvation*, p. 70-72.

Overview of Romans 10:8-14

The Availability of Salvation	
Rom 10:8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,	Points to the initiative of God’s grace in bringing salvation to men.
Man’s Responsibility	
Rom 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus <i>as</i> Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;	1. Confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord. In this context which deals with Israel’s rejection of Jesus, it means to acknowledge to God that Jesus is Yahweh of the OT. Is an affirmation of His deity. 2. Believe in the resurrection which confirms one’s faith in all that the resurrection proves (Rom. 1:4; 4:24-25).
Paul’s Explanation of Verse 9	
Rom 10:10a for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, (10b) and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.	1. Verse 10a—With the heart, from the inner man, man believes, puts his trust in the person of Christ which gives Christ’s righteousness and salvation. 2. Verse 10b—With the mouth he confesses, acknowledges, affirms to God his faith in Christ resulting in salvation.
Justification from the Old Testament (vss. 11-13)	
Rom 10:11-12a For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; [Explains faith] Rom 10:12b-13—for the same <i>Lord</i> is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” [Explains confess]	1. Verses 11-12a—Quotes Isa. 28:16 to show Salvation comes by faith (man’s first responsibility). This explains the “whoever,” in vs. 11, i.e., there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (cf. Rom. 3:22, 29). 2. Verses 12b-13—Explains the other part of man’s responsibility, the confession of the mouth. It means to call on the name of the Lord.
The Question	
Rom 10:14 How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?	Here again, the two key ideas, belief and calling on the Lord, are linked together and this corresponds to belief and confessing with the mouth in vss. 9-10.

The Priority of Preaching the Faith Alone Message (vss. 14-17)

Since the issue is faith in the work of God for man in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is an important question that must be answered. How can men turn from their religious works, as with the Jews, so they may come to Christ by faith alone? Only through the work of evangelism through believers who understand the message and go out proclaiming the glad tidings of God's gracious gift.

Note the emphasis: The Jews by-in-large rejected the message of grace because of their works mentality. Nevertheless, faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ, i.e., the telling of the story about the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only means of salvation.

**Assault 5:
“Believe and Do Good Works”**

Another assault on the Gospel message of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone is “believe and do good works.” The idea promoted is that one must both believe and do good works in order to be saved. If the good works are not present, then, either (a) you were never saved, you never really believed, or (b) you lost your salvation, or (c) you never got saved because you lack the good works required.

Some would argue that we are saved by faith alone, but if faith is alone (if there are no works), then you are not saved, your faith was only an intellectual faith, not a heart faith. In this view faith is usually redefined to include turning from sin and surrendering one's life to Christ. Assurance then, in the final analysis, is based on one's works or record rather than on the work of Christ and the sure promises of the Word like 1 John 5:11-13 and John 5:24.

In the final analysis of the works viewpoint, works are added to faith in Christ in order to be save. This means SALVATION BY WORKS AND ASSURANCE BY WORKS.

The Argument

The argument is that genuine faith always results in good works. Because of new life imparted to believers via spiritual regeneration, and because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in every believer's life, those who have genuinely believed the Gospel message about the person and work of Jesus Christ will, as a general rule, produce some fruit, sometime, somehow. Jesus said:

John 6:56-57 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.

As the context suggests (vss. 50-57) eating His flesh and drinking His blood refer to the initial act of believing in Christ. This results in the gifts of regeneration and eternal life (vss. 50-51, 54, 58). But it also means the believer is brought into a new relationship with the Savior so that he abides (remains) in fellowship with Him (vs. 56). But it is this abiding or fellowship which is the cause for fruitfulness or good works in the life of the believer (John 15) and not just the presence of new life.

The Lord was speaking of a general maxim, of what is generally true. He was not stating an absolute—that which will always be true in the life of the believer. Many quote this passage and say, “See, true believers will abide and bear fruit and so prove they were really saved.” I believe that view is wrong

because the Lord knew **some** Christians would not abide or remain in fellowship with Him, and the proof of this is John 15 where He commanded the disciples to continue to abide. If it is not possible to stop abiding, lose fellowship with the Lord, and thus stop bearing fruit, why would the Lord warn His disciples about this possible failure? This is what He does in John 15:1-6.

As a general rule, every Christian will bear some fruit, somewhere, sometime, somehow. But having said that, there are a few points of caution we need to make that affect the concept of good works or fruitfulness and their use as proofs for salvation and assurance.

As John 15 and many other passages of Scripture teach, the general maxim that believers will bear fruit does not mean that **all** believers will be fruitful or that a believer will **always** be fruitful (compare Paul's and Peter's admonition to good works: Titus 3:14; 2 Peter 1:8). Both of these passages indicate that a true believer might be unfruitful. These exhortations would be meaningless otherwise. The same principle applies to the Lord's admonition for us to abide in Him that we might be fruitful.

Though the following remarks bear on the lordship/mastery issue, they also apply here since these two issues (good works and lordship) are really tied together. How much fruit or good works do believers need to prove they are saved? How do we measure the amount of works or fruit necessary to be sure we are saved in the lordship/mastery or believe/works sense of the term? "Or how do we quantify the amount of defection that can be tolerated without wondering if I have saving faith or if I in fact lost what I formerly had?"³⁵

Ryrie writes:

The lordship response, in spite of its stringent demands on the nature of what the view calls saving faith, must either say (1) that a disobedient Christian loses his salvation, or (2) that some leeway exists for disobedience within the Christian life. Since many lordship people hold to the security of the believer, they opt for the latter.

So we read a statement like this: "A moment of failure does not invalidate a disciple's credentials" (John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988, p. 199). My immediate reaction to such a statement is to want to ask if two moments would? Or a week of defection, or a month, or a year? or two? How serious a failure and for how long before we must conclude that such a person was in fact not saved? Lordship teaching recognizes that "no one will obey perfectly" (Ibid., p. 174), but the crucial question is simply how imperfectly can one obey and yet be sure that he "believed" in the lordship/mastery salvation sense? If "salvation requires total transformation" (Ibid., p. 183) and I do not meet that requirement, then am I not saved? Or if my transformation is less than total at any stage of my Christian life, was I not saved in the first place?³⁶

Here then is a key question: "How imperfectly can one obey or be without works and yet be sure he is saved if works are the criterion for proof of saving faith and eternal life?"

On the other hand, if salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone and one's works are a proof of the nature of one's fellowship and maturity, then his works regardless of how small or great, become a crite-

³⁵ Ryrie, p. 47.

³⁶ Ryrie, p. 47-48.

tion for blessing now and rewards in eternity. They concern *not my entrance* into heaven, but the *nature of my inheritance* in heaven.

We reap what we sow, but the harvest is not a matter of heaven or possession of eternal life, but blessing versus discipline now, and rewards versus loss of rewards in heaven (Heb. 12:7-13; 1 Cor. 11:28-32; Rom. 8:12-13, 17; Gal. 6:7-9; 1 Cor. 12-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10).

Ryrie writes,

My understanding of what fruit is and therefore what I expect others to bear may be faulty and/or incomplete. It is all too easy to have a mental list of spiritual fruits and to conclude if someone does not produce what is on my list that he or she is not a believer. But the reality is that most lists that we humans devise are too short, too selective, too prejudiced, and often extra-biblical. God likely has a much more accurate and longer list than most of us do.³⁷

A person's fruit will not necessarily be outwardly evident. A person's fruit may be private or erratic, and just because we do not see someone's fruit does not mean that some fruit is not there. Furthermore, we may see a man's fruit, but we cannot see his heart. We don't know what motivated his works. The works may have been motivated by selfish desires, by his desire to impress, or to be accepted rather than by the Spirit and by love.

Many unbelievers (those who profess no faith in Christ) will demonstrate all kinds of good works like helping the poor, ministering to the sick, caring for their family, self-control, and working for the benefit of the community in other ways. Does this prove they know God? No! Does it save them? No! While works may give evidence of new life and fellowship with the Lord, it is still never a proof because there are too many variables that we just cannot see.

According to Scripture, bonafide fruit in the life of the believer is the result of pruning and abiding, of the work of God as the Vinedresser, and the response of the believer through fellowship and faith. When our Lord said, "without Me you can nothing," He was not saying believers could produce no works, but that there could be no bonafide fruit—works that were the result of new life and the power of the Spirit.

Witnessing for the Lord is a good work, but in order for it to be fruit it needs to be the product of His life working in us. Compare John 15:1-6; 26-27; Acts 1:8 with Matt. 7:13-28 and the warning about false prophets who sounded and looked like sheep, who witnessed and did other things in the name of Christ, but had not built their lives on His truth, i.e., on Christ.

If a person gives a cup of cold water to a thirsty man, it may be:

- The result of fellowship with the Lord and so also of salvation.
- The result of a works-for-salvation mentality like with the religious Pharisees.
- The result of a desire to be accepted by others or to impress people. In this case it is a good work, but not the fruit of the Spirit or of fellowship with the Lord. Motives are important and say a lot about the source (1 Cor. 4:5; Jam. 4:3).

³⁷ Ryrie, pp. 45-46.

- Or it may be the result of natural human compassion.

If a man claims to be a Christian by the things he does and says: he goes to church, prays, and says he knows the Lord, but refuses to help someone in need when it is within his power, what does this indicate about the man? It could indicate the person is not saved—but not necessarily. Remember, many who do not know Christ help the poor. But refusal can also indicate the person is out of fellowship and not walking by an active faith in the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 John 3:16-17; Gal. 5:22-23; Jam. 2:15-17).

What's the point? Works do not necessarily prove a man's salvation. Then what are some of the values of a person's good works?

The Value of Works (Fruit)

Because of the many variables and the problems outlined above, works are not designed to be the fundamental means of assurance of salvation. Assurance is based on something more absolute—the work of Christ and the Word.³⁸

- Good works glorify God especially when our motives are right and He is the source of those works because we are abiding in Christ (1 Cor. 4:5; 6:20; 2 Cor. 9:13; 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:16).
- Good works witness to others of God's love and of the truth of the claims of Christ. They can give evidence of the authenticity and power of the Gospel (2 Cor. 6:3-6; 1 Thess. 2:1-12; John 13:34-35).
- Good works minister God's love to men (1 John 3:17).
- Good works promote peace and order in society (Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:14).

So let's not compromise the Gospel of grace by adding anything to what man must do other than believe the message of God's saving love in Christ. Let's all be challenged as believers to grow in Christ, to submit to His lordship, and allow Him to change our lives as we walk in fellowship with the Savior. Let's also remember that one of the evidences of salvation is the discipline of the Lord (Heb. 12:5f).

Thoughts on James 2:14-26

James 2:14-26 is one of the key passages used to support the need of adding works to faith in Christ. The thinking is something like this: "We are saved by faith alone, but real faith is never alone, or the faith that saves is never alone," and James 2:14-26 is used to support this position. Does James 2:14-26 support this position?

There are three views on this passage:

(1) James is contradicting the Apostle Paul and teaching salvation by works.

(2) James is teaching that real or genuine faith will produce works and fruitlessness is a sure sign that a person is unsaved. "That faith" in 2:14, the kind of faith that is without works and fruitless, cannot save from hell.

MacArthur writes,

³⁸ See Part 1, Lesson 2, *Assurance of Salvation*.

The Bible teaches clearly that the evidence of God's work in a life is the inevitable fruit of transformed behavior (1 John 3:10). Faith that does not result in righteous living is dead and cannot save (Ja. 2:14-17). Professing Christians utterly lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance ...³⁹

(3) James is writing about the problem of the dead, inoperative faith of a Christian whose faith has lost all of its vitality and productivity because of his or her failure to walk with the Lord in the Word.

There is no question that this is a difficult passage, but much of its difficulty stems from our own preconditioned thinking, theological bias, the nature of English translations, and our understanding of certain words like "save," "salvation," "soul," and translations like "that faith" in vs. 14.

There is no question that faith without works is in some way defective, but that does not mean that the person is unsaved or that their faith in Christ is not real. Scripture teaches that faith begins as a grain of mustard seed and must grow. If it is not fed and nourished by the Word and fellowship with the Lord, it becomes stagnant, the soul becomes hard, and the life becomes unfruitful.

Over and over again the Scripture posts warning signs for believers against the dangers of unfruitfulness (Tit. 3:8, 14; 2 Pet. 1:8).

The wasteland of barren living was therefore a real and present danger which the New Testament writers faced with candor. In no way did they share the modern illusion that a believer could not enter that wasteland, or live there.⁴⁰

James' Relation to Paul and His Theology

That James is not writing to refute or contradict the doctrine emphasized so strongly in Paul's epistles is seen from two facts: (a) James was written very early, before the epistles of Paul that emphasize justification by faith without works. James was written in 45 A.D. and Galatians and Romans in 49 or 55 and 58. (b) That James and Paul were in harmony and believed in salvation by faith apart from works is clear from Acts 15:1f and Galatians 1:18-21; 2:9.

The Context and Thrust of James

The Recipients: Unquestionably, James was written to believers, to those whom James considered as saved. He was not questioning their salvation. This is apparent from the following:

- He identifies them as brethren in every chapter for a total of 15 times in this epistle (1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, etc.).
- He refers to his readers as "begotten of God" (1:18), a reference to regeneration or the new birth as a gift from God (1:17).
- As a warning against partiality he refers to their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (2:1).

³⁹ MacArthur, Jr., p. 23. Compare also MacArthur's statement on page 170.

⁴⁰ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, Redención Viva, Academic Books, Zondervan Publishing House, p. 120.

- He also speaks about “the fair name by which you have been called,” a reference to the name *Christian* because of their faith in Christ and association with the Christian community (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16).
- He teaches and challenges them in ways that could only have application or meaning to genuine believers: (a) In 1:2-4 of the goal of trials to mature one’s faith and character; (b) In 1:5-8 and 4:2-3 he speaks of their privilege of prayer and of the need to pray in faith with right motives to receive answers for wisdom and to meet their needs; (c) In 1:12 of the promise of the crown of life; (d) In 1:20 of achieving or producing righteous character which has its origin in fellowship with God, i.e. God’s righteousness; (e) In 1:21f of receiving the engrafted Word which, like a mirror, is able to expose us and bring about much needed change; (f) And in 4:5 of the jealous concern of the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers to keep us faithful to the Lord, the Groom of the bride (cf. 4:4).

The Problem and Concern

While James knew his readers were born again, he also knew how they desperately needed to take in the Word and respond to its truth. The facts of the epistle show that though they were religious and orthodox in their faith, they were carnal, worldly, and legalistic. Legalism always nullifies the power of Christ in believers’ lives. It means they are trusting in their own ability and good works to be accepted with God and to feel significant.

As is clear in the epistles of Paul, this does not mean they were unsaved or only professing Christians. But it does mean they were unfruitful because they were laboring under the weakness of their own ability.

They were begotten of God (1:18), they were brethren (1:2, 16, 19, 2:1), they had faith in Christ (2:1), but they were religionists as is evident by James warning in 1:26 and by the following facts: (a) they were hearing the Word though not applying it (1:22-26); (b) they were meeting together as an assembly of believers (2:2); (c) they prided themselves on having the Law (2:10-11); and (d) some were wanting to be teachers in the assembly and were priding themselves on their mature wisdom (3:1-2).

So, while they had real faith in Christ for salvation (2:1), they were not experiencing the liberty and deliverance that should accompany salvation. Their faith in Him for daily living was dead and inoperative just as with the Christians in Galatia. Like the Galatians, they had fallen from a grace/faith way of life under the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:1-5).

Again, they were external religionists who were seeking to live the Christian life by their own ability and this had neutralized the power of God. They had some religious works in the form of certain religious activities as mentioned, but they lacked a moment-by-moment vital faith fellowship with the Lord in and through: (a) the mirror activity of the engrafted Word (1:19-25); (b) through the ministry of the indwelling Spirit (4:5); and (c) through drawing near to God in honest confession and humble brokenness before God (1:21; 4:7-10).

While being religious externalists, they were being dominated by man’s wisdom and strategies for handling life rather than by God’s wisdom, the wisdom of the Word which they needed to apply personally (1:2-27). They were controlled by that which is earthly, worldly, natural, demonic (1:13-16; 3:13-18; 4:1-4).

As a result, while religious, they were lacking in bonafide Christlike other-oriented works. They were under God's discipline and perhaps on the verge of discipline unto death (cf. 1:21; 2:14; and 5:14-15, 19-20).

The following illustrates the failures of their inactive faith which failed to appropriate their wealth in Christ: (a) They were frustrated by trials (1:2-4). (b) The rich were trusting in their riches (1:10-11; 5:1f). (c) The poor were complaining of their lack (1:9). (d) They were ignoring those in need (1:27; 2:15-17). (e) They were guilty of sinful attitudes which were manifesting themselves in sins of the tongue—in fighting, quarreling, and criticizing (3:2-4:2, 11f). (f) They were guilty of favoritism (2:1f). (g) They were guilty of putting their business ahead of the Lord (4:13-17).

The Key Words of James 2:14f:

(1) Faith: James is not talking about a real versus a false or spurious faith, one which only claims to be real, but really is not. These were brethren (vs. 14), true believers with real faith in Christ for salvation. But as for their daily walk, their faith was dead, inoperative, and unproductive. Faith, in order to work and be productive, must have a valid object and be energized by fellowship with the Lord; it must grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Their faith had a valid object for salvation from sin's penalty, but not for the Christian life and victory against the power of sin. Again, compare Paul's argument in Galatians and in Colossians. See also Matthew 6:30; Colossians 2:6; Romans 10:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13.

