

God's Training Program for Believers

Preparation for Living

by William Gibbs

God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living

Copyright © 2014 by William Dixon Gibbs, III
All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ®, *NIV* ®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible ®, copyright © 2005, by Biblical Studies Press, LLC. (www.bible.org) All rights reserved. Scripture quoted by permission.

Dedicated to all believers everywhere
who want to grow in knowledge
and grace.

God's Training Program for Believers:
Preparation for Living

Table of Contents

Excerpt from an Article by J. Hampton Keathley, III.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Section A: First Remarks.....	2
Section B: Seeking God First.....	2
Chapter 2: Knowing the Plan of God and the Will of God.....	7
Section A: God Controls Everything.....	8
Section B: Knowing God's Will.....	9
Section C: God's Specific Will for Each Believer.....	11
Section D: Free Will and Liberty.....	13
Section E: The Truth Will Set You Free.....	16
Chapter 3: Training in the Word.....	19
Section A: Introduction to Training in the Word.....	20
Section B: The Purpose of the Word.....	21
Section C: Jesus' Growth Pattern.....	23
Section D: The Command to Grow.....	24
Section E: Avoid False Teachers.....	25
Section F: The Holy Spirit in Learning.....	27
Section G: The Results of Learning.....	29
Section H: The Results of Not Learning.....	32
Section I: Having a Love for the Word.....	33
Section J: Getting and Applying Wisdom.....	34
Section K: Guidelines for Studying.....	37
Chapter 4: Growing Faith.....	41
Section A: Faith Works.....	42
Section B: Living by Faith.....	45
Section C: Faith for Training.....	49
Section D: Faith Verses.....	52
Chapter 5: The War Against God.....	55
Section A: Satan's Fall.....	56
Section B: Earth: Creation, Spoilage, and Restoration.....	58
Section C: Angels are Watching.....	63
Section D: The Fall of Man and the Fall of Angels.....	66

Section E: Satan's Tactics.....	68
Section F: Satan's Objectives.....	74
Section G: Satan's Mission.....	80
Section H: Whose World is It?.....	83
Section I: Christ Defeated Satan.....	86
Section J: Dealing with Satan.....	90
Chapter 6: The World.....	95
Section A: Pride and the World.....	96
Section B: We are Foreigners Here.....	99
Section C: The World Opposes Us.....	101
Section D: Chasing After the Wind.....	103
Section E: Seeking Fulfillment in the World.....	107
Section F: The World Promises Success.....	110
Section G: The World is Satan's Kingdom.....	114
Section H: The Wicked May Prosper in the World.....	115
Chapter 7: Our Nature.....	119
Section A: Human Good vs Divine Good.....	120
Section B: Sin vs Works.....	123
Section C: Our Sinful Nature.....	127
Section D: The Forgiveness of Sin.....	131
Section E: Consequences for Unforgiven Sin.....	141
Section F: Stop Trying.....	149
Chapter 8: Our Spiritual Walk.....	153
Section A: Maturity and Spirituality.....	154
Section B: God's Provision.....	167
Section C: Jesus and the Holy Spirit.....	171
Section D: Christ our Example.....	173
Section E: Glorifying God.....	175
Section F: The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.....	176
Section G: Functions of the Holy Spirit.....	180
Section H: The Word vs the Holy Spirit.....	182
Section I: Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit.....	183
Chapter 9: Position and Condition.....	191
Section A: Distinguishing Position and Condition.....	192
Section B: The New Man.....	194
Chapter 10: Outcomes of Spirituality and Maturity.....	197
Section A: Exaltation of God.....	198
Section B: Changes in the Heart.....	200
Section C: Operation of Spiritual Gifts.....	202

Section D: Benefits of Spirituality and Maturity.....	204
Chapter 11: The Training Program.....	211
Section A: Prosperity and Suffering for the Righteous and for the Wicked.....	212
Section B: Do Miracles Strengthen Us?.....	214
Section C: Responses to Suffering.....	216
Section D: Grace Before Judgment.....	220
Section E: Temptation.....	222
Section F: The Gifts and the Giver.....	225
Section G: The Lessons of Life.....	227
Section H: Revisiting Discipline.....	240
Section I: Perfection through Suffering.....	241
Section J: Scriptures on Training.....	246
Final Statement.....	251
Endnotes.....	252
About the Author.....	255

Excerpt from an Article by J. Hampton Keathley, III

Why me? Why now? What is God doing? Suffering is a tool God uses to get our attention and to accomplish His purposes in our lives. It is designed to build our trust in the Almighty, but suffering requires the right response if it is to be successful in accomplishing God's purposes. Suffering forces us to turn from trust in our own resources to living by faith in God's resources.