(2) Save: In James 1:21, James speaks about the Word's ability "to save your souls." Compare also 2:14 and 5:20. We need to be careful that we do not misunderstand this. The modern English translation has for many only one religious meaning—"to be saved from hell." But this is not what James meant nor what his readers would have understood. By context, this meant "to save your life" from God's divine discipline and the self-made misery of walking out of fellowship. Five times James uses the word *sozo*, "to save," which means:

- to save or deliver from peril, injury, suffering, or physical death (Matt. 8:25; 14:30; 27:40, 42; Mk. 13:20; Jam. 4:12; 5:20).
- to heal, restore to health or strength (Matt. 9:22; Mk. 5:24; Jam. 5:15).
- to save or deliver in a spiritual sense from the penalty, power, and presence of sin (1 Cor. 1:21; Jam. 1:21; 2:14; 1 Tim. 1:15). Used of the past, present, and future aspects of salvation. Some passages could refer to all aspects of salvation, past, present, and future.

We simply cannot limit this word to mean salvation from hell. James is clearly saying their faith, in the condition it was in, could not save or deliver anyone from the things that were dominating their lives. But he is not talking about salvation from hell. Why should he? This does not fit the context as demonstrated above. He did need to warn them, however, about the bondage and futility of legalism and dead orthodoxy, and about the consequences of sin—the loss of rewards and divine discipline even to the point of death (1:15, 21; 4:12; 5:1-4, 7-8, 9, 14-16, 20).

(3) Soul: Soul is *psuche* which is translated "life" or "lives" as often as it is translated "soul" (43 versus 47 times in the NASB). In some cases (as in James 1:21) it would be better to translate it with the English word "life" or "lives."

(4) Works: James is speaking of deeds and actions which are the product of a vital, growing, productive faith in the indwelling Spirit (Jam. 4:5) and the engrafted Word (Jam. 1:21). Paul, by contrast, speaks of dead works which are done apart from faith, which proceed from the flesh and which are done to gain merit with God.

(5) Justified: This is the Greek, *dikaioo*, which has two uses: (a) To declare or pronounce righteous and refers to the imputation of righteousness through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1). (b) But it may also mean to show to be righteous (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:35; Rom. 3:4; 1 Tim. 3:16).⁴¹ James uses it in this way in 2:21.

Conclusion

Hodges sums up the issue for the book of James and writes,

James ... understood how easily Christians, who knew the great truth that God accepted us on the basis of faith alone, could fall into the error of downplaying good works altogether. He understood how readily doctrinal correctness could take precedence over practical, everyday obedience. In short, he knew the danger of dead orthodoxy.

One of Satan's methods of assault is to get us to lock up our shield of faith into our theological armory so that we never employ it on the field of combat and everyday life.

Too often Christians go about proudly proclaiming their theological position, their orthodoxy, and ungraciously denounce those who believe differently. They talk like theologians and behave like enemies at war.⁴²

In his little epistle, Jude calls upon the Church to "contend for the faith" (Jude 3). For us today, the faith refers to the body of revealed truth that has been handed down in the Scripture. It concerns the great fundamental truths of Scripture concerning subjects such as God, Jesus Christ, man, salvation, the Bible, and things to come including the personal return of the Lord.

This body of truth is called the faith because it must be received by faith, and because "the faith" contains the Gospel which is a message of grace offering man a salvation that is free, without price, one that is to be received by faith rather than by human works.

But from as early as Acts 15, the church has had to contend against assaults on the Gospel wherein people have tried to add some form of human works to faith alone whereby we could gain salvation like works of the Law, or circumcision, or its counterpart for today, water baptism. Truly, the Gospel of God's grace in Christ is under siege and we need to be able to contend for the faith.

⁴¹ G. Abbot-Smith; *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 116.

⁴² Hodges, p. 122-123.

Lesson 8: The Stewardship of God's Truth Through Discipleship

Preface

This lesson on discipleship was written and prepared by Hampton Keathley IV. I am truly grateful for my son's input and permission to use this lesson in our series. Hampton is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, and in addition to writing articles he is technical director of the Biblical Studies Foundation.

Introduction

In a church questionnaire for the men's group, men were asked if they would like to be mentors or be disciplined. When the results came back, many men wanted to be disciplined, but very few men volunteered to be mentors. Many people are reluctant to take on the job of mentoring or discipling. Why is that?

Why Is There Such Reluctance to Discipling?

False Humility

One reason there might be a reluctance to discipling is because, if a person volunteers, it feels almost like he is saying that he has it all together. Well, nobody has it all together, and if you feel like you do have it all together, then you probably need to be disciplined not be the discipler.

But if we have been walking with God for a long time, hearing sound teaching for a long time, studying on our own for a long time, then we ought to be further ahead than someone new in the faith. If we have lived more years than someone else, we ought to have many experiences that we can relate as examples of how biblical truths have played out in our own lives. So, just because a person commits to being a discipler, it doesn't mean he thinks he is more spiritual than the next guy. In fact, it is my conviction that a new Christian, who is faithful with the little knowledge that he has, is going to receive more rewards than the intellectual who doesn't apply much of what he knows.

Lack of Commitment

Discipleship takes a lot of time.

Fear of Being Open

Some people are afraid to open up because they are afraid they will be rejected.

Ignorance

Another reason people are hesitant to be a discipler is because they don't know what to do. What will I teach the disciple? What should we talk about when we get together? What plan of action should I follow?

We will discuss the discipleship process and lay out *a* plan of action to follow. This is not *THE* plan. It is just a suggestion. But, I think it is a biblical one, and hopefully it will give a course of action to follow.

The following is an outline and proposed order of topics, but each disciple is unique, with his own special needs, background, etc. If he is an ex-Mormon or ex-Jehovah's Witness for instance, you'd probably need to deal with areas of Christology in more detail. If he is having marital problems, we might need to deal with those areas up front.

Also, some of the passages used to explain Biblical truths are passages that have meant much to me. You might use others that have really spoken to your needs because you can explain those more easily.

Why Disciple?

The Benefit to the Disciple

When we bring a newborn home from the hospital, we don't just sit down the infant seat and say, "Welcome to the family, Johnny. Make yourself at home. The towels are in the hall closet upstairs, the pantry is right here, the can opener is in this drawer. No crying after 10 p.m. If you have any questions there are lots of people in the family who would love to help you so don't be afraid to ask."

You laugh and say that is ridiculous, but that is what usually happens to new Christians. Someone gets saved and starts going to church but never gets much personal attention. We devote 18 years to raising our children, but don't even spend six months helping a new Christian get started in understanding the spiritual world. As a result, many people have been Christians for many years, but have not grown very much. Hebrew 5:12 refers to this phenomenon.

So, new believers need someone to give them guidance and help them grow. Like a newborn, they need some personal attention.

The Benefit to the Discipler

There are two big lakes in Israel. The Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee has a number of rivers flowing into it and the Jordan river flowing out of it to the south. The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful, healthy lake with much life in it. The Dead Sea on the other hand, only has rivers flowing into it. Nothing flows out of it. Consequently the mineral content has built up and nothing can live in its waters. They don't call it the Dead Sea for no reason.

Many Christians sit in churches all their lives hearing the Word taught. They learn Bible doctrine. They experience life and learn from their experiences, but they never pass on their knowledge and experience to others. *They* benefit from their knowledge and experience, but never allow *others* to benefit.

When we sit in the pew for our whole lives and don't pass on our knowledge and experience to others, we become like the Dead Sea.

1 Corinthians 1:3-4 says:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

God doesn't want us to hoard all that He has taught us. He wants to use us to help others grow. That process is discipleship.

The Results of Preparation

Another good thing about discipling someone is it gets us into the Word. If we know we are going to have to teach a class next week for Sunday school, we are going to do some preparation. If we are going to be meeting with a disciple, we are going to need to be prepared with some idea of what we want to talk about. It may not be the purest motivation for getting into the Word, but Isaiah 55:11 says God's Word does not return void and He will use the opportunity to speak to us if we will let Him.

Once we start learning really neat things in the Bible that transform our lives, we are going to want to share what we've learned.

The corollary to this is that if we aren't bursting with the desire to share the new discoveries we've made, then maybe we aren't making any. Maybe we aren't growing. Maybe we need to evaluate ourselves and see where we might improve our study time.

When you start spending individual time with another Christian for the purpose of having a ministry in his or her life—time together in the Word, prayer, fellowship, systematic training—something happens in your own life as well.

The Benefit to the Church

We live in an entertainment-centered, spectator-oriented society. Most people spend much time watching TV, movies, sporting events, etc. but little time actually involved in playing the sports they watch. Coach Bud Wilkinson, Oklahoma football coach, once described a football game the following way: Thousands sit in the stands in desperate need of exercise while 22 men are on the football field in desperate need of rest.

I think that we have carried the spectator mentality into the church. Although I don't think we would get too many people to say it out loud, many people come to church to be entertained and to be ministered to. They have the idea that ministry is what the professionals do. We pay the pastor to minister to us. If we go back to our football analogy, we have a congregation full of people who need to get some exercise and a few professionals who are in desperate need of rest.

One or two pastors can't possibly meet the needs of 500 or even 100 people with one or two messages per week. To really minister to someone you need to spend time with them and develop a close relationship. You can really only do that with half a dozen to a dozen individuals. The care groups churches have established is one attempt to address this problem. The discipleship process is another.

When we are learning and growing and passing our discoveries on to someone else, and they are doing the same, then the principle of multiplication will cause the church to grow. And it will be good solid

growth with Christians in varying stages of maturity. Not a spectator church with a few professionals and a lot of babies.

The Discipleship Process

Be a Friend! Someone has said that we need to get rid of the teacher/student, guru/guree relationships and just be friends. I don't think that we can totally do away with the teacher/student relationship. The idea of doing away with the teacher/student relationship is an over-reaction to the tendency of most discipleship programs to be nothing more than an information transfer. But we don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water. There is a place and a need for learning doctrine along the way. We just have to understand that there is much more involved. I heard someone describe discipleship as friendship with a spiritual perspective, and I've also heard it described as friendship with a vision. I think these descriptions put discipleship in the right perspective because 90% of what a disciple learns is caught from our lives more than from our teaching. We should place our emphasis on being a friend and let people see how we deal with things, how we study, how we pray, how we love, etc. We don't want to just give him all the facts. We need to allow him see how we work through various issues and help him work through the issues himself.

Deuteronomy 6:6f is a good model for what the discipleship process should be like. Just as a father and mother should take opportunities to relate daily events and actions to God's sovereignty and our responsibilities, so the mentor can turn conversations towards learning opportunities and not just talk about the weather, sports, or computers.

Speaking of computers, let me give you an example: I love working with computers and I love to talk about them. The other day I was at lunch with someone (a computer programmer) and we were talking about one of our favorite subjects—you guessed it—computers. But in the midst of our enthusiasm about computers was an opportunity to discuss spiritual truth. With just a couple of questions, the conversation was turned toward a discussion of how he and I both have a tendency to use the computer as an escape from facing real life ... and from working on relationships with others, about how the computer is a safe place where nothing is expected of us with regard to relationships. It is much easier and safer to go into the study and work on some project for several hours than to interact with people who will disagree with us, argue with us, disappoint us, etc. We had a great conversation, and now I can't sit in front of my computer without questioning myself as to whether I should be there or be riding bikes with the kids or talking to my wife. This doesn't mean I don't use my computer any more, but now I make sure I'm there for legitimate reasons.

So, the process is friendship—friendship with a vision.

Philosophy of Discipleship

I've been impressed lately with the emphasis throughout Scripture on the importance of relationships—both with God and with other people. For example, in the midst of predictions of coming judgment for failure to love their fellow man, Amos calls for "justice and righteousness" (5:24) which showed that their worship was hypocritical (5:21-23). Micah calls for justice, kindness and humility before God (6:8) instead of empty sacrifice (6:7). Jonah epitomizes lack of love as he refuses to forgive the Assyrians and has no compassion for them, all the while espousing that he serves the true God. The emphasis in the Sermon on the Mount is on relationships—forgiveness, reconciliation, not judging, etc. The

priest and Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan knew the Law and had just been to worship God, but would not help/love the injured man. There are countless examples.

In the past I would have designed a discipleship plan around doctrinal content teaching everything from theology to eschatology. My course outline would have looked like a seminary curriculum with the emphasis on content. I think a lot of discipleship programs are nothing more than a transfer of information from the teacher's notebook to the disciple's notebook. But when the author of Hebrews says they could not handle deeper truth because they had not learned the elementary things, I'm convinced the problem was application. They did not practice what they had learned (Heb 5:14). And the thing that is most difficult to practice is loving one's neighbor and building good relationships.

Therefore, I am designing my discipleship plan with an emphasis on relationships. Certainly, the doctrinal content is necessary.

To borrow an illustration from the Four Spiritual Laws booklet: The engine is **Fact**, the middle car is **Faith** and the caboose is **Feeling**. The caboose can't go anywhere without the engine. We can't have proper feelings without the facts. If there are no biblical principles guiding our love, it will be purely emotional and very up and down—mostly down. So we will list many topics to be covered in our discipleship plan. We will learn many facts, but rather than just teach a disciple a bunch of facts, the mentor needs to take special care to relate the facts to real life and take the time to discuss and evaluate how the disciple is progressing in his application of the facts to current situations.

The discipler needs to be open and show how the facts work out in his own life. We need to follow the model of Paul who said in Phil 4:9, "The things you have learned and received and heard in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you." The discipler needs to be a model. And that involves more than just having the disciple watch you. You need to be open and talk about how things affect you too.

Goal

What is the goal of a discipleship program? When Jesus left the earth, He gave the disciples a final command. Matthew 28:19-20 says to go make disciples ... teaching them to **obey** all that I commanded you.

The Obedience

Notice the word "obey." Too often we skip over that word and just worry about the content. If we can teach them the facts, then they will be disciples. But application is the hardest part and that is where true discipleship really focuses. As disciplers, we will need to be involved in discussing the methods (how to do it), accountability (did he do it), evaluation (how well did he do it), etc.

The Commands

Perhaps a good place to start in looking for things to teach a disciple is by looking at what Jesus specifically commanded His disciples. This is not to imply that the black letters in your Bible are not as important as the red letters. This is just a good place to start for seeing the discipleship process. After all, I think the reason Jesus waited three years to be crucified was so he would have time to train the disci-

ples. In John 17:4, Jesus says that he had accomplished the work which God had given him. He hadn't died on the cross yet, so what was He talking about? Training the disciples.

If we look at the words of Jesus and specifically at the commands He gave his disciples, we can narrow them into four categories. Therefore, the goal of our discipleship will be to teach and develop the following qualities in the disciple:

- Supreme love for God (Matt. 10:37-40)
- Study and devotion to God's Word (John 8:31)
- Denial of self—God-ward and man-ward aspects (Mark 8:34)
- Reflection of Christ's love toward others (Matt. 22:39)

These characteristics build on one another. We can't love others until we have learned to deny self. We won't deny self until we have studied the Word and seen why we need to deny self. We won't have a devotion to God's Word, until we have a supreme love for God and want to know what He has said in His Word.

If we have a formal discipleship relationship where someone has asked us to disciple them, then lay these out as goals and move through the commands sequentially. If we don't have a formal discipleship relationship, then it is not necessary to tell the person that my goal is to instill the above characteristics in him, but we could still use this as our outline to give us a sense of direction as we practiced "friendship with a vision."

As we move through these characteristics we will discuss many verses. In a more formal setting, we can have our Bibles out and work through them. In the less formal discipleship relationship, we as the discipler will need to have read, understood and applied these verses to our lives so we can discuss them as the topics come up in real life situations. That is the way Jesus did it. That is the Deuteronomy 6 model and that is the most effective way to disciple because we are meeting a need and dealing with relevant issues. But it is also the hardest to do.

Supreme Love for God

The Command

First discuss the passages which call for us to put God first.

- Matthew 10:37-40 (here are some of those red letters). This passage shows Jesus' command to love Him the most. The issue is not hating family, but the surpassing love for God. Raise question of why someone might not be willing to be devoted to God. Ask the disciple what might stand in his or her way. Perhaps it is fear of what others will think, especially family members (context of Matt. 10:34-36). How do we reconcile the statement that Jesus came to set fathers against sons with the idea that God wants us to have good relationships with others? If a son or daughter forsakes the "family" religion, they may be disowned.
- Another question people have is, "Will this love for God cause my family to receive less of my love?" The answer is No, because one of the ways we show love for God is by showing love

for others. (For example Ephesians 5:18f shows that if we are filled with the Holy Spirit, then that will affect our relationship with our church, spouse, children, employers, etc.)

- John 8:42. Love for God is a characteristic of one who is saved.

Evaluation: Ask for commitment to work on relationship with God and learn how he can show his love for God.

The Motivation

We've been commanded to love God, but why should we? What is our motivation. In order to have a supreme love for God, we need to have an understanding of the basics of anthropology, soteriology and christology. You're probably thinking, "Hey! I thought your discipleship program wasn't going to look like a seminary curriculum."

The categories sound ominous for beginning sessions with a new convert, and they could indeed take a lifetime to study, but the emphasis should be on explaining, in a simple manner (maybe even without ever mentioning the theological words), the relationship between the three, and how one's view of mankind (one's anthropology) affects his view of salvation (soteriology) and of Christ (christology). Essentially the issue is, if he has a high view of man, he will have little need for God. We often say in reference to evangelism that you have to get them lost before you can get them saved. But this carries forward into the area of sanctification or growth. If a person does not have a realistic view of mankind, he will not appreciate his salvation. If he does not fully understand the greatness of his evil and the sacrifice God made for him, he will not have a supreme and incomparable love for Jesus Christ. Instead he will have a tendency to think he deserves God's love and blame God when things don't go just right.

How might we approach this subject in a less formal discipleship relationship? Undoubtedly we've all heard people say, "I think that there is a little bit of good in all of us ..." or something to that effect. The next time you are with your disciple and you hear someone say that, ask him or her what they think about that. Do they think it is true? Why or why not? From there, you can point out what the Bible says.

If we have a more formal teacher/student relationship, then we would take one or two weeks for each topic—man, sin, and the Savior. It would certainly not be in depth, but the important thing is understanding the relationship of these issues so he will have a framework to build upon as we move through the study. One thing this will do is solidify the disciple's assurance of his salvation. When he understands that he can't earn his salvation and God's approval, that will free him up from thinking he can do something to lose his salvation. The various topics covered should also demonstrate man's sinfulness and make him appreciate God's grace and result in a supreme love for Christ.

Man's Sinfulness:

- Genesis 1-3 —These verses deal with creation, the fall, and separation from God. The emphasis is on breaking of the relationship. We know that man was created in God's image and that it was not good for Adam to be alone, so God created Eve. Therefore relationships are very important and our relationship to God is most important. Emphasize that just as Adam and Eve's sin in the garden broke their relationship with God, so does our sin today breaks our relationship or fellowship with God.

- Isaiah 64:6 —This passages tells us all of our good works are worthless. People usually compare themselves to others and think that relative to others, they are okay and that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. But God's standard is not relative. It is absolute. Compared to his perfect righteousness, all our good deeds amount to nothing.
- Romans 1:18f and 3:21f —These passages show the depravity of man and his inability to earn salvation. This should result in gratitude for what God has done.

God's Holiness:

- Habakkuk 1:13 —God cannot have fellowship with sin.
- Isaiah 6: —This passages shows motivation. It was Isaiah's vision of God's holiness which convicted him of his sinfulness and caused his repentance and commitment.

Christ's Work:

- Romans 5:8f —God's love
- John 3:16 —God's love
- Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45 —substitution

This is not in depth by any means, but when a person understands his sinfulness and God's holiness and how God overcame that barrier, it will result in a tremendous gratitude and supreme love for God.

Evaluation: Ask for commitment to work on relationship with God and learn how he can show his love for God. This love for God is foundational to the rest of the process.

The Expression

What will it look like when we do love God with all our heart? Ask the disciple how he expresses his love for his girlfriend, or if married, to his wife when they were dating. If he took every opportunity to spend time with her, shouldn't he do the same with God?

How do we spend time with God? Through prayer. If we have a supreme love for God, we are going to need to communicate with Him in order to build a relationship. Share with him how you talk to God, what you talk about with God, how you listen to God. Share how you look for answers.

- Matthew 6:5f, Luke 11:1-13 The disciples' prayer as a pattern for prayer.¹
- Assurance of answered prayer (Luke 18): Discuss the parable of the persistent widow. In that parable a poor widow goes to an unjust judge and pesters him until he hears her case. It is important to understand that this parable is one of contrasts. God is the opposite of the judge. God is just. We are the opposite of the widow. We are God's children. We are related to God. If we don't understand the contrasts we will think God must be pestered, argued with and bribed in order to get our prayers answered. The parable is not teaching that. God *wants* to answer the prayers of his children. We lose heart because we don't understand God's timing or purpose.

¹ For a discussion of Luke 11:2-4 and the disciples' prayer, see Part 2, Lesson 8.

We ask questions like, “When ... Why now ... How could you ... ?” We challenge the justice and goodness of God. This parable deals with two issues: God's character and God's chronology. Persistent prayer is the demonstration of faith in the character of God's attributes and the chronology of His actions. This parable teaches that the only legitimate reason to stop praying for something is the return of Christ. (vs. 8) It says, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” The demonstration of that faith is persistent prayer. When we stop believing a prayer will be answered, we stop praying. We have given up hope. We have no faith. Discuss with the disciple what items have dropped off yours or his or her prayer list that need to be put back on. God is a loving father who wants His children to keep coming to Him. If we are a parent, we should be able to identify with that.

- When a new Christian, especially someone who has not spent his whole life in church begins to pray, there will be a few theological problems with what they pray. For example: He might start off, “God, this is Bob, I'm here in George's house ... I pray that you will be with me as I ...” Those kinds of prayers are honest, innocent and priceless. Don't correct him and explain to him that God is omniscient and knows who he is and where he is and that God is omnipresent and has promised to always be with us. As he studies and learns doctrine, he will probably stop praying those things. But hopefully, the honesty and innocence of his prayers will not change. If we start correcting him and saying, “you're doing it wrong,” he is not going to feel very comfortable praying.
- Another option is to take him through passages on prayer or find a good book on prayer and read it separately and discuss it during a meeting.

So, under the goal of developing a supreme love for God, we've discussed the biblical command to do it. We've discussed the motivation which is appreciation for all that a gracious and merciful God did for a wretch like me, and we've discussed a little bit about how we express that love to God in communication with Him. Prayer is how we communicate with God, but how does He communicate with us? Through His Word.

The next major characteristic grows out of and is an expression of love for God. Christ says, “If you love me you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Therefore, the disciple must know His commandments, which means he must be devoted to knowing and obeying God's Word. The next characteristic also completes the communication process begun just above. If we pray to communicate with God, then one of the ways He communicates back to us is through his Word.

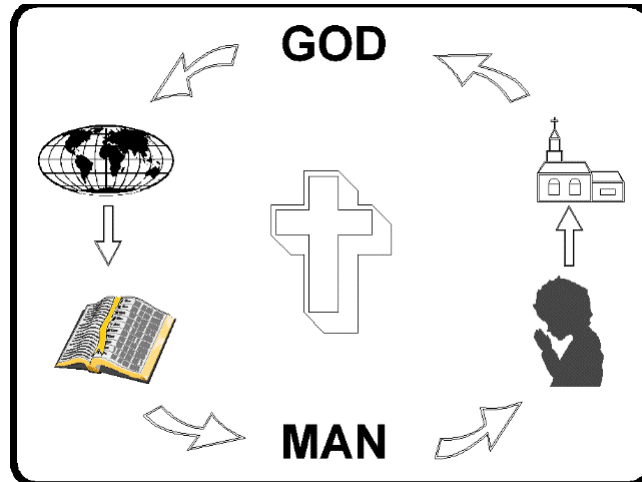
Devotion to God's Word

Once a person is saved, interested in becoming a disciple, and has affirmed his love and desire for relationship with Christ, we should stress that Scripture is God's instruction to us for knowing Him, knowing His will for our lives and for learning how to love God and people. He needs to have an understanding of the importance of the Word and a model for studying.

Importance

- John 8:31. Abiding or obeying God's word is a sign of discipleship. It sets us free from Satan, sin, death, etc. This is motivation. John 14:15

- Psalm 119 makes many statements about the importance of God's word and the benefits of following it. Go over some of the word pictures about scripture such as the Word is a lamp, sword, etc.
- Psalm 19 describes the communication process between God and man.



God speaks to us on the left side of the diagram through his world and His Word. We have called this natural revelation and special revelation.

We speak to God on the right side of the diagram. Our prayer is a response to His Word, His special revelation. Our praise is a response to His world, His natural revelation. Of course we can also praise Him for things we learned about Him from His Word, but most of the praise in the Psalms is about God's work in creation.

Christ is central to this whole process. He is the final revelation. He is our intercessor. We go to God through Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. John 1 says that the light came into the world and was the light of men. ... Jesus was the Creator and has enlightened every man through creation (natural revelation) and He came in person (special revelation).

When Satan wants to attack this process and keep us from worshipping God, where does he start? Does he come into the church and have demons disrupt the service? Not usually. That would more than likely motivate Christians to stand strong against him. He is more subtle than that. Instead, he works on destroying the left side of the circle.

How has Satan attacked natural revelation? Special revelation? Christ? God?

- Through evolution which attacks the general revelation. It says, God didn't make the world.

- Through rationalism, which says, God didn't write the Word. The Bible is not the truth. There is no truth. Relativism is closely related.
- Through liberalism, which says, Christ is not God.
- Through existentialism which goes so far as to say God is dead.

Satan knows that if he can cut off the left side of the diagram, he makes the right side ineffective because we have nothing to respond to. Proverbs 28:9 says, when a person will not listen to the law, even his prayers are an abomination. If I'm not listening to the left side, my prayer is an abomination to Him. If we aren't taking in the Word, we won't even pray except when we want something. Our prayer is to be a dialogue, not a monologue of requests. So, if we aren't taking it in, there is static on the line. That is the connection between the Word and prayer.

- Use the hand illustration from the Navigators to show the importance of the Word and the five things we need to do to get a firm grip on it. **Hear** (Rom. 10:17), **Read** (Rev. 1:3), **Study** (Acts 17:11), **Memorize** (Psa. 119:1,9) and **Meditate** (Psa. 1:2-3)
- 2 Timothy 3:16. Discuss profitability, inerrancy, inspiration.

Study Method

We used the illustration of bringing a new baby home and how we wouldn't dream of just letting him fend for himself from day one. We can go back to the baby analogy for this point. When your child is about a year old, he is going to want to try to feed himself. At first he is going to make a big mess. He will miss his mouth, get it in his nose, hair, ears, etc. Our tendency is to want to do it for him since we are much more efficient, and we don't make messes that have to be cleaned up later. It is the same with a new Christian. He needs to be taught to study on his own. He can't depend his whole life on the Sunday sermon for his information. At first he may not do it very well, he may make a mess, but with practice, he will learn to feed himself.

Using the model laid out in 2 Timothy 3:16, teach him the basics of studying the Word.

Teaching

What does a passage teach us? Teach the disciple what questions to ask: who, what, when, where, why, how. This step involves observation of the broader context, and the details within the passage.

Reproof

How should this passage convict us? How are we failing in this area? What should we stop doing?

Correction

What do we need to do? The Bible never gives a negative (reproof) without supplying a positive command to fill the void in our lives.

Instruction in Righteousness

What will it look like if we do the right thing? What will righteousness look like in the various areas of my life? We are going to talk about that in the next couple of characteristics of the disciple.

Howard Hendricks teaches a Bible Study Methods course at Dallas Theological Seminary and has four basic steps to follow: **Observation, Interpretation, Application, Correlation**. These four steps in 2 Timothy 3:16 parallel the four steps in Hendricks' course.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Teaching | Observation/Interpretation |
| 2. Reproof | Application |
| 3. Correction | Application |
| 4. Instruction in Righteousness | Correlation |

Evaluation: Ask the disciple if he will commit to consistently spending 30 minutes each day on his own, reading and studying God's Word. And ask him to commit to meet with us each week so we can do it together. The first time, show him how to work through the four steps. Then in consecutive weeks, each person studies a passage on his own and then discuss each other's findings during the meeting. As we work through the rest of the discipleship characteristics and study the verses associated with each, we should help him learn how to use this study method.

Also, as the disciple looks into the Word it will help him see himself and help him see things that he needs to change. One of those is his attitude about himself. Thus the next characteristic:

Denial of Self

The command to deny ourselves comes from Mark 8:34. The parallel passages are in Matthew 10:38 and Luke 9:23. These passages are addressed to both the multitudes and the disciples. Therefore, denial of self is a requirement of both salvation and sanctification. Paul says in Galatians 3 that we live the Christian life the same way we began the Christian life. That is why Jesus says the same thing to both unbelievers and believers. What does it mean to deny self, take up the cross and follow Jesus?

A person can control his life and refuse to drink alcohol or coffee, or smoke, or eat meat, dance, go to movies, watch TV, not drive a car, etc. Is that self-denial? Yes. Is that the denial Jesus is talking about? No. Biblical self-denial is not some monastic life of asceticism.

Galatians 5:16f is a good passage to look at as a background to this principle. This passage shows us that the desires of the flesh are the opposite of the desires of the Holy Spirit. That is why we need to say no to ourselves. There is a conflict between the works of the flesh—what we do—and the fruit of the Spirit—what God does through us.

Denial involves limiting ourselves and our natural desire to want to do things out of the energy of the flesh. Our natural tendency is to want to take control of our own lives, the situations around us and the people around us in order to find happiness. Someone who moves to a monastery, gives up drinking, smoking and women is exercising the ultimate fleshly control over his life. But that is not the self-denial that Jesus is talking about.

It's interesting to think about monks and monasteries. I don't think that God really likes that life-style. He wants us to be in the world but not of the world. But, in spite of that, God has used monks throughout history to preserve his written Word, to get it translated into other languages, etc. It just shows that God can use us even when we are lopsided in our theology or application of it.

What kind of self-denial is He talking about? Under this characteristic we need to deal with three issues:

- A proper self-identity. Before we can deny ourselves we need to have a proper view of ourselves.
- Self-denial in relation to God.
- Self-denial in relation to man.

A Proper Self-Image

Before we can properly deny ourselves we need to have a proper view of ourselves. People usually go to one of two extremes in their view of themselves. They either think too lowly or too highly of themselves.

Romans 12:3 is a good passage to launch this topic.

I went to an Exchanged Life conference a few months ago and it was very good. They dealt with the problem of having a proper self-identity. One of the speakers pointed out that we all have **needs** which need to be met. We perform **deeds** to try to meet those needs. As time progresses, we continue to do those deeds that worked for us and they become **habits**. After a time, those actions seem **normal** and we look at our deeds and begin to derive our self-**identity** from what we do. Some people have well adjusted flesh that seems to work well and usually have a fairly positive self-identity. Others have poorly adjusted flesh—maybe they are too passive, too violent, etc. Their flesh doesn't work so well and they begin to have a negative self-image. What we need to do is have a self-image based on who we are in Christ. Our self-image is based on our relationship with God.

We might develop a study on the self-image to work through the different wrong attitudes that the disciple might have. Ask him questions that require him to describe his view of himself. When he identifies a characteristic that is too low or too high, we would take him to passages that show the balanced self-image.

Evaluation: Ask the disciple to evaluate his thoughts over the next week to see if he projects these wrong images and then help him think through the proper attitudes. Then move to the importance of self-denial and show him how he must deny himself in two ways: in relation to God and in relation to man.

In Relation to God

We have discussed the flesh and how it is opposite of what God wants to do through us through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand our insatiable desire to control every aspect of our lives—both circumstances and other people. The disciple needs to turn control over to God and follow His leadership. Since God has proven His love for us and He is omniscient, omnipotent, etc., we need to deny ourselves and place ourselves under His will and submit to His authority.

Passages:

- Hosea 2:5-7. Gomer tried to find life in illegitimate relationships. We try to find life in the same way or through materialism, prestige, etc. God blocks our attempts to drive us back to Him. Show through the example of Gomer and Hosea's responses this concept in detail. Dis-

cuss how you, the mentor, have learned this lesson. Reveal what you do to try to find happiness apart from God. How has God blocked your attempts to find life without Him?

- Jeremiah 2:14. Broken cisterns represent our futile attempts to find life apart from God. They don't hold water.
- The life of Jacob is a great illustration of someone who spent his whole life trying to manipulate those around him. He finally gave up (during his wrestling match with God) and God was able to bless Him.
- Matthew 6:24-7:11 shows that God is our Heavenly Father and He will take care of us. If a person doesn't believe this, he will never deny self (i.e. give up control). He will never let go of trying to control his own life. Discuss the issue of trusting in material things and why we won't depend on our Heavenly Father who loves us and will do what is good for us.
- This vertical aspect of denying ourselves is necessary to fulfill Christ's commands to "follow Him" in Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23.
- Luke 9:57-62 shows self-denial in giving up comforts, cares, family in order to follow Christ. Discuss what that might mean for the disciple.

Evaluation: Ask the disciple if he is willing to stop trying to control his life, to trust God to provide for him and follow His leading. Ask him to evaluate whether or not he is too attached to the things of this world such as family, comforts, things, etc. How would he feel about going to the mission field, etc.? If we are not willing to go, then maybe we are too attached to our "stuff."

In Relation to Others

Another way the flesh operates to control its surroundings is to try to control people. Although this really is part of surrendering control to God, how we deal with people is such a major area of our lives we need to treat it in great detail.

We naturally try to manipulate others to meet our own perceived needs and goals and to protect ourselves from pain.

There are several ways we can do this:

- We can withdraw—being a loner, introverted, giving someone the silent treatment, being pre-occupied with projects, crafts, work, hobbies are all ways of keeping others at a distance so that they can't hurt us.
- We can dominate others—by being dictatorial, demanding or pushy, overbearing, intimidating others (perhaps with a know it all or dogmatic attitude, by yelling or swearing at them, or by use of guilt).
- We can be self-sufficient—being a perfectionist, legalistic, etc. If we're not dependent on others then they won't let us down.
- We can be self-indulgent—impulsive, hasty, compulsive shopping, eating sprees, getting drunk, etc.
- We can be insensitive—uncaring, indifferent, unsympathetic.

- We might resist authority—be uncooperative, unteachable, argumentative, stubborn, etc.
- We can be pessimistic—if we always expect the worst, then we won't be disappointed so much, or at least we deny our disappointment.
- We can be critical—always finding fault with others or myself.

These are some of the ways that we manipulate and control others.

We talked about the flesh being opposite of the Spirit; well these traits are certainly opposite of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22. We often hear people say, "I'm just a loner, or I've always been a perfectionist ..." like it is okay, and as if it is supposed to excuse us. But it is not okay.

We need to learn to deny self, deny trying to control those around us, and stop trying to protect ourselves from those around us. When we stop doing these things mentioned above it will leave us vulnerable—but that is where God wants us. That is where He can use us the most. Read Romans 12. The whole chapter shows that we need to sacrifice ourselves for the good of the community so we can serve others. What does it mean to sacrifice?

This is a very misunderstood concept. Usually people think of sacrifice simply as servant-like acts of kindness. Although those are included, a person can be subservient and act like a doormat without engaging in relationship with others. People can also perform the "sacrificial" acts of a servant and have a martyr attitude which in reality causes bitterness or withdrawal into a shell. The reason for the sacrifice is so we can move into the lives of others to make an impact in their lives and help them grow. Jesus is the example. He came to earth to die for us so that we could have a relationship with Him. His sacrifice was the willingness to be rejected, to be hurt and to die for us so that He could sanctify us.