Suffering is not in itself virtuous, nor is it a sign of holiness. It is also not a means of gaining points with God, or of subduing the flesh (as in asceticism). When it is possible, suffering is to be avoided. Christ avoided suffering unless it meant acting in disobedience to the Father's will.

"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 men may not discover anything *that will be* after him." (Eccl. 7:14)

The following questions are designed to help us "**consider**" in the day of adversity:

- (1) How am I responding to it?
- (2) How *should* I respond to it? (emphasis mine)
- (3) Am I learning from it?
- (4) Does my response demonstrate faith, love for God and for others, Christ-like character, values, commitment, priorities, etc.?
- (5) How can God use it in my life? (Endnote 1)

And the God of grace,
who called you to his eternal glory
in Christ,
after you have suffered
a little while,
will himself restore you
and make you strong,
firm and steadfast.

—*1 Peter 5:10*—

Chapter 1

Introduction

In This Chapter...

A. First Remarks

B. Seeking God's Blessings

A. First Remarks

We take our view of life largely from the world. We see things in a superficial light, distorted by this thing we call “reality”. The world’s reality is not the same as God’s, and Satan wants us to incorporate the world’s perspective into our thinking and assume that “what we see is what we get”. The best things in creation are not seen, and may go with only a whisper of sensation to us, but their importance to us is paramount. The purpose of this book is to promote a divine view of events so that we can see what God is doing in the world and in our lives as He prepares us for service in His kingdom.

Our perception of suffering and blessings has been confused by the world’s view that pain and loss are completely bad, and ease and wealth are inherently good. This is one of the biggest lies Satan has ever perpetrated on the human race. Our goal is to reframe our concepts of “good” experience and “bad” experience, so that we will be able to endure God’s rigorous training and receive maximum benefit from it.

By the time we are through with this book, you will be able to understand the reason for tests and trials, and you will see events in your life as opportunities to grow and advance. Your confidence in God’s plan will be increased, and your fellowship with the Holy Spirit of Christ will be more consistent. This will curtail any temptation you may have to become bitter and resentful underneath God’s intense training. God’s life-prep program is not easy, but the resources He provides to help you get through it can actually make it a time of joy and peace, despite the hardships and difficulties. And the outcome following the training is unimaginably great.

If we *want* God and His truth and His life, we will enter God’s training with hope and enthusiasm. Still, we must acknowledge the free-fall feeling that happens with intense drill and training, so—at the outset—it may be good for us to recall that familiar warning that is heard before a crash landing: BRACE!!

B. Seeking God First

We want blessings from God, sometimes more than we want God Himself. We want what He offers, and hope to find any shortcut to blessings, without developing a close relationship with the Provider of them. Both believers and unbelievers are at some stage of awareness of God, and there are certain processes for each of them that enable them to reach the point of experiencing God’s benevolent and gracious provision. Unbelievers must first of all become believers, and then all believers must follow a protocol for entering and maintaining a close relationship with God. To receive what God wants to give, we must believe in the ONE who gives, not only at salvation, but throughout the new life we get when we are saved. Without following the protocol for receiving God’s best (described in this book), we will not experience the abundant life He promises.

We begin early in life with an awareness of God, and then we approach this awareness with either a negative or positive response. Ecclesiastes 3:11 gives us this: “He has made everything beautiful in its

time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” We see right away that God has placed within the hearts of every human being a clear yearning for eternity...for God. He has made us curious about His own reality, and caused us to be aware of His existence. Whenever we encounter this awareness of eternity, we make a decision at some core level to either seek to know more about God, or to walk away from our own inclination to learn more about Him. Romans 1:18-21 describes this condition perfectly, saying this:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Whenever we confront our own awareness of God, which is “plain” to us, we exercise our volition and express our own desires by deciding to either pursue what we recognize, or to squelch it and suppress any tendency to invite God into our lives. This is the point at which we will choose to move toward God or away from Him, and if we persist in a reluctance to embrace what we sense within ourselves—that God is real—the awareness of God will subside until it is completely gone, and then nothing will change our minds about Him. We will be without God and without hope in the world, and we can blame no one for this condition except ourselves.

According to John 1:9 the light of Jesus Christ shines throughout humanity, and is available to every man. The gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that we can have eternal life simply by believing in Him, is offered to all, and no one who seeks God will be denied access to this gospel. Salvation is open to all who desire it. But each person must first acknowledge God and recognize his need for Him. When God sees this condition in one’s volition, God is then obligated to get the gospel to him, so he can believe in Jesus Christ, and join the royal family of God.