Passages:

- Ephesians 5:25f: Christ is our example. Show how this would work out in a relationship like marriage. For example: willingness to engage one's spouse in deep conversation or confrontation and risking being hurt (the true meaning of sacrifice) in the verbal onslaught, silent treatment, etc. that might follow if the spouse is not receptive to the confrontation. Or risking ridicule if one is revealing hopes or fears. The preceding context of Ephesians 4:30 shows that it grieves the Spirit when we fail to enter into relationship with others. So, denial of self means denying myself the self-protection that I long for and denying myself the tendency to want to control my wife.
- Exodus 20:12-17: Why are most of the commands negative? Because loving others involves limiting oneself. Discuss why. Use Matthew 5-7 to explain full meaning of Ten Commandments.
- Romans 14: The law of love—not eating, drinking, etc. out of concern for others to avoid making them stumble. The way we might approach this topic with a disciple in a friendship context is when the topic of drinking comes up.

Evaluation: Ask the disciple if he is willing to work on limiting himself and his natural inclinations for the good of others.

Self-denial in relation to God and others is very important. We started off by talking about having a proper self-image. We can't sacrifice ourselves and be vulnerable if we are insecure about our identity. If we derive our identity and security from our bank account or the way others respond to us, then we are

not going to stop trying to control life and other people. What is ironic is that we cannot control life or others. It doesn't work. That is why there are so many miserable people out there having panic attacks, getting divorces, caught up in various addictions, etc.

As the disciple begins to try to deny himself and tries to show love for others, he is certainly going to find himself with the same frustration as Paul in Romans 7. This may be a good time to discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling him to deny himself and do the things he now wants to do. An explanation of Romans 6-8 and the old and new natures should be in order. In Romans 6 there is the new nature/disposition along with the old nature/disposition and we do not need to be subject to old one. In Romans 7 we see that we can choose to obey the new nature, but we cannot do it on our own. Romans 8 shows us we need the Spirit. Also use Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 5:18 to show the role of the Holy Spirit.

When we stop trying to control others and keep others at a distance to protect ourselves, it frees us up to really love others and that leads us to the next characteristic ...

Showing Love to Others

This principle comes from Jesus when he summarized the law with the commands to love God and love our neighbor in Matthew 22:39 and Paul's summary in Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:8f.

Passages:

- Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). One of my favorite passages for showing this relationship between love for God and love for people is the parable of the Good Samaritan. Although the priest and Levite had just finished worshipping God (love for God), they refused to help the injured man (love for people) and showed through their hypocrisy that they did not love God. The one who showed love for his neighbor, proved by his actions that he really loved God more than the priest and Levite and he was the one who was on the inside (in the kingdom).

Ask the disciple what it would mean to love his neighbor and challenge him to broaden his concept of who his neighbor is. Teach how the principle of love for our neighbor works out in various areas of our lives. Which areas we focus on would depend on the disciple's needs.

Ephesians 5:18f gives us a good outline for this: It says, be filled with the Spirit and if we are it will affect our relationships in the church, in our marriage, with our children, with our parents, with subordinates and superiors.

Church

- Spiritual Gifts—Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4. The goal of our gifts is service/love for others in the body as seen in lesson 2.
- Unity—Ephesians 4:1f, 1 Corinthians, Romans 12.
- Judging—Matthew 7:1f. After sharing the ethic of the law in a deeper sense than the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus says don't judge. The difficulty with all that we understand is that we become critical of others who don't understand as much as we do. This is how subtle that bent of the soul is. Right when we think about loving, the tendency is to criticize someone for not loving the way we know they ought. "Do not judge" does not mean don't discern, but does mean don't condemn, criticize.

- Church discipline—Matthew 18: Involves confrontation procedures but the goal is restoration—repentance and forgiveness.

Family

- Husband/wife relationship—Ephesians 5-6. Issues of love, sacrifice, authority, submission.
- Divorce and remarriage—Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7. Issues of commitment, forgiveness and restoration.

Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:21f). Forgiveness means to cancel the debt and not try to make the offender pay us back. It is understanding that we are as evil as the offender and appreciating God's forgiveness of us that allows us to do this. I'm convinced that most divorce is the result of not being able to forgive. And I don't think it is any accident that the discussion on divorce in Matthew 19 follows the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Evaluation: Find out who he has not forgiven and ask him what it would mean for him to do so and challenge him to do it.

- Children—Deuteronomy 6:, Ephesians 6:, Proverbs—training, discipline,
- Parents—honoring, responsibility

Work

- Relationship with superiors (Eph. 6). Example of Joseph's loyalty, integrity, etc.
- Relationship with subordinates—Example of Nehemiah's sacrifice and refusal to take extra portion allowed him.
- Relationship with peers (Matt. 18:21f). Example of the unforgiving servant—we can forgive because we have been forgiven.
- Honesty on the job—Proverbs
- Working diligently—Giving employer our best, not stealing from company—Proverbs.

World

- Responsibility to government—taxes, military service (Rom. 13).
- Responsibility for missions (Matt. 28:19-20). Spread of Gospel in Acts as apostles moved out into the world.

In our discipleship process we see that this last characteristic—showing love for others—is dependent on successful adoption of the other characteristics. Unless we really love God and turn over control of our lives to Him, we won't be able to love others.

Special Topics

Depending on the disciple's needs we might use the following resources either at the end or during the process, as issues come up, to deal with special circumstances or problems he is facing. It will take several months to move through the above issues, but we should also take time to deal with any of the following areas:

- Perhaps take a book like *Growing in Christ* put out by the Navigators which walks through several of the basic doctrines and gives numerous verses associated with each. Those topics not already covered would be studied.
- Since we've been doing a lot of single verse or passage analysis over the last few months, we might teach him how to do synthesis of some book of the Bible like 1 Thessalonians, Habakkuk, Haggai, etc.
- If he is married we might take him through a book like *The Marriage Builder* by Larry Crabb which is excellent on explaining one's tendency towards manipulation versus ministry.
- Perhaps use a book like *Bold Love* by Larry Crabb to talk about how to deal with problems with parents, spouses, etc. and deal further with issues of forgiveness, confrontation, etc.

Conclusion

Although this is an outline and proposed order of topics, each disciple is unique, with his own special needs, background, etc. We can't just give a person a list of things to do to solve his problems. His problems will be solved or at least better handled when he adopts all of the above characteristics of a disciple.

Just remember, 90% of what a disciple learns is caught from the mentor's life more than from his teaching. We need to place our emphasis on being his friend and let him see how we deal with things, how we study, pray, love, etc. Don't just give him all the facts, help him work through the issues himself.

Lesson 9:
The Stewardship of Treasures
The Multiplied Life Through Financial Faithfulness

Introduction

One of Satan's most effective delusions is the idea that happiness consists in the things that we possess. Through his deceitfulness, he has erected a golden calf, an idol called materialism. Like a barker on the midway, he calls to every passerby, "*come and worship at its feet, buy, sell, get gain, and possess, and it will make you happy.*"

Christians, though a people with a spiritual calling and heavenly assets beyond compare, are not automatically exempt from Satan's schemes nor inoculated against infection from the deadening disease of materialism. Like a plague, it stalks us from every corner—on television, the printed page, the display window, the showroom, the Jones' driveway. Everywhere the seductions of materialism fill the air and seek to come into our lives through both conspicuous and subliminal messages.

In a context that instructs us to live as aliens and strangers (1 Pet. 1:17-18; 2:11), and as a people who are to live with a view to a heavenly inheritance that is untouched by decay, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time (1 Pet. 1:4), Peter also warns us to be sober and alert against Satan's devices (1 Pet. 1:13; 5:8). Why? Because, if we are not on guard, Satan will distract us through possessions from our heavenly calling as a people for God's own possession who are to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness (the delusions of Satan) and into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

Money is a very little thing (Luke 16:10). Why? Because money cannot buy happiness. Money cannot give eternal life nor real meaning in life (Isa. 55:1-3; Rev. 3:16-18). Yet, there is nothing that reveals our spiritual orientation and relationship with God like our attitude toward money.

Jesus Christ made it clear that a mark of true spirituality was a right attitude toward wealth. The mark of a godly and righteous man is his preoccupation with God and heavenly treasure.

Scripture has a tremendous amount to say about money or material possessions. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus deal with money. One out of every ten verses in the New Testament deal with this subject. Scripture has 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but over 2,000 verses on the subject of money. Money is an extremely important issue because a person's attitude toward it is so determinative of his relationship with God, on fulfilling his purpose in this life, and on his character.

The Responsibility for Planning

Without planning based on biblical values, goals, and priorities, money becomes a hard taskmaster and, like a leaf caught up in a whirlwind, we get swept into the world's pursuit of earthly treasures (Luke 12:13-23; 1 Tim. 6:6-10).

Financial planning is biblical and is a means to good stewardship, to freedom from the god of materialism, and a means of protection against the waste of the resources God has entrusted to our care (Prov. 27:23-24; Luke 14:28; 1 Cor. 14:40).

Financial planning should be done in dependence on God's direction and in faith while we rest in Him for security and happiness rather than in our own strategies (Prov. 16:1-4, 9; Psalm 37:1-10; 1 Tim. 6:17; Phil. 4:19).

The Responsibility for Discipline

If our financial planning is to work, it will require discipline and commitment so our plans are translated into actions. We must follow through on our good intentions (Prov. 14:23). Financial faithfulness is an important aspect of complete, well-rounded spiritual growth and godliness (2 Cor. 8:7). But godliness requires discipline (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8; 6:3-8).

Good intentions are useless without plans that translate them into actions. The Corinthians had indicated their desire and willingness to give and had even been instructed on planned giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2), yet they had failed to follow through on their good intentions (2 Cor. 8:10-11).

The Responsibility for Stewardship

Financial faithfulness ultimately flows out of the recognition that everything we are and have belongs to the Lord (1 Chron. 29:11-16; Rom. 14:7-9; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Life is a temporary sojourn in which Christians are to see themselves as aliens, temporary residents, who are here as stewards of God's manifold grace. All we are and have—our talents, time, and treasures—are trusts given to us by God which we are to invest for God's kingdom and glory (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11; 4:10-11; Luke 19:11-26).

The Responsibility for Working

One of God's basic ways to provide for our needs is through work—an occupation through which we earn a living so we can provide for ourselves and our families (2 Thess. 3:6-12; Prov. 25:27).

The money we earn is also to be used as a means of supporting God's work and helping those in need, first in God's family and then for those outside the household of faith (Gal. 6:6-10; Eph. 4:28; 3 John 5-8).

Guidelines Regarding Savings

Biblical Support

- (1) God directed Joseph to save for the future (Gen. 41:35).
- (2) Saving for the future shows wisdom and is demonstrated in God's creation (Prov. 21:20; 30:24-25; 6:6-8).
- (3) Saving for the future is responsible stewardship when designed to meet both the predictable and unpredictable needs of the family (1 Tim. 5:8; 2 Cor. 12:14).

Biblical Guidelines

(1) Maintain a proper view of ownership. Remember, all our wealth ultimately belongs to God. We are managers, not owners (1 Chron. 29:11-16; Luke 16:12).

(2) Maintain a proper view of our security. We are to put our trust in the Lord and not in our investments (1 Tim. 6:17).

(3) Beware of impure and unbiblical motives, priorities, and reasons for saving such as anxiety and hoarding as a result of insecurity or covetousness (Matt. 6:25-33; Luke 12:13-31).

(4) Decisions concerning future investments are to be made prayerfully in view of the Lord's will (James 4:13-15).

(5) Don't use money in saving/investment programs that God desires be used for giving. This occurs when savings or investments become extreme and for the wrong reasons as seen above (Luke 12:16-21; 1 Tim. 6:18-19; 1 John 3:17).

(6) Avoid high-risk investments or get-rich-quick schemes (Prov. 21:5; 28:20, 22; 1 Tim. 6:9).

(7) Watch those priorities. Make the kingdom of God your number one investment (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31; 1 Tim. 6:18-19).

Guidelines Regarding Spending

Contentment

We need to learn to be content (spiritually independent on the details of life for our happiness and security) with what we have (Phil. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 6:6, 17-19; Heb. 13:5). When we are content with what we have, we are free from servitude to materialism. This means freedom to follow the Lord; freedom to pursue His values and objectives. How does one acquire contentment? Contentment is the product of possessing heavenly treasure and casting the whole of one's care on the sovereign God as our loving heavenly Father (Matt. 6:19-33; 1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Temptation

Be on guard to the temptations and messages of the world (Rom. 12:1-2; 13:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 5:8). There are thousands of messages every day that clamor for our attention through the press, television, radio, billboards, salespeople, and store displays—all designed to get us to buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't know, and to find happiness where it simply cannot be found.

Evaluate Purchases According to Biblical Principles

(1) Can we pay cash or will the purchase put us in debt? (See Guidelines Regarding Credit.)

(2) Do we have complete peace about it with no doubt? (Rom. 14:23; Col. 3:15) We need to watch our tendency to rationalize—giving ourselves deceptive answers to do a bad thing.

(3) Is it a real need or a matter of greed? (1 Tim. 6:9; 1 John 2:15) Will it be profitable to our family, our spiritual growth, our health, our ministry, the Lord's reputation, and will it increase our love for the Lord or could it hinder it? (1 Tim. 3:4: 5:8; 1 Cor. 6:12)

(4) Is our lifestyle adequate or more than adequate? Do we need to reduce our spending by lowering our expected standard of comfort? (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:15, 23; Prov. 15:16-17; 16:8; Eccl. 5:10-11).

Guidelines Regarding Credit

Basic Principles

(1) God favors lending (investing) over borrowing because it promotes freedom and wise stewardship (Deut. 15:5-6).

(2) Unwise borrowing can put us in a position of servitude (Prov. 22:7).

(3) Use credit wisely and avoid it whenever possible. Though not prohibited by Scripture, credit is generally mentioned in a negative sense. Romans 13:8 is often used as an absolute prohibition against borrowing, but it does not necessarily forbid the use of credit. It may simply teach the necessity to pay one's obligations whether physical or spiritual as they come due.

(4) Concerning credit there are two basic alternatives: (a) Buy now on credit and pay the installments with interest. (b) Save now and buy later with cash and save the interest.

Keep Borrowing to a Minimum

(1) Interest adds to the cost of living and thereby reduces our capacity for wise stewardship. If we must borrow, we should seek low interest for short terms.

(2) Credit can be risky because it can place people in bondage to creditors and to their own desires rather than to God's will. It makes impulsive buying too easy. The world system depends heavily on impulsive buying as a balm for being bored and frustrated with life.

(3) Credit can be used as a substitute for trusting God or to get what we want in place of waiting on Him. We use it to buffer ourselves from having to depend on the Lord. Why? Because we are often afraid He won't give us what we want when we want it (Ps. 37:7-9, 34; 147:11; Matt. 6:30-34; Phil. 4:19).

(4) Credit reduces our ability to give to God and to those in need.

(5) The use of credit is often nothing more than a failure to be content with what we have (the sin of dissatisfaction) (Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6-8; Heb. 13:5). The materialist is never content, but the godly learns contentment.

Don'ts for Borrowing

(1) Don't purchase something on credit if it will jeopardize your financial freedom.

(2) Don't go into debt today based upon a future event (such as a raise or a potential sale). This is presuming upon the Lord and His sovereignty.

(3) Don't go into debt for a house before you have secured a source of income (Prov. 24:27).

(4) Don't finance daily needs, living expenses, or pleasure items.

(5) Don't finance items that depreciate quickly, except on very short terms (i.e., 30-90 days).

(6) On appreciating items, such as a house or for business investments, don't borrow beyond your ability to cash out of the obligation through sufficient collateral plus the value of the item, should it be necessary to sell.

(7) Don't allow debts (excluding mortgage) to exceed 20 percent of your take-home pay. Shoot for ten percent or less.

(8) Don't allow a mortgage payment (including insurance and taxes) to exceed 25 or 30 percent of your take-home pay.

Questions to Ask Before Borrowing

(1) Do I really need it?

(2) Have I asked God for it and waited long enough for Him to supply?

(3) Am I impatient and seeking immediate gratification?

(4) Is God testing my faith, my values, my motives, etc.?

(5) Did I wrongly spend the money God provided for this item or have I violated God's financial principles?

(6) Am I guilty of:

- Stinginess: "There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want" (Prov. 11:24; 11:25-27).
- Hastiness: "A faithful man will abound with blessings: but he who makes haste to be rich shall not go unpunished" (Prov. 28:20).
- Laziness: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, then your poverty will come as a robber, and your want like an armed man" (Prov. 24:34).

Guidelines for Giving

God Expects Us to Give

(1) **By His Grace Work:** Through fellowship with Him, giving is to be the product of God's grace working in the life so that it first produces a commitment of one's total life to God with giving as an overflow of that previous commitment (2 Cor. 8:1-2, 6-7; 9:9-11).

(2) **In faith:** He has promised to supply all our needs; our giving will not be our lack (2 Cor. 9:7f; Phil. 4:19).

(3) **Purposefully:** We are to give from careful and prayerful planning. "*Let each one do just as he has purposed (planned beforehand) in his heart*" (2 Cor. 9:7).

(4) Regularly: “*On the first day of every week*” helps promote diligence and disciplined giving. This creates a consistency and regularity that translates good intentions into actions (1 Cor. 16:2).

(5) Personally: “*Let each one of you*” brings out the need for every believer to take giving as a personal responsibility for which God holds us each responsible (1 Cor. 16:2).

(6) Systematically: “*Put aside and save*” brings out the need to have a method or system whereby money for the Lord’s work is specifically set aside, stored up for giving, so that it is not used for other things (1 Cor. 16:2).