We will have much to say about what happens after salvation, but as a preview of these studies, it seems appropriate to cite a condition that exists after salvation: When we are saved by believing in Christ, thus becoming a child of God, we are still at choice, and we will—as believers—either want more of God, or drift into apathy and indifference to our heavenly Father. This will result in our lapsing into a state known as “reversionism”, and even into apostasy and unbelief. There are ways to prevent this, as we will examine thoroughly at some point. It must be made clear that we will never lose our salvation, but we can lose the “life” that it offers.

It is right to seek God, and to anticipate His blessings when we do, because He *wants* us to seek Him. Matthew 6:33 tells us to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”, and that all the things we need to function and grow will be provided. These things come to us, not because we are pure or strong or competent, but because we SEEK God. God wants us to *want Him*, and He will not enter where He is not invited. The place where we seek God is in His Word, whereby we listen and learn and become wise, with the prospect that we will ultimately apply His truth to make our lives rich and meaningful. Proverbs 8:32-36 tells us that we will be blessed with “favor” when we *seek* Him. (This is what you are

doing as you read these words.) Consider this passage which enunciates the process clearly:

Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.

There is no blessing without seeking God. On the other hand, when we seek God, the blessings of heaven open to us. This is confirmed in Ps. 37:4, which says, “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” When we “seek” we want to get closer to God, to grow in His wisdom and draw strength and comfort from Him. But the process for this is specific, as we shall see. We gain LIFE from closeness to God, as per Prov. 3:1-2, and 7-8, which we present here:

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

This passage contains more than a superficial reading suggests, but suffice it to say that seeking God in His Word and in prayer will bring to us the blessings we seek. There is no other way to access the blessings that are approved by God for dispensation to us...and these are the only ones that are truly worth having. Later we will see how understanding and applying Scripture, and following the prescriptions for fellowship and maturity, qualify us for unimagined benefits from God’s grace. It all begins with a desire...a decision...to search for God. The object of our search is God Himself, and not just blessings, but when we move closer to Him, blessings will come...in a form and at a time that is designed by God, and that will be the ultimate *best* for us.

The meaning of “blessings” and how these are distributed will be a topic seen throughout this book. You may be surprised at God’s definition of “blessings”, and may have—by the time we are finished—a completely revised notion of what it means to be “blessed”.

Special Note to Readers

It is important for you to understand at the outset that you, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, have the Holy Spirit inside of you. He is your Teacher. I believe that there is *one* truth from that Spirit, and that *one* interpretation of Scripture is correct. But MY interpretation of the Bible has no corner on God's truth. As long as you, or I, or anyone else, is genuinely seeking God and His truth, I believe we will find its core, and we will grow by learning what we see. Unfortunately, human energy, imagination, and, in short, our sinful natures...not to mention Satan and His world system...convene to conspire against the truth, and this explains the distortions and faulty conclusions that occur. Pride also plays a part in our embracing and holding on to concepts, especially after they have taken root. This is because—once we have articulated what we believe—we tend to coddle our own notions as if they were our own children.

All we can do is study diligently and prayerfully and seek answers in the Word. Each of us has an equal shot at understanding Scripture; I do not believe that high-level scholarship or sophisticated hermeneutics always provides the best understanding, even if great *knowledge* of one sort or another amasses. If academics alone perfected understanding, scholars would all be in agreement, which they clearly aren't. I believe it is our *wish* for the truth...our truly *wanting* God...that opens our hearts to the truth. Put simply: If you want God, you will find the truth.

In any case, screen everything you read here with a prayerful eye toward the whole of Scripture, and meticulously challenge what you read. God bless your studies and your search for wisdom. I pray that this material will increase your understanding and improve your spiritual walk.

Chapter 2

Knowing the Plan of God and the Will of God

In This Chapter...

- A. God Controls Everything*
- B. Knowing God's Will*
- C. God's Specific Will for Each Believer*
- D. Free Will and Liberty*
- E. The Truth will Set You Free*

A. God Controls Everything

God Exercises Control. Isaiah 46:10 tells us God is in control. He is aware of every detail and every condition in the universe, and He keeps it all under His control. This Isaiah passage says, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please.” There is no limit to God’s ability to maintain control, and He has a plan for everything. He sees the end of all events in this cocoon known as “time”, and he knows the finished product of every life. He has complete *foreknowledge*.