(7) Proportionately: In the New Testament, set amounts of compulsory giving (as in the tithe) have been replaced by the grace principle of voluntary, purposeful, and proportionate giving. The new standard for today is “*as He may prosper*” (1 Cor. 16:2), “*they gave of their own accord*” (2 Cor. 8:3), “*it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality ...*” (cf. 2 Cor. 8:12-15, Mark 12:41-44), and “*let each one do ... not under compulsion*” (2 Cor. 9:7).

To Whom Should We Give?

The Local Church

“*And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches*” (Gal. 6:6; cf. also 1 Tim. 5:17-18). If the local church is to form a solid home base for other ministries of outreach, it is only logical that it should become a first priority for our giving.

Other Organizations and Individuals

This would include missions, para-church groups and individuals who are involved in these ministries (3 John 5-8).

Fellow Believers in Need

Those unable to support themselves or who have faced serious problems are to be helped as we are able. Those who refuse to work are not to be supported (1 John 3:17; Jam. 2:15-16; Gal. 6:10; Heb. 10:33-34; 13:1-3 with 2 Thess. 3:6-10).

Unbelievers in Need

Our first priority is to those who are of the household of faith, but we are also to reach out to others in need as we are able (Gal. 6:10).

The Tithe of the Old Testament

The word “*tithe*” means “*a tenth*.” In the Old Testament, however, there is good evidence that the Old Testament saint was required to give at least two tithes and possibly even three tithes per year.

(1) The first was ten percent of all one’s possessions (Lev. 27:30-33). This was given to the Levites for the temple ministry (Numb. 18:20-21).

(2) A second tithe was taken from whatever produce was left after the first tithe was given. This tithe was for the Lord's feasts and sacrifices (Deut. 12:17-18; 14:22). "This command was considered by Jewish interpreters to be for a second tithe (see Lev. 27:30 and Num. 18:21 for the first; also the note on Mal. 3:8), which was brought to the central sanctuary either in kind or in money. Apparently the offerer could use a part of this tithe for a feast at the sanctuary (vv. 26-27)."¹

(3) Another tithe was taken every third year for the welfare of the Levites, strangers, orphans and widows (Deut. 14:26-29). This third tithe may have been separate from the second, though we are not certain. At any rate, each Jewish family was responsible to give not ten percent, but approximately 19 percent.

If the tithe was God's will for believers today, then believers who give ten percent are under giving.

Because the tithe was required in the Old Testament, it was more of an income tax than a gift given under the theocratic kingdom of Israel. In fact, the Old Testament often speaks of "*tithes and offerings*" which makes this distinction. Frieson says, "*that is why failure to submit to the 'whole tithe' could be described as robbing God.*"² If one of God's people wanted to express his worship through a voluntary offering, it had to be over and above the two tithes of his income which was owed (Deut. 16:6, 11; 1 Chron. 29:6, 9, 14).

The New Testament Economy of Giving

There is very good evidence the tithe is not for believers today. There are godly men who teach the tithe, but they are clinging to an Old Testament theology that does not apply to the church today. The following is presented as evidence in support of this position.

The tithe of the Old Testament was a part of the economic system of the Law but the New Testament specifically teaches that believers are not under law (Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6; 8:3; 2 Cor. 3:11; Gal. 3:19-25; 4:21-31). There is a two-fold emphasis here.

(1) Believers today are not under the legal, economic, social, or religious system of the Old Testament Law. The Law was a temporary system until the coming of Christ. The coming of Christ and the New Covenant, as it applies to the church, supersedes the Old Covenant with a higher law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which enables believers to fulfill the spiritual and righteous requirements of the Law but through the leading of the Spirit rather than by the imposition of legal regulations.

(2) "Law" in Romans 6:14 is anarthrous. It is qualitative. It is not talking about just one specific law, as the Old Testament Law, but any kind of law. This means we are not under any kind of legal system of external rules or legal regulations which we are to keep in relation to our walk with God. Though we are not without law, being under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), the standard for how much we give in the church age is not an amount set by some external law or some form of compulsion. This would include the tithe either under the Law or even before the Law, because either way, the moment a definite amount is established for believers to give, it becomes a legal and external matter rather than a matter of the inner man and the leading of the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:1, 18, 24, 25).

¹ *Ryrie Study Bible*, Expanded Edition, NASB, footnote, p. 298.

² Garry Frieson, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, Multnomah Press, Portland, 1980, p. 357.

The New Testament teaches us that giving for the church age is to be proportionate by the grace work or leading of God through the Spirit (2 Cor. 8:1-3, 7; 1 Cor. 16:2; 9:7). In keeping with this concept, when we turn to the New Testament we find no New Testament regulation or commandment which continues the tithe for New Testament believers. The word “*tithe*” is never used in the New Testament as a command or regulation for the church. In fact, it is used only of historical occurrences where it pertained to Israel under the Old Testament economy, but never in such a way it could imply this is the rule of life for the church.

Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42. Both of these passages applied to Israel. Christ was speaking to Jews who were still at that time under the Law. They were also offering sacrifices in the temple.

Luke 18:12 is merely an historical reference of the prayer of a self-righteous Pharisee who was still under the Law and before the coming of the Spirit and the beginning of the church age.

Hebrews 7:5-9 is an historical reference to Abraham who paid tithes to Melchizedek. Some use this as proof the tithe is legitimate for today. They say it was pre-law, so it should be used as a guideline for all dispensations. But there are two things wrong with that line of reasoning:

Other Old Testament practices predated the Law, yet they are not used as norms or as requirements for the church. (a) The concept of the Sabbath predated the law (cf. Heb. 4:3-9), but it has been replaced by the first day of the week, and even that is not presented as a legal requirement. (b) Circumcision also predated the law (cf. Rom. 4:9-13), but it has been replaced by baptism. (c) Likewise the tithe which also predated the law (Heb. 7:5-9), has been replaced by proportionate giving (1 Cor. 16:2). To insist on a tithe is really a disobedience to the direction of 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Giving according to a tithe is a hindrance to proportionate grace giving as it is prescribed in the New Testament. Let me explain.

Many believers give their tenth and never even consider that they could (and perhaps should) be giving even more. Actually, to demand a tenth from all believers is disobedience to the principles set down in 2 Corinthians 8:12-15 because the tithe may become an unequal yoke. By that I mean it is a burden to some, and a limitation to greater giving by others according to the principles of equality and proportionate grace giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Please note the following:

(1) Giving ten percent for one man might be considered “*sowing sparingly*” if he was giving proportionately.

(2) Giving ten percent for another could be considered “*sowing bountifully*,” if he was giving proportionately.

(3) Giving ten percent for some would be giving beyond their ability and could be considered sacrificial giving, giving “*according to what they do not have*” (cf. 2 Cor. 8:12; 9:6).

(4) In essence this means some are being eased of their responsibilities because of their abundance and others afflicted by the tithe compulsion because of their lack (2 Cor. 8:13).

(5) Proportionate grace giving in the New Testament eliminates this and brings about what Paul calls “*equality*” (2 Cor. 8:14-15). See the illustration below concerning proportionate giving.

(6) This means to be a good steward of the resources God supplies, the more prosperous believers give more out of their abundance, not just in dollars but in the percentage (20, 30 percent and even more), while those with less give a smaller percent, one determined out of their walk with the Lord. They

may decide to give sacrificially as did the Macedonians, but it should be the product of the work of the Spirit of God and not the legal demands of a church that insists on the tithe. Indeed, the tithe is an unequal yoke. Think about it. If you tithe, you may be sowing sparingly.

Proportionate Giving

The big question is, what does it mean to give proportionately? How does one determine how much (what percent) to give? It is easy enough to figure ten percent of something, but how much is “*as he pursues in his heart,*” or “*as he has been prospered,*” or “*may prosper,*” or “*if there is a readiness it is acceptable according to what a man has ...*” How much is that?

(1) It is not a specific amount, or a certain percent, but a proportion based on what one has, one’s own needs, and on the needs of others, including the work of Christ or the ministry of the local church.

(2) Those who have little may give the little they are able (2 Cor. 8:2-3).

(3) Those who have nothing, if there is a readiness, are not expected to give anything (2 Cor. 8:12).

(4) Those who have less than enough (genuine needs) are to receive from those who have more than enough so there is a balancing out, a kind of equality (2 Cor. 8:13-15). This is not socialism or communism which is coercive and seeks for a total equality that does away with any variations in society based on individual differences in hard work, in giftedness, and personal incentive (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17f).

(5) God is not asking those who have plenty to become poor or burdened that others may be made rich (2 Cor. 8:13). The equality envisioned here through proportionate giving is twofold: (a) It involves aid to help people through a condition of need until they are able to get on their feet financially by working (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10-15). We do not give so others can live in ease or have the same standard of living as everyone else. (b) This creates an equality in the sense that those with less give proportionately less and those with more give proportionately more and are able to carry more of the load in giving.

(6) Those who have an abundance are to be rich in good works; they are to use their abundance liberally in the cause of Christ (2 Cor. 8:14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

(7) Increased prosperity should not result in a higher and higher standard of living, or wasteful spending, but in an increase in giving, not only in the amount but in the percent given. If believers today were committed to proportionate giving, many would be giving far in excess of ten percent. Statistics show, however, that most believers give no more than 3-5 percent.

Definition of Proportionate Giving

Proportionate giving is giving in proportion to God’s blessing, as a steward who wants to invest his life in heavenly treasure. Proportionate giving does not mean just giving more, but giving a greater proportion of one’s income—a greater percentage invested in God’s work.

In Proportionate giving:

(1) **OUR MOTIVE** for giving is God’s spiritual blessing, to increase fruitfulness and bring glory to God (2 Cor. 9:8-15).

(2) **OUR MEASURE** for giving is God’s material blessing (1 Cor. 16:2).

Illustration of Proportionate Giving

Believer A has an income of \$20,000 per year and he gives ten percent which is \$2,000. **Believer B** has an income of \$50,000 per year and he gives ten percent which is \$5,000. **Believer B** has given \$3,000 more per year but this is not proportionately more because **Believer A** has \$18,000 left to live on and **Believer B** still has \$45,000 left, over twice as much. **Believer B** could give 20 percent (\$10,000) and still have \$40,000 left to live on which is still over twice as much as **Believer A**. **Believer B** would then be giving not only more, but proportionately more as well.

Promises for the Generous Proportionate Giver

Luke 16:10-11: Generally, God does not entrust more wealth to us to manage until we prove faithful with what we have now.

Second Corinthians 9:8-11: Our giving will never be our lack; God will not only resupply what we have given, but He will increase our giving capacity as we give abundantly. The goal here is not increased personal wealth, but greater giving.

Biblical Challenges Regarding Earthly Riches

Where Is Our Treasure?

Basic Principle: What we treasure is determined by our perspective or insight to the real values of life (Matt. 6:22-23).

Biblical Insight: Our treasures should be in heaven (Matt. 6:19-20).

Biblical Reasons:

- (1) Our treasures in heaven are permanent (Matt. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:4).
- (2) Our treasures on earth are temporary and can be lost. We can't take earthly treasures with us (Luke 12:20-21; 1 Tim. 6:7).
- (3) Our treasures on earth are really unfulfilling in that they cannot buy true happiness or significance (Isa. 55:1-3; Luke 12:15, 23; Eccl. 5:10).
- (4) Our treasures on earth cannot prolong life or give security (Luke 12:16-21).
- (5) Our treasures determine our pursuits and priorities. Without the right treasures, we will pursue the wrong things and waste our lives (Matt. 6:21; Luke 12:34; 1 Tim. 6:9-10; Luke 19:23-26).
- (6) Our greatest treasure is godliness with contentment (1 Tim. 6:6; Heb. 13:5; Phil. 4:11-12; Prov. 15:17; 16:8; 17:1).

Biblical Explanation: Heavenly treasures consist of crowns, rewards, and responsibilities given to believers at the judgment seat of Christ for faithful stewardship (Luke 19:16-19; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8). The ultimate treasure is glory to God (1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 4:9-11).

Who Is Our Master?

A servant cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve God and mammon (materialism) (Luke 16:1-13, cf. Matt. 6:24).

Biblical Reason: It is impossible to hold allegiance to two masters at the same time. “*For either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other*” (Luke 16:13).

Biblical Insights:

(1) Luke 16:1-2: Life is a stewardship and we are each servants of God who will be held accountable for the way we have used our stewardship. Stop thinking like an owner. Start thinking like a manager.

(2) Luke 16:1, 11-12: Are we squandering God’s investment in our lives or investing it wisely for His glory?

(3) Luke 16:10: Money, in terms of true value, is a “*little*” thing, however, faithfulness in little things (money) is an indicator of our faithfulness in big things (eternal values).

(4) Luke 16:11: The use of money is a test of our faithfulness.

(5) Luke 16:11: Money does not constitute true riches.

(6) Luke 16:12: Money is to be used wisely and faithfully as part of our stewardship from God.

(7) Luke 16:12: Money and its acquisition, if we are not careful, can become our master.

Biblical Challenge:

(1) Am I a slave to money and earthly treasures? Is it possible that I am and do not even know it? We must choose between serving money and serving God!

(2) Do I sacrifice Christlike qualities and responsibilities in my pursuits for earthly treasures? (a) Clear conscience; (b) Honesty, moral character; (c) Friendships; (d) Family (wife, husband, children, in-laws); (e) Reputation; (f) God’s glory, etc.

(3) Do I care more about earthly treasures and money matters than I do about my relationship with the Lord and the pursuit of the kingdom of heaven? (a) Priorities; (b) Use of my time, how and where is it spent; (c) What do I think about most—money and what I think it will purchase or God and my trust in Him?

(4) Do I seek from money and earthly treasures (prestige, power, position, pleasure, possessions, etc.) those things that God alone can give? (a) Happiness, real joy; (b) Contentment; (c) Peace of mind; (d) Security; (e) Purpose or meaning in life.

If your answer is yes to any of the above questions, money has become your master to some degree!

Conclusion

Having studied these principles, let’s ask ourselves a question: Am I willing to commit myself to these concepts as a way of life in order to become a good steward of the grace of God? May God keep us from the altar of the golden calf of materialism.

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:17-19).

Appendices

Appendix 1: Thoughts on Ezekiel 2:8; 3:1-3, 14

Under the picture of the Word as our necessary food, these verses demonstrate the importance of God's Word for motivation, courage and strength, and capacity for ministry. Living in and feeding on the Word, because it tunes our ear into God's voice, produces the burden, the willingness, and the courage necessary for ministry regardless of our fears or the obstacles we face. Scripture brings us in touch with God Himself and with His heart.

In Ezekiel 2:8 and 3:1 "eat" is a fitting picture of feeding on God's Word and filling our souls with His truth. This naturally leads to the ability to hear and follow the command.

After being told to eat, the prophet is told "go," an apt picture of going or ministering according to the gifts and special leading of the Lord in any believer's life. But if we aren't feeding, we will not be listening, nor will we be in a position spiritually to follow the Lord.

Then the prophet is told, to "speak to the house of Israel." This was God's specific ministry and call for the prophet. It was God's will for Ezekiel, but what about us both corporately and individually as believers today?

The impact of chapters 2 and 3 in Ezekiel may be lost on us because of an idea that is common in the church today, but one that is erroneous and that throws a wet blanket on the outreach of the church. Many would say this passage applies only to evangelists or pastors. The idea is that only such men have the call of God on their lives; these are the ministers of the Word. As a result, a large portion of the body of Christ excuse themselves from the ministry of evangelism or outreach.

In the church age every believer is a priest of God and called of God into full-time service of one sort or another according to their gifts. Furthermore, every believer is to do the work of evangelism, show mercy to others, help, give, and in general, do good works (Tit. 3:8, 14; 2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Peter 2:1-10; 4:10-11).

A Proper Response by Ezekiel (3:2)

"So" points us to Ezekiel's response. In light of who is speaking and what the Scroll consists of (God's Holy Word), the following is essential and logical—"I opened my mouth." Revelation demands an adequate response. Opening the mouth portrays a teachable, hungry, and studious spirit.

"And He fed me ..." Only God can ultimately feed us and make us understand the Word through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But if we don't open our mouths, if we aren't hungry, and if we don't make ourselves available, He can't feed and strengthen us in the Word.

A Full Meal Deal (vs. 3)

God was telling Ezekiel to thoroughly digest and understand the message. To be a student of the Word. He was also telling him this message must saturate his life; he must become full of the message. But why?

- We must know the message if we are going to be able to communicate it accurately. Recent statistics show the majority of Christians are biblically illiterate.

- We must be absorbed with the Word if we are going to be willing and courageous to carry it to others and if we are going to be able to change our values, priorities, and thus, pursuits—if God’s burden is going to become ours. To be full of the Word is to be controlled by the Word, to have the mind of Christ.

Read carefully and reflectively on Ezekiel 3:3-15.

When we aren’t living in the Word and allowing it to saturate our hearts and minds, we will either fail to minister, or we will minister for the wrong reasons—and always without a sense of God’s purpose and without the joy of the Lord. Further, when we run into obstacles, and we always do, our tendency will be to run or throw in the towel. Ezekiel was given a very difficult task, but God’s Word in his heart fortified him and gave him the hardness to stand against the difficulties he faced (3:8-10).

In verse 14, we see the change that took place in the heart of Ezekiel brought about by the Word and the ministry of the Spirit of God. As he became associated with God’s message and God’s glory, he began to feel God’s righteous anger over Israel’s sin and stubborn rebellion.

Appendix 2: Exposition of Isaiah 55:1-3

The Invitation (vs. 1)

The context is that of the coming of the suffering servant of the Lord, the Messiah, and His all-sufficient work on the cross where He bore our sins in His body, where He was wounded for us, the innocent dying as a substitute for the guilty. Because of what Messiah has done, the offer of this passage can be made.

“Ho.” This particle is an emphatic way to get our attention.

“Everyone.” This is a universal invitation. No one is exempt; it applies to all. It is available to all and all need it.

“Who thirsts.” Thirsts indicates an intense desire, but also an intense need. It calls attention to the futility of life to really satisfy the innermost needs of man. This is an invitation to those who, experiencing the dryness of the world, are looking for something more and are open to the salvation of God.

“Come.” Three times this word is used to highlight God’s offer of salvation and of a life that is truly satisfying and meaningful. God says “come.” He says, “I have what you need and I want you to have it.”

- Such an invitation first of all stresses that the needy one is not at the place of blessing or relief and he must make a decision and come to that place. Wherever he is now won’t cut it.
- The nature of this invitation expresses the urgency of the matter. It is urgent because the longer a person delays, the harder it is to come and the less opportunity there is to come (see 55:6).
- The invitation to come expresses the loving heart of God. God wants us to experience His love, comfort, and provision (Isa. 40:1).

“To the waters.” This is emblematic of abundant blessing and of the fact that only the salvation of God as revealed in the person and work of Christ and the Word can truly satisfy the thirst and needs of man.

“And you who have no money come, buy and eat, Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” What is this saying? How can one buy without money?

God’s offer is absolutely free. Neither money, power, position, nor prestige can purchase what God has to offer us. It is the free gift of His grace through the gift of His Son who purchased man’s redemption (Rev. 21:6; 22:17).

The word “buy” is used in the sense of acquire or get, but, as we are told, we may buy without money. The word “buy” is the Hebrew, *shabar*. It meant, “to break” and then, “to purchase.” It was used of grain as that which was broken in the mill, or of food which breaks hunger (compare our word *breakfast* for “break your fast”). So God calls us to not only to buy or acquire, but to eat. The idea here is get bread and eat.

As the next verses make clear, God is calling man to come, listen, and feed on the living Word which in turn will produce faith (Rom. 10:17). Peter, remember, tells us faith is more precious than gold

which perishes (1 Pet. 1:7). Why? Because faith is the channel by which we acquire or obtain the salvation of God and its manifold blessings (Eph. 2:8, 9).

“Wine and milk.” God’s salvation and its blessings are portrayed under these two symbols. Wine was often used at special feasts and portrays the joy and exhilaration which God’s salvation brings. Milk portrays sustenance, that which nourishes and is nutritious and healthful.

The Call for Evaluation (vs. 2a)

By means of a question and through the prophet, the Lord calls upon us to see the futility of life and the efforts of people to find happiness or salvation apart from the free gift of His grace and a life lived out of the fullness of Christ through the Word where we can hear the voice of God.

“Spend.” This word literally means “weigh.” It referred to the counting out and weighing of silver or gold as the price paid for something.

“For what is not bread.” Literally, the Hebrew says, “why do you weigh out money for the *not-bread*.” This is emphatic and dramatic. Bread is emblematic of the support of life or of whatever contributes to man’s support, happiness, and comfort. But in this regard, what man finds is really not-bread, it is futility. The Apostle Paul warns us against this same futility in a context that stresses the importance of the Word (Eph. 4:17).

The choice of the verb in Isaiah 55:2a and this negative noun, *not-bread*, dramatizes the difficulty and the futility of man’s ability to find or procure that which will supply his real needs apart from God and His plan (cf. Deut. 8:3).

“And your wages for what does not satisfy.” “Wages” is literally, “toil or labor.” Our wages are the result of our toil or work.

People are habitually weighing out what they have earned by toil for that which does not, in the final analysis, truly satisfy. Man, therefore, is left running on the gerbil wheel of fortune in hot pursuit of things—position, power, pleasure, possessions—looking for happiness in all the wrong places and things which are simply incapable of giving it. Is man ever satisfied with what he has? How much money is enough? More! How much pleasure? More! How much power? More!

Compare these verses: Proverbs 27:20; Ecclesiastes 1:8; 4:8; 5:10. There is a void in man which only God can fill, so we naturally have the next point in Isaiah 55.

A Call for Investigation (vss. 2b, 3a)

Verses 2b and 3a call us to an investigation of God’s Word, which, far in excess of the purest of gold, reveals and provides the real values of life.

“Listen carefully to me, and eat ...” Where do we listen to God? In His Word. The idea is, that by attending to God’s Word and by feeding upon its truth, men will find, without money or price, that which they were seeking at so much expense, toil, and pain. Finding and experiencing God’s truth will lead to resting in and enjoying the blessings of God’s covenant which offers salvation to all men with all its consequent blessings of life. Here and here alone is the source of real security, satisfaction, and significance in life.

Appendix 3:
Preparing to Truly Hear God's Word
"Therefore Consider Carefully How You Listen"
(Luke 8:18)

Introduction

We might begin by asking the question, What exactly is the Bible? Most Christians would answer that it is God's Holy Word, His special instrument of communication to man. And they would be right. Then we need to ask another question. If we believe the Bible is God's Word and special means of communication, do we take the Bible seriously? Do we have a holy reverence for Scripture and the time we assemble together to worship and study this Word from God?

Are we like the one God esteems or looks for in Isaiah 66:2? "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." (NIV) Or as the KJV reads, "but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

God is looking for people who have a holy reverence for the Word and His plan for learning and applying it. This means truly hearing God's voice in the Word. God is the master communicator and biblical history is not only the story of redemption but it is also the story of communication and revelation from God. He encodes and transmits, and we are to decode and receive.

Isn't it true that one of the keys to life and good relationships is effective communication? And for effective communication to occur, there must be **effective listening**. This is just one of the reasons we must take the study of the Bible very seriously, whether privately or corporately. This is true not only in Bible study, but in our prayer life and in all aspects of corporate worship. Why? So we might truly listen to God through the various aspects of a worship service, and especially our time in the Word.

We need to listen to God even though He has chosen to use human instruments to communicate with us. It would be well for each of us to take to heart Paul's praise to the believers in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for what it really is*, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

The process looks something like this:

- *COMMUNICATION*: Listening to God
- *COMPREHENSION*: Understanding what God says
- *CONFIDENCE*: Trusting in what God says
- *CHANGE*: Being transformed by what God says

Without this process of communication, there simply cannot be any real spiritual change in the life of man. Because of this, God is deeply concerned about how well we hear when we are listening.

The Importance Scripture Places on Listening to God

Have you ever noticed how often the Bible emphasizes the idea of listening? It is a concept that is repeated over and over in a variety of ways. This is obviously not without purpose.

Illustrations:

(1) The specific clause “hear the Word of the Lord” occurs 32 times in the NIV and 28 times in the NASB.

(2) The words “hear” or “listen O Israel” are found six times in the NIV and the NASB. “Listen” is found 331 times and the majority of these passages in some way deal with listening to the Lord. “Hear” is found 347 times, and again many of these also have to do with hearing God’s Word.

(3) We also find a number of comments like “incline your ear,” “give ear” or “pay or give attention” and similar expressions used in various ways to call man, and especially God’s people, to listen intently to God.

(4) In the New Testament, the Lord warns us to consider carefully **what** you hear (Mark 4:24) and **how** you hear (Luke 8:18).

(5) The words “today, if you hear his voice,” are found three times in Hebrews and once in the Old Testament (Heb. 3:7, 15; 4:7; Ps. 95:7).

(6) Seven times, once in each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 we read “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

(7) In Mark 4:9 the Lord warned, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” and again in verse 23 He said “if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” (NIV)

(8) And is it not significant that one of the titles of the Son of God is the Greek term *logos* which refers to some form of communication? It means “speech, word, saying, discourse.” As the *Logos*, Jesus Christ is the living Word of God to man. Of Him Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 18:15, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. ***You must listen to him.***” (NIV)

(9) But not only is there the call to listen carefully to the Lord, there is the warning about listening to the wrong voices or influences in the world in numerous passages in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Point is Simple. God has much to say to us and because He is the all-wise and sovereign God and because of our finite humanity as well as our fallenness, it is imperative for us to listen carefully. But, as fallen people, even as fallen people now redeemed, we are ever so prone to be distracted and drawn away with other things, even with good things.

We can too easily be like Martha, who was distracted by so many things, rather than Mary who sat at the feet of the Savior to hear His Word (Luke 10:38-42).

As portrayed in the parable of the sower, the soils, and the seed, we can be like the thorny ground, full of thorns and thistles which represent the cares of the world and which choke the Word and cause it to become unfruitful in our lives (Mark 4:18-19).

Why do you suppose God created man with two eyes and two ears, but with only one mouth? That in itself ought to be a visual object lesson worth a thousand words.

Listen to these words from Proverbs 20:12: “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, The Lord has made both of them.” You know, I find it significant and interesting that Solomon says nothing about the mouth. The Lord made that too, yet it seems Solomon purposely didn’t mention the mouth. He only mentions that which is a source or means of receiving instruction from the Lord.

The fact is we are all too quick to reveal our minds and too slow to listen. James reminds us of this very fact: “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19 NIV).

With this in mind, we might note Proverbs 18:2, “A fool does not delight in understanding (which comes by hearing), But only in revealing his own mind.” Compare also Proverbs 22:17-19.

The lesson is obvious: We are to listen so we can learn to trust the Lord. To fail to listen shows our determination to pursue life through our own resources and foolishness

The Instruction of Scripture on Listening to God

How God communicates should teach us something about how we should listen. So how does God communicate, and how should we listen? What do we need to do to be prepared to listen attentively and effectively?

God Communicates Through the Bible

The Bible is our index or guide for all the other ways God communicates. If we are going to listen to God and discern His voice in the other avenues He uses, we must be listening to His Word, the Bible. Of course, God communicates His Word in many ways: through those who teach it formally and informally as in counseling, in personal exhortation and encouragement, through song or music, through books, tapes, film, etc. However, the primary method God has chosen, and that which is foundational to all the other ways God communicates in the church age, is the local assembly when the church is assembled together for the hearing of the Word. Other things are involved, prayer, singing, praise, the Lord’s table, but at the center is the proclamation of the Word (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 4:11, 13; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

God Communicates Through the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the resident teacher whom the Father has sent through the Son to indwell every New Testament believer as God’s special anointing to teach and make the truths of the Word understood and real to the hearts and minds of believers. One of His primary ministries today is that of communicating the Word—the completed canon of Scripture.

Since the cessation of the temporary, foundational, and miraculous gifts, He does not give special or new revelation, but He works through the Word which is our index for belief and practice.

To be able to listen to God, to comprehend truth, to worship the Lord, and to be transformed by the Word through faith in God, God has given us the Holy Spirit. He is God’s special agent who takes the

things of Christ and teaches them to us whether we receive them by personal study or through the human instruments who teach us the Word.

God Communicates Through Events

- Through special times of worship (singing, praise, prayer, teaching, ordinances)
- Through blessings that reveal His love and grace.
- Through trials and irritations that become tools to get our attention and build character as we learn to rest in the promises and principles of Scripture.

God Communicates Through People

The Bible is full of illustrations of how God uses people to communicate His love, mercy, and grace. This comes in many forms: sometimes in the form of encouragement, sometimes in the form of godly example, and sometimes even in the form of rebuke. Note these passages to illustrate the point: 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Proverbs 27:5-6, 17; John 13:34-45; Malachi 3:16; Ephesians 5:19-20; 1 Timothy 5:1-2; Ephesians 6:4; Galatians 6:1-3; 1 Peter 3:1-2, 7).

Our primary focus in this short study is on how God communicates to us through the Word and the Holy Spirit especially in relation to our times of worship together.

What does this mean in terms of how we listen to God? As already pointed out, listening to God must involve God's Word and the Holy Spirit working together in the mind and heart of the believer. Even when God uses people and circumstances, we must always consider what God is saying to us in the light of His infallible Word.

God never contradicts His Word. We must learn to examine everything in the light of the Holy Scripture. Further, this means we need to recognize that since the Spirit communicates to us through the Word of God, we need to expose ourselves to the Word privately and corporately as often as we can.

But listening to God also means something else. Listening to God—really hearing what He is seeking to say—demands **spiritual preparation** and **active participation** on the part of the listener. In order to listen to God, one must be prepared to listen. Listening to the Lord is a spiritual matter.

But any kind of learning involves preparation and active participation or concentration. Because of this, God is very concerned about **how** we listen and worship. He is concerned about our **mental attitudes** and our **spiritual state** when we worship corporately or sit down privately with the Bible.

The problem is that we can simply go through the motions of religious activity and deceive ourselves as James warns us in James 1. We can play church and do a kind of 'nod to God' routine putting in our appearance physically while we are in essence absent spiritually. The result is we don't even come close to truly hearing the voice of God because we have removed our hearts from Him. We have become passive listeners because we aren't really prepared physically, mentally, and spiritually to hear the Word of the Lord.

Church attendance is often simply a part of our plan to pursue life on our own terms. We attend church not to meet with God or listen in order to know, love, and serve Him, but to feel good, to have an experience, to hear beautiful music, to hear an eloquent speaker, to see people or even to be seen by people. We attend church to soothe our consciences and maybe earn a little of God's favor. In this case, our

religious activity is a kind of insurance policy—a protection we think. But we are dead wrong if we think this way because such reasons do not line up with what God says to us in His Word (read carefully Ecc. 5:1-2; Isa. 29:1,13; Eze. 33:30-32).

So, the key question is, what can we do to prepare our hearts so we are in a position where we can hear what the Lord is seeking to communicate to us, i.e., *understand the message and respond with faith and obedience whether the message comes through a hymn, or a testimony, or through the teaching of the Word?*

What Is Needed to Effectively Listen to God

We Need Spiritual Preparation

As has already been stated, God's communication through the Word always involves the teaching/convicting ministry of God the Holy Spirit. This is evident in a number of passages but we will illustrate the point from Ephesians 3:16-19 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:3.

That God communicates the Word through the ministry of the Spirit means we must be properly adjusted to or in right relationship to this divine teacher who indwells us. This is a relationship where, believing that He is present, we consciously depend on Him for insight to God's Word (understanding and personal application).

But as we can see from 1 Corinthians 3, carnal believers, those who are not dealing with sin in their lives, cannot and will not effectively listen or hear God's message. Carnal believers are apathetic and simply cannot understand and respond to the things of God while in that condition.

Why is that? Because known sin in the life, things like wrong attitudes (envy, jealousy, resentment, pride, unbelief, self-centeredness), self-protective ways of living, indifference or apathy to God, preoccupation with other things, and other forms of sin grieve the Spirit's person (Eph. 4:30) and undoubtedly stifle or quench much of His ministry like teaching and making the things of Christ real (1 Thess. 5:19). His ministry is changed from leading and teaching the believer to that of convicting him of his condition. The Lord Jesus put it this way in Mark 4:19, "and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

Martha gives us a classic illustration of this. Though in the very presence of the Lord Jesus, Martha (in contrast to Mary) had no ears to hear what the Savior was saying because she was distracted and drawn away by other concerns (Luke 10:38-41).

Another illustration can be seen in the disciples when the Lord fed the five thousand (Mark 6:30-52). They had failed to truly listen to what the Lord was teaching them through the events of the day because they too were occupied with other things, like with who was the greatest. The result is seen in the Lord's rebuke in verse 52, "For they had not gained any insight from the *incident of the loaves*, but their heart was hardened."

An Open Heart

There needs to be a heart open to personal soul-searching examination for the purpose of seeing our motives, our sources of trust or the things we depend on for our security, i.e., the condition of our lives as they really are. This needs to be done prior to personal study or a worship service in order to prepare our

hearts for hearing God. And then it needs to be maintained as other things (or thoughts) distract or hinder our listening while studying or praying, or during a worship service (Ps. 119:18; 139:23-24; 1 Cor. 11:28f).

Often this is simply not done. People arrive at church harried and upset because of something that happened at home or on the way to church. People get caught up chatting with friends and then sit down and never give any thought to their need to secure a spiritual focus and to be sure they are controlled by the Spirit.

The purpose for examination and self-revelation is honest to God confession in a spirit of repentance. While people can't see our hearts, God can and He rejects worship that is not in spirit and truth, where the heart is kept from Him (Isa. 29:13).

Regarding confession, we are talking about a confession which seeks to go to the root causes of sin in our lives, especially our stubborn determination to run our own lives and live by our own devices for peace, security, and significance (Jer. 2:13; 17:5; Ps. 66:18; Pro. 28:13-14; 1 John 1:9; Ps. 51:5f; Jam. 4:6-10).

Both James 1:19-25 and 1 Peter 2:1-2 teach us that before there can be a proper response to the Word that leads to true spiritual deliverance through an active faith, a response where we are quick to listen, receive, and hunger as a newborn babe for the pure milk of the Word, we must honestly deal with sin. In James 1:23, "receiving the word implanted" is dependent on "putting aside all filthiness ..." In 1 Peter 2:2, the command to "long for the pure milk of the word" is dependent on "putting aside all malice and all guile,..."

How do we deal with sin? By personal examination and honest confession of sin. Then we will be free to listen to God's Word and depend on the Holy Spirit to give deliverance over sin.

Active Participation

In our TV generation we have become passive listeners. I think the term is "couch potatoes." We have become mentally lazy. We have forgotten how to think and stay actively involved in the listening process. Active listening means concentrating, searching, probing, questioning, thinking, interacting, responding and applying.

God doesn't want pious, passive spectators. He wants actively involved listeners. We aren't receivers who turn ourselves on, tune ourselves in, and relax. Active involved listening is spoken of frequently in Scripture.¹

Note the following passage:

James 1:22-27 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his

¹ Grant Howard, *The Trauma of Transparency*, Multnomah Press, Portland, 1979, p. 91.

tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Having challenged us to deal with any sin so we can truly receive (hear) the Word, James then warns us about the difference between *superficial and substantial listening*. He is warning us against unprepared, passive, and uninvolved listening. James is teaching us we need the kind of active listening that is diligent to understand and respond to God's Word in order that its truth touch the heart so that it begins to bring change—not by our own strength, but by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God through faith. Compare 1 Corinthians 2:15.