Ecclesiastes 6:10 tells us that God has named everything, including every second and every molecule. This verse says “Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he.” God has always known in full detail everything that would ever happen...every thought, every shift in the wind, every twinkle of all the stars, every blink. This is the God we are considering. Sometimes we think that God is letting things run on their own, allowing them to play themselves out “naturally”, but this is false. God coordinates every occurrence, and fits all things into His plan. A phrase in the middle of Heb. 1:3 speaks to this, describing God in the person of Jesus Christ as the One “sustaining all things by his powerful word.” “Word” here is the expression of His power. He speaks and things happen.

In fact nothing can happen in human history without God’s consent or direction. Is. 45:7 shows His power to enforce this: “I form the light and create darkness; I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.” This is what we must grasp, yet it is hard to get the concept of God’s immensity and strength. Nebuchadnezzar is a good example of this struggle to encompass the extent of God’s control, as he considered himself to be powerful and resourceful, a self-made man, and he boasted of the kingdom he had personally created. But He ignored the real Creator, and this elicited God’s correction. God sent him out to live among the foxes, without his full mental faculties and with no kingly power, for seven years. During that time, he learned the following:

At the end of this time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever....He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” Dan. 4:34b, 35b

God had told Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel that “seven times [years] would pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.” The point is established that we cannot claim credit for the things we accomplish, or the positions we occupy, as they are the product of God’s plan. There is a caveat for this truth, however, and that is the limit to God’s plan, *one which He places on Himself*. We will explain this next. For now, the lesson for us is that humility is in order, not just because it is commanded in Scripture, but because—when we picture the scope and size of God—any other response is unthinkable. The more we recognize God’s power, the more likely it is that we will come to rely on His resources, rather than our own.

Ps. 135:6 sums it up nicely: “The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.” But does this mean that He controls human behavior or thoughts or plans? The surprising answer is “no”. God does not impose His way onto ours. His way is something we must choose. This is the caveat to God’s controlling everything: He has given us choice. We will discuss free will and liberty shortly, but we first want to establish that God’s plan incorporates our choices. He knows our choices, has always known them, and plans around them.

In His sovereignty, God chose to give us choice, and He will not take that away from us, even if what we do displeases Him. He wants our movement toward Him to be a matter of OUR choice, and not a matter of His exercising His power over us. He could do that, of course, but He values our CHOOSING Him and His way, thus He has given us the right to make our own decisions...good or bad.

Only God can Do What God Does. We cannot help but marvel at the infinite wisdom of God in creating this interplay among all human events and human choices in such a way that free will is respected, while God controls outcomes from all that happens. Such a God can only be viewed in awe and reverence. God is astounding. Scripture proclaims it:

Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do. (This quotation from Isaiah 46 gives an expanded view of verse 10, seen above. Verses 8-11 are quoted here.)

God’s plan is a super-orchestration of conditions and happenings that border on the infinite. The complexity of all that must be managed by God is far beyond that which we can grasp, yet God controls it all...seamlessly and without hesitation. His plan was set in eternity past, and we can be sure we are in it, whether what we are doing corresponds with His will or opposes it. The plan is set. Our objective is to exercise our freedom to choose well within its scope. The idea presented here of God planning and our choosing has not received much attention from scholars and pastors, but our ability to choose is the *key consideration in God’s plan*. Everything He plans REVOLVES AROUND WHAT WE CHOOSE...and His foreknowledge of what we will choose. (See my book, *Bible Basics on Living in God’s Plan*, for more.)

B. Knowing God’s Will

God’s Will can be Known. God’s will can be framed and described, though our complete understanding of it can be distorted and limited, except among the most mature believers (these can probably be counted on one hand). Our criterion for an examination of God’s will is His own Word to us regarding it. For example, in 1 Tim. 2:3-4, Paul was instructing Timothy on prayer and other matters, when he inserted a statement about God’s will. The things he was urging Timothy and his followers to

do were expected to "please God our savior" (v. 3), who "wants all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (v. 4). Notice that there are two aspects of God's will: 1) that all men be saved, and 2) that there would then be a follow-up with an acquisition of a "knowledge of the truth". The first expression of His will is for unbelievers...that they would choose to believe and be saved. The second is for believers...that they would study and grow in His truth.

Choosing God's Will. The question then arises: Is God's will always done? Is everyone saved? Does every believer faithfully pursue the truth in God's Word? Of course they don't. So, if God controls everything, how would things happen that go against His will? Remember that He has given us choice, and that means we can choose negatively or positively toward God on any occasion. Unbelievers can continue in their unbelief, and believers can persist in ignoring and following God's prescriptions for living. Also, remember that God plans *around* the choices we make, and engineers events and outcomes that are interjected around our decisions. So we see readily that God's plan and God's will are not the same thing. God's plan is a constant set into place in eternity past that is being played out in this arena called "time". God's plan was fashioned in eternity past to honor our choices, while He maximizes the fulfillment of His will. God's will is the abiding condition of what God wants, which will be only partially satisfied, due to the rebelliousness and willfulness of man. So, God allows our choices, even those that run counter to His will. That is the choice He made...to give us free will...the ability to reject Him.

God's will is something we seek to understand and fulfill. His will for mankind is expressed throughout Scripture, which is why we study the Word. One passage that reflects God's will for believers is found in 3 John, verse 2. Here is what this verse says: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." This is not just idle well-wishing on the part of John. This is an inspired expression of what God wants for us, seen as a prayer penned by John. This prayer is a correct prayer, because it is recorded here as such. If it were inaccurate or inappropriate, we would have some indication of that, but it is presented here in God's Word as a legitimate prayer. This prayer is prayed "according to God's will" (1 Jn. 5:14). Thus, we see that God wants us to enjoy good health, and He desires for things to go well in our corporeal lives, while our spiritual lives ("souls") are prospering. We will look at all of God's dealings in context with His wanting us to prosper and live well.

Three Major Areas of God's Will. In considering aspects of God's will, we observe three major categories that will help us frame its operation. Here are three aspects of God's will:

1. **The view-point will of God.** God wants us to view our lives as He views them. He wants our thought-life and perspective to reflect His. Isaiah 55:7-8 distinguishes our perspective from His, saying, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." Verse 9 goes on to say that God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours. But we aspire to grasp His view and to live with His outlook.

2. **The operational will of God.** This is what God wants us to do for His glory. This aspect of God's will includes everything He requires in order for us to meet His standards and honor Him. This is the content of this book, and all books that preceded it. We want to function within the scope of His plan and His will to honor Him and to participate in the good life He wants us to have. This will be achieved only through spirituality and maturity, the two pillars of Christian living. We will explore these thoroughly.
3. **The geographical will of God.** This is the specific place where God wants us to be. Where is it that God wants me? Location and re-location are never considered apart from the view-point and operational will of God. Understanding and carrying out this will assumes spirituality and maturity.

These categories are “blanks” into which we will be entering details and procedures that will show us how to satisfy God's will, as we seek to please Him and move closer to Him.

C. God's Specific Will for Each Believer

God Has a Personalized Will for Each Believer. Once again, God has a desire for unbelievers...that they would be saved, and for believers...that they would learn all about Him and master ways to please and serve Him. His desires deal with categories of people, and are the same for all members within each category. But there is a differentiated will of God, which is the specific will that God has for each of us. As we stated earlier, many things in the plan of God do not match the will of God, because mankind exercises free will to operate independently of God's will. Much of our behavior does not match His will, yet what we do becomes part of His plan as He structures events in correspondence with our choices.

At the detailed level of our lives, we must acknowledge that each of us as individuals fail God, most of us to a great degree. We disappoint God's specific will, a pattern that will persist until we reach maturity. But the road to maturity is a long one, which must begin with an awareness that God has a specific, detailed will for each of us. He wants to see certain things in each of our lives. In other words, there are areas that God is concerned about for each of us...personally and separate from all other human beings. Specific areas of the individualized will of God include the following areas of life, along with numerous others not listed here:

- My career—the types of employment, business, or service I will occupy.
- My job—the specific location and nature of the work I do.
- My mate—the person I marry, if I marry.
- My friends—the people I develop close relationships with.
- My location—the place where I live.
- My recreation—how and where I spend my “off” time.

- My gifted ministry—the way I serve God in unique ways.
- My church—the place where I grow spiritually, and serve.

Finding God’s Personalized Will. The question I must ask is this: What does God want from me in the detailed areas of my life? To find the answer to this question, we must know the *methods* for ascertaining God’s will. This is one of the toughest problems we face: how to find God’s will for each of our lives. There are ways that this can be done, but—as we suggested already—maturity will pre-exist such clarity. Procedures that underpin advancement toward maturity must be implemented faithfully and extensively for us to ever grasp God’s individualized will for our lives. We will see each of these procedures in turn, as we build a super-structure of faith that will enable us to achieve and sustain maturity. We will look at techniques for *practical daily life*...as these lead us to, and equip us for, accommodation of God’s specific will. There is no short-cut, and no substitute for achieving this, and very few scholars and teachers have presented the whole picture of God’s provision for meeting His will. We want the full story.