The words “looks intently” in verse 25 represent a different word for “looking” than the one used previously in this section (vss. 23-24). This is the Greek word *parakuptō* which refers to a very intent and concentrated look. Literally *parakuptō* means “to stoop down in order to have a close look.” It is used in John 20:5 and 11 of the investigation of the empty tomb by the disciples, and in 1 Peter 1:12 of the angels intense interest and study of the person and work of the Savior. So *parakuptō* suggests keen interest, close attention, and active investigation.

In 1 Timothy 4 Paul told Timothy to “take pains” and “be absorbed” in these things, a reference to the previous commands regarding his ministry in teaching, being an example of Christlike character, and using his gift (4:11-14). One simply cannot “take pains” and “be absorbed” and remain a passive listener. “Take pains” is the Greek word *meletaō* which means “cultivate, think meditate, attend to carefully.” “Be absorbed” is literally, “in these be,” and connotes the idea of “be totally enveloped, absorbed,” “give yourself totally to them.”

But note the next verse: “Pay close attention to yourself ...” Bible study or hearing the Word is to be aimed at personal application for changed living from the inside out.

Passive, uninvolved listening to God is inadequate and judged by God as futile religiosity. Believers are always to be on the alert, probing for meaning and application. Lethargic, half-hearted listening just doesn't cut it with God nor can it result in spiritual deliverance. In practical terms what does this entail?

What does this mean in terms of my *listening to God*? When I read and study the Word, I must put everything else aside and concentrate on what He is saying to me. I must give Him my undivided attention. I should do this on a regular basis, for that is the only way I can develop my listening skills. I should do this in a place where I have minimal distractions. I should read and meditate out loud and take notes and ask questions, for these are the kinds of things that make me an active participant.

I should *observe* carefully to whom God is speaking, what He is saying and why He says it. I should *interpret* accurately what God means I should *apply* these truths personally and practically in my own life.²

Finally, to round out our preparation, there are two more things we need so we can listen carefully.

² Howard, p. 92.

Biblical Participation

The nobility of the Bereans refers to the fact that the Berean Jews (in contrast to Jews in Thessalonica) were teachable and open, though not gullible. They listened attentively as active participants, but they tested Paul's teaching against the Scriptures as their index for truth—always a noble and biblical attitude. Their authority for what was truth was the Word. They sought to set aside or block out their prejudice so God's Word could speak for itself. The result was many came to trust in the Savior.

When we attend church, God wants us to be like the Bereans—good listeners and teachable—and also biblically active participants who search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.

Mark 7:7-13 stresses the ever present problem of prejudice and background whether religious or secular which we all bring to church and to our background. This passage shows how our background, tradition, experiences, prejudices, etc., can nullify the power and truth of the Word in our lives.

Second Timothy 3:15 teaches again the value of active participation in the words "be diligent" or "study" (KJV). But to that it adds the importance of applying *sound* principles of Bible study so we are truly listening to God and not the ideas of man that are so often based on man's tradition or human experience, including our own (cf. 2 Pet. 1:17-21). We need to be precise in our hermeneutics so we truly hear what God is saying.

Why did the apostle say this? Because Timothy was faced with false teachers who were neither diligent nor accurately handling the Word. That leads to hearing man's voice and not God's. When we apply poor methods of Bible study and poor methods of listening, we can end up hearing man's voice rather than God's. There is simply no place in God's plan for lethargic, passive listening, or listening carelessly.

Physical Preparation

In Luke 22:7-14, we find that the Lord sent Peter and John to make preparations for the Passover meal that they might observe it according to its meaning and significance. The word "prepare" is used three times in these verses (vss. 9, 12, 13). The Lord saw to it that everything needed was properly prepared so He could observe the Passover with His disciples.

Truly listening to God involves physical as well as spiritual preparation. Certainly without spiritual preparation, the best physical preparation in the world accomplishes little. But we often fail to see the need to be physically prepared to listen to God. Physical preparation should be seen as a part of the spiritual preparation needed to listen to God.

- Noise, people moving around, poor lighting, and other physical conditions can be distracters which hinder our ability to concentrate.
- Being physically tired from failing to get enough sleep the night before can create a major hindrance to good listening.
- Those who have a part in the worship service as song leader, pianist, organist, ushers, the speaker, etc., can call attention to themselves through a lack of preparation and thus hinder people from listening to God.
- Preparation needs to start at home on Saturday night by getting to bed early, getting the kids clothes ready, and by even planning breakfast. For many families, getting to church becomes a

frantic, harried experience with mom and dad looking for socks and shoes, and trying to feed the family. In such circumstances, who is prepared to listen?

- Preparation can include something as simple as seeing to it that the children go to the bathroom before the service.

The bottom line is that listening to God is no small issue. If we are not prepared to listen so we can respond with our hearts, let's face it, we are simply playing church and we are withholding our hearts from the Lord. Our religious activities then become an exercise in futility and deception (Jam. 1:22).

Appendix 4: The Believer and Daily Cleansing (John 13:1-17)

Christ's Security (13:1-3)

It is important for us to note the fact that Jesus was completely aware of His sovereign authority, His origin, and coming destiny as He depended by faith in what the Father was doing (cf. 13:1, 18); yet He voluntarily took the place of a slave and washed the feet of His disciples. Note how His thinking and action contrast sharply with the self-seeking insecurity of the disciples (cf. Matt. 20:20-24; Mark 9:33-34; Luke 22:24-30).

Christ's Example (13:4-5)

His security in the Father, His love, and His confidence in the Father and future allowed Him to assume the position of a servant, an amazing example of condescension. This attitude, faith, and action portrayed His entire ministry on earth (cf. Phil. 2:5-8) and provides us with the perfect example of what He wants to do in our lives. But it also provides an example of how this is accomplished—through faith and understanding of who we are in Christ and by confidence in the eternal glories of the future.

Historical and Cultural Context: Foot washing was needed in every home in Palestine. Why? Not only were the streets dusty and dirty, but they usually contained garbage and the waste from the animals that traveled up and down the same streets. People wore sandals without socks and their feet could become very dirty. The custom was to recline around the table at the evening meal. Dirty, smelly feet could make the meal and the fellowship rather uninviting. Slaves were usually provided to wash the feet of guests, and it was a mark of honor for a host to provide a servant to wash a guest's feet. To fail to provide a servant was a breach of hospitality (cf. 1 Sam. 25:41; Luke 7:40-50; 1 Tim. 5:10).

Since the last supper was held in a private home, and probably as a secret meeting, we can easily see why no slave was present to fulfill the task. Furthermore, since the disciples were filled with dreams of power and prestige in the coming kingdom, we can see how the Lord used this occasion to teach some very fundamental principles of the Christian life. The disciples were jealous of one another and were competing for the best place. "They were ready to fight for a throne, but not for a towel."¹

The situation in this passage demonstrates some serious problems among believers that we each need to deal with if we are going to be successful in properly representing the Lord Jesus to the World.

The first problem was their pride or arrogance that manifested itself in two ways:

- The disciples were each seeking to find their significance by their own strategies. Any time we seek to handle life by our own methods, we are acting in arrogant independence.

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1948, p. 199.

- There was the pride of their unwillingness to humble themselves to serve others, the very essence of the life of the Savior.

There was a second problem. As an outgrowth of all of this, there was an attempt to fellowship with the Lord and one another around the Passover table with unwashed and dirty feet. Thus, as He arose from His heavenly throne to become man to go to the cross for all of us, so the Lord arose from the supper, laid aside His garments, took the towel with which He was girded, and began to wash the feet of the disciples.

Illustration or Lesson (13:6-11)

Washing the disciples' feet teaches us the necessity for daily cleansing through forgiveness to have fellowship with the Lord.

Sin hinders fellowship, but love cleanses and restores fellowship (13:6-10). Except for Judas, the Lord was dealing with believers, those who had placed their faith in the Lord Jesus, but they were attempting to have fellowship with Him with unwashed feet. Unwashed feet was the equivalent of a believer trying to walk with the Lord, study the Word, pray, or serve Him with known sin in the life, like the sin of pride and selfish independence. The dialog with Peter and his reluctance to allow the Lord to wash his feet illustrates our slowness to grasp this truth.

There are two different Greek words used for the concept of washing. There is *nīptō* which was used of washing only a part of the body, such as the hands, face, and feet. This word is translated "wash" in each occurrence in this passage. The second word is *louō* which meant to bathe the body. It referred to a thorough washing of the entire body. It is used in verse 10 and is translated "He who has bathed (*louō*) needs only to wash (*nīptō*) his feet." When Peter refused to allow the Lord to wash (*nīptō*) his feet, the Lord responded, "If I do not wash (*nīptō*) you, you have no part (fellowship) with Me." He was not denying Peter the possibility of salvation or relationship with Him. The issue was intimate fellowship. For fellowship to occur, there must be daily cleansing through honest confession of all known sin (1 John 1:9). When we confess, He, the Lord Jesus, is faithful to forgive and cleanse us (wash our feet).

Unbelief hinders relationship, but love provides a means for relationship (13:10-11). In verse 10, the Lord made a distinction between being bathed and having one's feet washed by the Lord. In either case, the Lord is the one who does the cleansing, we only appropriate it by faith and obedience to the issue involved.

The one who is bathed is the one who has trusted in Christ as Savior. The result is a total cleansing—one with lasting results. This is emphasized in the tense used in the Greek text. "Has bathed" is a perfect tense which looks at action completed with results going on in the present. Once we are saved, we don't need another total bath, only the daily cleansing from the sins that occur as we walk down the dusty and dirty streets of life. The bath of the cleansing work of the cross through faith in Christ is more than sufficient for whatever life may bring (Rom. 8:31-39) and brings all believers into the new relationship of children of God (John 1:12).

The daily washing through confession is needed for the privilege of fellowship and the power of Christ through the control of the Spirit in one's life. All but Judas, who would betray the Lord, had trusted in the Savior and all were clean in the sense of a bath of salvation from sin's penalty. They all, however, needed—and would need throughout their lives on earth—daily cleansing to maintain fellowship.

**Exhortation and Application
(13:12-17)**

As Christ had cleansed and forgiven them, so they would need to do the same for one another and for all believers. All that they had seen exemplified in His life was absolutely essential in their relationship to each other and to their purpose in the world (cf. Gal. 6:1f; Eph. 4:32; John 13:35).

**Summary of Spiritual Truths
Illustrated by the Foot Washing Example**

- (1) Knowing who we are and resting in what God is doing is vital to serving others (Rom.12:3; Eph. 1:3).
- (2) We cannot fellowship with the Lord as a believer with unwashed feet, i.e., without honest and consistent confession of sin.
- (3) We cannot have a relationship with the Lord apart from personal faith in Christ.
- (4) When we sin, we do not need to be bathed all over again—we do not lose our salvation.
- (5) With Christlike humility, we are to serve one another (Phil. 2:3-5; Mk. 10:43-45).
- (6) We are to forgive others as Christ forgives us (Eph. 4:32).
- (7) We are to help restore fellow believers in Christ as the Lord restores us (Gal. 6:1f).

Appendix 5: An Overview of the Forgiveness of Believers

Introduction

In the New Testament there are a number of key passages which are important to the subject of sin and forgiveness for the child of God.

Acts 24:16 In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4 But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:28-29 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

1 John 1:5-2:2 And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

1 John 3:19-22 We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

The Old Testament is not silent on this subject and adds to our understanding of forgiveness for the believer. Some key passages are Genesis 3 and the responses of Adam and Eve who tried to cover their sin by blame and their own solution of fig leaves. In addition to those below, compare also Psalm 32:1-7 and 51:1-13.

Psalms 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Psalms 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

Proverbs 20:27 The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, Searching all the innermost parts of his being.

Proverbs 28:13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? 10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

There are three needs involved in forgiveness:

- *Examination* (1 Cor. 11:28)
- *Self-judgment* (1 Cor. 11:31)
- *Confession* (1 John 1:9)

The above passages from the Old and New Testaments amplify and clarify this whole element of forgiveness and our responsibility regarding personal sin. From these passages, a number of important principles emerge.

The Problems We Face

- Inherent sinfulness with a bent for foolishness or the disease of self-management (Prov. 4:23; Jer. 17:5; 1 John 1:8; cf. Isa. 2:6-8 with 1:3-4).
- The delusions and temptations of Satan to tempt us to sin. We should be aware that the key goal of Satan, regardless of the sin or the temptation, is to get us to act independently of God.
- Defilement as we walk in an evil world using human solutions (John 13:1f; 1 John 1:9).
- This defilement and the use of human strategies form a barrier to fellowship, growth, and honest change from the inside out (Isa. 2:6; 30:1-2; 50:10-11; with 59:1-2).

Unconfessed **known** sin in the life *constitutes negative volition* to the leading and control of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jam. 4:17; Rom. 14:23). It *grieves* His person (Eph. 4:30), *quenches* His power (1 Thess. 5:19), causes God to *ignore our prayer requests* (Ps. 66:18), and *cuts us off* from experiencing much of the blessing and power of God (Prov. 28:13).

Our bent for self-management and control, and our failure to recognize this and deal with it, not only creates a barrier to fellowship with God but it creates a barrier to real inward change. We devise methods by which we can appear and act religious on the outside (cf. Isa. 29:13) while we seek to manage our own lives by handling our fears, insecurities, and frustrations with our own strategies (our man-made firebrands) rather than with God's resources (cf. Isa. 50:10-11; Jer. 2:13).

The Needs We Have

Examination

We each need not a morbid preoccupation with self, but a daily inside look at our lives, our patterns of behavior, our strategies for living, and our feelings, fears, and attitudes (cf. Ps. 139:23-24; Prov. 20:27; 1 Cor. 11:28f).

Honesty

An inside look is useless without honesty with God and with self. Duplicity or deceit by way of self-justification or just plain denial through which we seek to cover up our attitudes and behavior is the enemy of spiritual growth and fellowship with God (cf. Ps. 32:2b; 51:6; 15:1-2; Prov. 24:12; 21:2; Luke 16:15).

Confession

Honest examination is needed for the purpose of confession in the form of genuine repentance—specific acknowledgment of all known sins with a commitment to change by God’s grace through faith.

But what is confession? “It is saying the same thing about sin as God does. It is having the same perspective on that sin as God does. This must include more than simply rehearsing the sin, for God’s perspective would also include forsaking that sin. Therefore to confess includes an attitude of forsaking that sin.”¹

Vital to self-judgment and confession is the need for a commitment to allow God to change us from the inside out or at the core of our lives through faith, not in our own strategies or even for our own purposes, i.e., to make life work so we can be happy, but by faith in His resources, the Word, the control of the Spirit, prayer, and even the trials of life (James 1:2-4).

Also crucial to biblical change through confession and dependence on the Spirit of God is a biblical view of sin. We particularly need to understand that the root of sin in all its various shades and colors is the sin of self-management. Self-management is the culprit that sprouts up like a weed and produces the other categories of sin with which we deal. Here is an issue that is often either not understood or ignored because the hardest thing for all of us to do is to relinquish control.

We tend to confess the surface sins, the obvious, but we fail to see them for what they really are, the fruit of a deeper problem of sin that we typically want to disregard, indeed, one that we want to overlook, one that is at the heart of man’s sinfulness—the desire to run our own lives, to live independently through our human strategies for life.

Categories of Sin

- (1) **Sins of Commission**—doing what we should not.
- (2) **Sins of Omission**—failing to do what we should.

¹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 302f.

Or

(1) **Overt Sin**—murder, fornication, theft, manipulating others, and sins of the tongue such as lying, criticism, murmuring, nagging, foul language, gossip.

(2) **Mental Attitude Sins**—resentment, anxiety, hatred, fear, pride, sinful desires like coveting.

(3) **Root Sins**—Self-management sins, failing of the grace of God, human substitutes (religionism, secularism, materialism, human strategies for handling life, defense and escape mechanisms, etc.).

Therefore, in light of the effects of sin and self-controlling strategies on our fellowship with the Lord and our capacity to change, we need to:

(1) Examine our lives regularly in the light of God’s Word through study and meditating on the Word.

(2) Confess, acknowledge specific sins, as they are revealed to us by the tools God uses (the Spirit, the Word, failures, people, trials).

(3) Trust God’s promise to forgive us when we confess sin and know that our sins are forgiven.

(4) Draw upon our resources in Christ to enable us to deal with our sinful nature and those areas of foolishness that produced the sin, draw near to God, to make Him our refuge and source of life.

The Purpose We Need to Embrace

Personal examination followed by confession of sin is designed to stop sinful behavior, but it really only does so when it draws us to God in such a way that it increases our dependence on Him and His solutions for life and our sin. Confession is never to excuse sin until next time, nor is self-examination to make us aware of ourselves for a better identity. It is to move us toward God and change our character. This is the point of 1 John 1:8-2:2; Ps. 119:59; 139:23-24; Proverbs 20:27; 28:13 and Jeremiah 17:1f.

Proverbs 28:13 says, “he who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.” The word “transgression” certainly includes any sinful pattern, and “conceals” includes the tactics people use to ignore, justify, or deny sin. One excuse we often hear and we are all perhaps prone to use is: “That’s just the way I am.” The implication is that the weakness, etc., is someone else’s fault and we can’t change because this problem is a part of our makeup. But God says we can change because He has provided for us in Christ.

Note how the broad and sweeping statement, “forgive me of all my sin,” can be a means of ignoring or concealing specific sin in our lives. Such a prayer may be a means of accepting some sin as part of our lifestyle. When we fail to identify our sins first by examination and then by honest, sincere confession, we conceal them.