Maturity is the key to *seeing* God’s personalized will, and the techniques and practices we will examine contribute to the maturation process. We have to begin with the first grade, and move up through the levels of God’s training, both in the classroom and in practice. Only then can we claim to be in tune with God’s will. No “unschooled” believer can claim to be “hearing” what God wants them to do without arousing suspicion that the “flesh” or some demon is whispering false notions into their untrained ears and prompting them to move out in a wrong direction. Be careful when you or anyone else hears God “speaking” to them. This is a broad area of potential deception.

A mature believer will know God’s will, but how? Our assumption is that some medium will be used to transmit God’s will to each of us. It is clear, almost intuitive, that we learn a great deal about God’s will through study of His Word. By absorbing His truths, we can go further...deeper...until we reach greater levels of maturity. With greater maturity, we achieve a closer relationship with God, and with this closer relationship we can gain a clearer view of what God wants from us at a detailed level.

We want to know God’s *personalized* will, and maturity itself can become a medium for this knowledge. Greater knowledge brings the capacity for greater understanding, and greater understanding enables increased sensitivity to God’s leading as He guides us into His will. Knowledge of God’s procedures and promises leads to maturity, and maturity enables perception of God’s specific will. But—until we have this level of understanding—we will falter and founder, picking our way through the fog as we proceed. We CAN have deeper understanding, if we persevere. If we are consistent, a clear view of what God wants from us EACH DAY will emerge as a natural consequence and outcropping of greater maturity. Knowledge leads to maturity, and sufficient maturity brings deeper understanding of God’s will.

Still, we always have choice in each matter, and our objective must be to have our choices move into coincidence with God’s will, so that what we want and what we choose is what He wants. We can’t strain or force ourselves into this...it is the product of sustained growth. Then, even the smaller deci-

sions will become simpler...where to buy groceries, what wrecker company to call in an automotive break-down, or what style to adopt in choosing our wardrobe. Should I buy a car, paint my bedroom, move to Texas, or upgrade my phone? Even in problem-solving, God has a preference: How do I pay my bills, what should I do to correct a health issue, or what can I say to bring peace to a troubled relationship? God cares what—and how—we choose, and He is more involved and more interested in the details of our lives than we might have thought. It must be clear: God is attending every passing thought and fleeting wish with infinite vigilance. He notices everything we think and do, and we cannot ignore His loving care.

Col. 4:13 encapsulates what we are trying to describe in a report that Paul gave on the behavior pattern of a faithful prayer warrior, Epaphras. Paul said of him: “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” Epaphras’ prayer, which was given the weight of Scripture under Paul’s hand, was that the Colossians would focus on and honor the will of God, which is an expected outcome of maturity and strong faith (“full assurance”). As we mature, we will gain better understanding of what God wants; ultimately, to the mature believer, God’s will becomes obvious. The rest of us will keep growing, aspiring to such assurance.

D. Free Will and Liberty

We Have Free Will. If any human being were sent to hell on the basis of God choosing to send him there, God would not be just, because all human beings are *born* in condemnation and sin. ...destined for hell when they hit the ground. But God gives an option to beat the rap and change directions, and that option is open to *homo sapiens* because God provided a means for salvation, and gave man the ability to choose it. Without choice, there can be no responsibility. Otherwise, God’s system for dealing with His own creation defies all logic and fairness, and is difficult to contemplate.

This is not a tirade against “Calvinism”, known especially for its position that God chooses those who are to be saved. When we cite free will, we simply describe the only possible position that will enable us to recognize God as gracious and just. We are FREE to make choices, and this saddles us with the responsibility to make decisions for or against God. Isaiah 53:6 indicates that we are free to choose, using the phrase “his own way”. *Our* way is the *wrong* way, yet we are free to go that way. So there is *OUR* way...and *GOD’S* way; and we can choose which to follow. Any human being can choose to pursue God, or to go his “own way”. Here are some scriptures reflecting our choice:

- 1 Tim. 4:10b—“...that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.” The salvation earned by the death of Christ on the cross is for all men, but acquired specifically only by those who choose to believe.
- John 3:15—“...that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” This clearly shows that “believing” is open as a choice that all people can make.
- John 6:33—“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the

world.”The entire world is free to choose the life that is offered.

- John 12:46—“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”Those who believe choose to move into His light.
- Rom. 5:6—“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” The ungodly includes all members of the human race, and the work of Christ is open to all.
- John 3:18—“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” The big word “whoever” shows that salvation is available to all people, and that all people are free to choose God’s way.
- 1 John 2:2—“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”That includes everyone. All may access it.
- Rom. 11:15—“For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead.” The party in question is the Jews, but the ability for all the human race to accept or reject is clearly in evidence.
- 2 Cor. 5:19a—“...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” Reconciliation to Christ is available to the whole world.
- 1 John 4:14—“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” If the whole world has the Savior-hood of Christ open to them, it is because they are free to choose it.
- 1 Tim. 2:6a—“who gave himself as a ransom for all men...” All men have been ransomed. But not all have chosen to accept it.

If God *chose* those who are to be saved, all *would* be saved, because that is what God wants. 1 Tim. 2:4 speaks of our God, “who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” But not all are saved, because God gives the choice to man.

Considering God’s Will in our Choices. Based on our freedom of choice, we often choose *our own* plans and pathways, even as believers. We are rebellious by nature. Jer. 18:12 says, “But they will reply, ‘It’s no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart’.” Ps. 78:8 echoes this: “They would not be like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.” And we see this again in Jer. 7:24, which says, “But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.”

We live in the world, and experience constant pressure to see the world as the world sees itself, not as God sees the world. When we live our lives from the perspective of the world, and perceive events and conditions as world-driven events, we will seek our own solutions *in the world*, and will reject

God's view. James 4:13-14^a tells us to avoid making plans based on the faulty vantage-point of the world and our view of it. This passage says, "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow." When we make our plans without considering God in those plans, we are expressing arrogance. Verse 15 adds, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'." So when we express our will, we are *exaggerating* our own ability (as per verse 16, which tells us that "all such boasting is evil").

Choosing Well. The dilemma is this: God wants to give us His best, but we limit Him by our choices. His will is for us to have the ultimate from Him, but His plan incorporates human choices, even though they disappoint His will and discount His purposes. God's plan will not operate independent of our choices. In other words, God will not super-impose His will upon us, so He *must* make a plan that honors human choice. This is the only way it can be. It makes no sense that He would give us choice, know our choices well in advance, have the power that He does, and not formulate a plan to allow for and factor in the choices we make. If He did not give us choice, He has the power to direct and enforce our thoughts and behavior at an infinitesimal level. But His plan does not negate our choices; it enfolds them. Otherwise, conclusively, choice would not exist.

Part of choosing involves selecting ways to survive in the world. It is right that we would choose to care for ourselves in a reasonable and practical way as we consider God's will and God's plan, but we must always pursue our own plans with a view to yielding to God's will, thus allowing God's plan to function in our favor. If we follow our own plans independent of God, we will be operating apart from Him, and the results will ultimately be disastrous. Just remember, we are *free* to choose, but there are consequences for our choices, and that is where God steps in to teach us the right way. That is basically the topic of this book, which is this: God is teaching us through His Word and through events He brings to our lives, but the effectiveness of that process is governed by our making choices that favor Him.

Choosing Freedom above Legalism and Sin. Gal. 5:1 tells us to stay free. This verse says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." The yoke is a bog of legalism, which pulls us down into a system of self-directed religion, rather than God-directed spirituality. This is a major area of choice. By choosing systems of self-induced righteousness and morality, rather than God's prescribed way to live the Christian life, we will reduce the field of choices for ourselves. When we subscribe to a system—any system—that requires perfunctory compliance with external standards, we are giving up our choice and becoming slaves to that system. When we conform to "religious" requirements, we become *automatons*, and are thus no longer *autonomous*. We will see that anything we do that is worthwhile will come from an abiding desire to seek God, know Him, and serve Him. The question of "how" will be addressed completely in this book.

The snare of self-righteousness is a pitfall of our freedom, and is the scourge of those who are "religiously-bent". But there is another area of danger emanating from our "freedom": Liberty can be-

come a license to indulge ourselves. Warning: We must not use our freedom as an opportunity or excuse to sin. 1 Pet. 2:16 admonishes, “Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.” Freedom can be a trap that ensnares us in a cocoon of depravity. Jesus described it this way: “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34) This is a matter of choice. We are free to choose, but we are responsible for choosing well. 2 Pet. 2:19-22 tells us what happens when believers choose poorly:

They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they [all believers] have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them, the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit,’ and, ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud’.”

“They” are those who have become ensnared in the traps laid for believers. It is easy to wander away from God, and often it is the wanderer who will lay more traps for others and entice them to follow the wrong path. What, then, will happen to those who wander? Simply put, things will not go well. For those who have been saved, and have been given the choice to pursue God through His Word, yet choose to go their own way, life for them on earth will not be pleasant. They will experience God’s corrective discipline, which can be quite severe and harsh. Freedom cannot be used to live as we want, ignoring God’s standards. Gal. 5:13 says, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

We are called to liberty, which is the freedom to choose, but this must not become an occasion for indulgence of the flesh, whether it is in the area of legalism, or that of licentiousness. We are free to move and choose and go, but we must not ignore God in the process, or the freedom we have received will become a prison, where the privileges of choice become occasions for bondage.