The person who conceals his sin, our verse tells us, “shall not prosper.” The Hebrew text means that he habitually cannot prosper. So long as he continues to ignore or make excuses for his sin, he will not find the peace of God, nor real happiness, and certainly not spiritual success. The Hebrew word for “prosper” is *tsaleach*. In the Old testament it is used of the person who finds prosperity through the work of God in and on his behalf because he has sought the Lord and followed Him (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:3; 2 Chron. 26:5, 31:21). On the other hand, when we hide or ignore our sin, we cut ourselves off from God’s purpose, blessing, and strength. This means we forfeit deliverance, peace, rest, and spiritual prosperity, the abundant life, regardless of our external religious behavior (cf. Ps. 50:16-23; 66:18; Prov. 28:9).

The second half of Proverbs 28:13 (quoted above) gives us a special promise if two things are done.

The Conditions

We must confess our sin. As explained above, this means we must honestly acknowledge all known sin, admit to ourselves and to God that what we have done and are doing (the sinful pattern for instance) is wrong, sinful, and hinders our fellowship with God.

The sinful pattern is also to be forsaken, and, according to the analogy of Scripture, this means replaced with godly alternatives (cf. Eph. 4:24-32). In the Hebrew text, “forsakes” is a participle of continuous action which would include the process of learning how to overcome and leave the sinful pattern behind. It takes time and growth to be able to deal with some of our deep-seated patterns, but we must be committed to the process and the pain involved.

The Promise

God promises such a person will find compassion. The words “find compassion” in the Hebrew mean “to love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate.” It connotes a special love, mercy, or compassion for the helpless, for those who, because of their special problem or weakness, need the uplifting love and aid of another. This has in view our natural helplessness and sinful condition which causes us to stumble and sin, even when, as Paul stresses in Romans 7:15, we do not want to sin. So this promise of compassion means not only forgiveness, but the blessing of divine love and provision: the supply and power of God to overcome and to change.

We must see, therefore, that the purpose of confession is change, deliverance from sin, and this requires being specific about the sin in our lives. Dealing with known sin and discovering these self-protective strategies, etc., is critical to our spiritual health, to real change, and our daily well being. It removes guilt, gives peace, is a means to restoration to fellowship with God, the filling of the Holy Spirit, effective prayer (Ps. 66:18), spiritual illumination, and a loving and ministering relationship with others.

Appendix 6: Key Verses on the “Daily” Emphasis of Scripture

Verses Using “Daily”

Psalm 68:19. God is committed to our care, deliverance, and direction (1 Pet. 5:6-7). He is our burden bearer, but our need is to learn to take our burdens to the Lord daily (Pr. 8:34) in humble submission to His sovereign purposes.

Proverbs 8:34. Blessing is promised to those who listen, but the listening that leads to blessing is a daily matter of waiting on the Lord as our Master and Provider.

Matthew 6:11. It shows our need of God’s sustenance is daily as is also our need of prayer for God’s supply.

Luke 9:23. Following the Lord is a daily responsibility which involves the subordination of my desires and will to His. For this to take place effectively, we need daily time with Him, waiting at His throne.

Acts 17:11. This verse gives God’s estimate of those who daily examine the Word, and shows the mindset or attitude that is needed for effective time with God: eagerness to see what He has said in His Word. Compare the following verses—2 Cor 8:11-12; 2 Cor. 8:19; 2 Cor. 9:2. Daily is stressed in Acts 17:11 of the Jews in Berea who, under the influence and preparation of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of Paul and Silas, were ready and eager to daily dig into the Scriptures. “Readiness” refers to the idea of enthusiasm and devoted zeal which is the result of some kind of preparation which produces the readiness or willingness and this in turn promotes what we do.

1 Corinthians 15:31. Compare the context of vs. 32 and our motives. Could there be a connection between time alone with the Lord daily and dying daily to selfish motives and self-dependent living, etc.?

Verses Using “Today”

Psalm 95:7-9. Do you see any connection with verses 7 and following and verses 1-6? Is there a connection between God as our Shepherd, hearing His voice, and the hardening of the heart? Is verse 9 the result of a hardened heart? How do we test God?

Hebrews 3:7, 13, 15 and Hebrews 4:7. What is the context in which the author of Hebrews quotes the Old Testament passage?

James 4:13. What are the implications of this verse to one’s daily time with the Lord? We all make daily decisions for which we need God’s guidance and submission to His will. If I am not daily taking time to get alone with the Lord for fellowship so I can also take the issues of my life to Him, then I may become guilty of presuming on the Lord and seeking to run my own life independently of Him. Compare verses 14-17.

Verses Using “In the Morning”

Psalm 5:3. This verse expresses David’s resolve, based on his understanding of his own insufficiency, to spend time with God to fortify his mind, heart, and will.

Psalm 55:17. This verse shows time with God is not just a morning affair (1 Thess. 5:17). It shows that David was resolved to take his burdens to the Lord. We should feel free to express our feelings to God rather than repress or suppress our emotions. He is a father kind of God who knows our frame, that we are dust, and cares for us a father does his children. We should always feel free to express our pain to the Lord. We see this pattern often in the Psalms, but when it comes to expressing our feelings to people, the principles and purposes of Scripture should control the way our feelings are expressed. We should express them in a timely manner, in love, and with a view to the edification of those involved (Pro. 15:23; 25:11-13; Eph. 4:29).

Psalm 143:8. Note the categories or aspects involved in our daily time with the Lord—worship in praise, thanksgiving and acknowledgment of God’s grace and faithfulness, prayer for illumination, study of the Word, prayer for help.

Psalm 88:13; Psalm 92:2; Psalm 119:62

Isaiah 50:4. “The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens *Me* morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.” The NIV reads, “an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary,” and the KJV has “the tongue of the learned, that I might know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.”

What are some of the cause and effect relationships that we can learn from this passage in our daily relationship with the Lord and our purpose for life? (a) The Lord God must be the ultimate source of instruction. This clearly stresses the need of intimacy with the Lord, of firsthand listening (cf. Psa. 119:102). (b) Daily intimacy with God draws the heart closer to God and imparts a ministering heart. We should note the unselfish, other-oriented nature of this verse and the daily time with God. (c) We see in this the need of consistency, morning by morning. (d) We also see in this the concept of a listening ear. Today, we are too busy to really take time to hear.

Lamentations 3:23. Note the context here fore and aft. What is new every morning? How are they made new? Waiting on the Lord and seeking Him as our portion every morning.

Mark 1:35. Who departed to a lonely place? When did He depart? Under what conditions? If He felt the need for this, how much more shouldn’t we?

Verses on Strength and Liberty Through Daily Fellowship

Psalm 119:45, 104-105, 114, 127-128, 133

Verses on Inclining the Heart Toward the Lord

Since the dailies are a means to inclining one’s heart to God, the following verses are also helpful to meditate on: Psalm 119:36, 112; 141:4; Proverbs 2:2; 4:2; 5:1; 22:17; Isaiah 55:3; Jeremiah 7:24, 26; 11:8; 17:23; Heb. 4:16; James 4:8.

Appendix 7: Seven Subtle Snares of Worldliness¹

1. Materialism

- Explanation—Matter is all that matters.
- Its Distortion—Deformed view of the world.
- The Snare—I am what I own.
- The Effect—Affluence, accumulation, occupied with things, consumer mentality, neglect spiritual things.

2. Activism

- Explanation—I must fill my life with activity.
- Its Distortion—Deformed view of work. Seeking from work what only God can give.
- The Snare—I am what I do, what I produce.
- The Effect—Neurotic, consuming ministry. Seeking significance from work rather than from the Lord.

3. Individualism

- Explanation—I must depend on no one but myself.
- Its Distortion—Deformed view of self. Produces a me-ism society.
- The Snare—I am the source of my own life.
- The Effect—Loneliness, resistance to authority, inability to work on a team.

4. Conformism

- Explanation—Recognition by others is primary and necessary.
- Its Distortion—Deformed view of the importance or the opinions of others.
- The Snare—I am who others recognize me to be.
- The Effect—Praise dependent, seeking significance from the approval of others.

¹ This information was adapted from material in *Defeating the Dragons of the World, Resisting the Seduction of False Values*, by Stephen D. Eyre, InterVarsity Press.

5. Relativism

- Explanation—It matters not what you believe as long as you believe something.
- Its Distortion—Deformed view of truth. Refuses to recognize revealed truth.
- The Snare—I am whatever I want to believe.
- The Effect—Subjective approach to life, to Scripture; experience oriented, uncertain faith, emotional.

6. Secularism

- Explanation—Man has no need of religion. Man is sufficient.
- Its Distortion—Deformed view of man. Fails to take into account man's sinfulness.
- The Snare—I am sufficient to handle my affairs.
- The Effect—Sunday only kind of Christian. Fail to integrate God into all areas of life or reject God completely.

7. Religionism

- Explanation—If I am good, go to church, etc., I will be okay.
- Its Distortion—Deformed view of God.
- The Snare—I am okay because of my religious works and activities.
- The Effect—Have some facts about God, engaged in some religious activity, but lacking in inner reality. Fail to integrate God into all areas of life.

Biblical Solutions

1. Materialism

- Biblical Value—Spiritual and eternal values, treasures.
- Responsibility—Renewal, reevaluation, trust in God rather than in things.
- Result—Ability to follow God, ministry, laying up eternal treasures.

2. Activism

- Biblical Value—Christ-directed ministry, His initiative.
- Responsibility—Fellowship, prayer, sensitivity, openness.

- Result—Peace, fruitfulness, rest, absence of burnout.

3. Individualism

- Biblical Value—Body life, co-worker, no man an island.
- Responsibility—Team work, submission to others, loving one another.
- Result—Edification of the body.

4. Conformism

- Biblical Value—Biblical sense of who I am in Christ. Accepted, belong, capable.
- Responsibility—Learn to live as unto the Lord while resting in Him for my significance.
- Result—Content, relaxed, able to love others and put them above self.

5. Relativism

- Biblical Value—Biblical absolutes based on the index of the Bible.
- Responsibility—Objective Bible study based on exegesis, not eisegesis.
- Result—Confidence, divine guidance, knowing truth which gives freedom.

6. Secularism

- Biblical Value—Biblical view of God and man.
- Responsibility—Total dependence on God.
- Result—Experience God in all areas of life.

7. Religionism

- Biblical Value—Finished work of Christ plus obedience.
- Responsibility—Rest in Christ's work, honesty, openness, worship, faith.
- Result—Ability to truly love God and people.

Appendix 8:
Soul Nourishment First
by
George Müller

It has pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost, for more than fourteen years. The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to *have my soul happy in the Lord*. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, or how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit. Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experiential communion with the Lord.

I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon his precious Word, was, to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching as it were into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and then my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. Thus also the Lord is pleased to communicate unto me that which, either very soon after or at a later time, I have found to become food for other believers, though it was not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word that I gave myself to meditation, but for the profit of my own inner man.

The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: Formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer, except when I felt my soul to be more than usually barren, in which case I read the Word of God for food, or for refreshment, or for a revival and renewal of my inner man, before I gave myself to prayer. But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour, on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc., and often, after having suffered much from

wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then began really to pray. I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart, first being nourished by the truth, being brought into experiential fellowship with God, I then speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point. In no book did I ever read about it. No public ministry ever brought the matter before me. No private intercourse with a brother stirred me up to this matter. And yet, now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything, that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is, to obtain food for his inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. We should take food for that, as every one must allow. Now, what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts. When we pray, we speak to God. Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably meditate, with God's blessing, though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man. Thus there is far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had time previously for meditation. I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God, I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials, in various ways, than I had ever had before; and after having now above fourteen years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it. In addition to this I generally read, after family prayer, larger portions of the Word of God, when I still pursue my practice of reading regularly onward in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes in the New Testament, and sometimes in the Old, and for more than twenty-six years I have proved the blessedness of it. I take, also, either then or at other parts of the day, time more especially for prayer.

How different, when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning, from what it is when without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials, and the temptations of the day come upon one.

¹

May 9 1841.

George Müller (1805-1898) was converted from a life of self-indulgence in 1825 while a student in Prussia. In the years that followed he founded the SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTION and made a life's work of establishing homes for the orphaned poor. His life was characterized by his remarkable trust in God to supply the necessities of life for his numerous dependents. Prayer was his life-line, and he proved the life of total dependence on God alone to be the practical, workable outcome of the Christian life.

¹ Taken from a tract published by "The Pilgrim's Way," Inc., 115 North 85th Street, Seattle, WA 98103.

Suggested Reading

- Profiting from the Word, Arthur Pink
- Daily Communion with God, Matthew Henry
- George Müller of Bristol, A. T. Pierson

Appendix 9: The Middle Voice of 1 Corinthians 13:8

There are some today who maintain that the New Testament Greek has abandoned the classical use of the middle voice in which the subject is acting in relation to himself or itself in some way. Such a view undermines the argument, in part, at least presented by Ryrie. For instance, in a footnote Bill Mounce writes:

Many grammars say the middle is “reflexive,” but we are uncomfortable with the term. The “direct reflexive” was common in Classical Greek but not in Koine. The only one in the New Testament is at Matt 27:5, but Moule (*Idiom Book*, 24) disputes even this one.¹

In another footnote he writes:

A good example of the problems caused by assuming that the classical use of the middle is always present is found in 1 Corinthians 13:8, where Paul says that the gifts of tongues “will cease” (παύσονται). It is argued by some ... Paul is saying the gift of tongues will cease in and of itself.

Regardless of one’s views on the topic of spiritual gifts, we feel this is an incorrect use of the middle. It assumes that the middle here has the classical usage, even though *BAGD* lists no self-interest meaning for the middle of παύω. And when one looks at the other eight occurrences of the verb, it is seen that the verb is a middle deponent and not reflexive. The best example is in Luke 8:24, where Jesus calmed the sea. “Jesus rebuked the wind and calmed the water, and *they ceased* and became calm” ... The wind and water certainly did not “cease” in and of themselves. The middle of this verb does not designate “self-interest”; it is deponent (deponent means the verb is middle or passive in form, but active in meaning).² (Emphasis mine.)

But Mounce’s arguments, and those of others, are unwarranted and simply do not fit all the facts. In *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Dan Wallace does an excellent job of answering the arguments that deny the force of the middle voice in the New Testament and especially in 1 Corinthians 8:13. Wallace writes:

One’s view of the nature of NT Greek has strong implications for this use of the middle voice. If one thinks that NT Greek has abandoned the rules of classical Greek, then h/she would not put much emphasis on the force of the middle voice in a given passage. Moule, for example, argues that “as a rule, it is far from easy to come down from the fence with much decisiveness on either side in an exegetical problem if it depends on the voice” (Moule, *Idiom Book*, 24).

However, if one thinks that the NT Greek has, for the most part, retained the rules of classical Greek, then he/she will see more significance in the use of the middle voice. On this side of the fence, Zerwick writes: “The ‘*indirect*’ use of the middle voice ...

¹ William Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 224.

² Ibid.

especially shows the writer to have retained a feeling for even the finer distinctions between the sense of active and middle forms” (Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 75).

It is our contention that a careful examination of the usage of a particular middle voice verb in Hellenistic Greek will shed light on how much can be made of the voice. What is frequently at stake, grammatically speaking, is whether the middle is to be considered indirect or deponent ...³

In discussing debatable and exegetically significant texts, Wallace has this to say about 1 Corinthians 13:8:

If the voice of the verb is significant, then Paul is saying either that tongues will cut themselves off (direct middle) or, more likely, cease of their own accord, i.e., “die out” without an intervening agent (indirect middle). It may be significant that with reference to prophecy and knowledge, Paul used a different verb (καταργέω) and put it in the *passive* voice. In vs. 9-10, the argument continues: “for we *know* in part and we *prophesy* in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial shall be done away {καταργηθήσονται}.” Here again, Paul uses the same passive verb he had used with prophecy and knowledge and he speaks of the verbal counterpart to the nominal “prophecy” and “knowledge.” Yet he does *not* speak about *tongues* being done away “when the perfect comes.” The implication *may* be that tongues were to have “died out” of their own *before* the perfect comes. The middle voice in this text, then, must be wrestled with if one is to come to any conclusions about when tongues would cease.

The dominant opinion among NT scholars today, however is that παύσονται is not an indirect middle. The argument is that παύω in the future is deponent, and that the change in verbs is merely stylistic. If so, then this text makes no comment about tongues ceasing on their own, apart from the intervention of “the perfect.” There are three arguments against the deponent view, however. First, if παύσονται is deponent, then the second principal part (future form) should not occur in the *active* voice in Hellenistic Greek. But it does, and it does so frequently. Hence, the verb *cannot* be considered deponent. Second, sometimes Luke 8:24 is brought into the discussion: Jesus rebuked the wind and sea and they *ceased* (ἐπαύσαντο, aorist middle) from their turbulence. The argument is that inanimate objects cannot cease of their own accord; therefore, the middle of παύω is equivalent to a passive. But this is a misunderstanding of the literary features of the passage; If the wind and sea cannot cease voluntarily, why does Jesus *rebuke* them? And why do the disciples speak of the wind and sea as having *obeyed* Jesus? The elements are personified in Luke 8 and their ceasing from turbulence is therefore presented as volitional obedience to Jesus. If anything, Luke 8:23 supports the indirect middle view. Third, the idea of a deponent verb is that it is middle in form, but *active* in meaning. But παύσονται is surrounded by *passives* in 1 Cor 13:8, not actives. The real force of παύω in the middle is *intransitive*, while in the active it is transitive. In the active it has the force of stopping some other object; in the middle, it ceases from its own activity.

³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 420.

In sum, the deponent view is based on some faulty assumptions as to the labeling of *παύσσονται* as deponent, the parallel in Luke 8:24, and even the meaning of deponency. Paul seems to be making a point that is more than stylistic in his shift in verbs ...⁴

Obviously, this does not tell us when tongues will cease, but it certainly gives credibility to Ryrie's argument as expressed earlier, and it answers the arguments of those who try to deny the force of the middle voice of the Greek text in 1 Corinthians 13:8.

⁴ Wallace, p. 422.