E. The Truth Will Set You Free

Maturity Brings Freedom. In John 8:31 Jesus told Jewish believers, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” They were already believers, but He was admonishing them to take the next step, which was to become “disciples”...or students of His teaching. And He told them what would happen if they did: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Learning the Word induces maturity, and with maturity, we move into freedom. But freedom from what? We have already seen that we can experience freedom from legalism, and freedom from sin. But can this be done if we are not “students” of the Word? The answer is “no”. We must mature to enjoy such freedom, and there’s no wishing or pretending that this can happen without attention to spiritual growth. Observe verse 34 in this chapter (John 8), which says that “everyone who sins is a slave to sin”, while verse 36 offers hope, “...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” But we must not forget step one in moving toward this freedom, which is becoming a student of Jesus...of His Word. When we do

this, we can come to know increased freedom commensurate with our growth. We can sin less, and we can also stop making “religious” decisions and commitments that are based on man’s systems, rather than God’s.

Verses on the Effects of Maturity on Freedom. Many verses point up the freedom that comes with increased maturity. A few of them are cited here:

- Rom. 6:14—“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” To be out from under the law and functioning under grace, we must fulfill God’s conditions for meeting His standards. We must follow His way, which is what we are exploring.
- Rom. 6:18—“You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” Those who have followed God’s pathway to maturity will be able to surrender to a pattern of righteousness. Otherwise, they will be slaves to sin.
- 1 Cor. 10:28-29—“But if anyone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake—the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience?” When we are exercising our freedom, we must consider the appearance of our “free” behavior, and take care not to offend a weaker believer, who has not yet achieved the same level of freedom.
- 2 Cor. 3:17—“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” We will be discussing the control of the Spirit later in this book, but take note of this for now: When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we have the greatest freedom possible.
- Gal. 3:11b, flg.—“The righteous will live by faith.” Verse 12—“The law is not based on faith. The man who does these things [law-keeping] will live by them.” Verse 23—“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law...” Verse 25—“Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” Attempts to keep the law take away the freedom we can know if we live our lives God’s way, while the life of a believer who is “practicing” his faith will gain freedom.
- Gal. 5:13a— “You, my brothers, were called to be free...” Believers alone are qualified to grow into the freedom God offers. Also, note the last part of verse 13, which says, “serve one another in love”. When conditions are right, and we are maturing and following God’s way, we will learn to serve in love. But we cannot do this until maturity is sufficient to allow it. New or “wandering” believers will not be able to do this; they are limited to superficial imitation, which amounts to legalism.

When we become students of the Word, and persist as disciples of Christ for an extended (or concentrated) period, we will mature; and when we mature, we will come to know freedom. But be aware that maturity is only half the story. We will explore the other half in this book, but much of God’s

training program is about our advancing toward maturity, so we will be spending a great deal of time on this topic.

Chapter 3

Training in the Word

In This Chapter...

- A. Introduction to Training in the Word*
- B. The Purpose of the Word*
- C. Jesus' Growth Pattern*
- D. The Command to Grow*
- E. Avoid False Teachers*
- F. The Holy Spirit in Learning*
- G. The Results of Learning*
- H. The Results of Not Learning*
- I. Having a Love for the Word*
- J. Getting and Applying Wisdom*
- K. Guidelines for Studying*

A. Introduction to Training in the Word

Progressive Nature of Understanding. The first step in growth is learning about God and His ways as they are presented in His Word. There is no substitute for knowing about God, since the more we know about God, the more we will be able to please Him. Fortunately, we have the completed Word, which gives us all we need to know about ways to live in the light. We want to emphasize the word “completed”, because the Bible will not be legitimately added-to, as of the end of the First Century A.D. On the other hand, there seems to be a progressive understanding of its contents as time goes by. This progression is apparently not within the main stream of Christian thought, but takes place in the shadows, in private studies and individual residences where passionate students plumb the depths of the Word. There the gems and nuggets of truth are being ferreted out, as the Holy Spirit infuses new understanding of ancient revelations.

Progress can actually be seen on several fronts. The development of Scripture over the centuries prior to 96 A.D. represented a burgeoning line of revelation, which was refined and expanded with each new period of time. And now that Scripture has been finished, as we mentioned above, the understanding of its meaning has gradually sharpened, allowing greater doctrinal truths to be encapsulated and taught with greater force and clarity. This is aided by the advancement of linguistic skills, which enable the most sophisticated management of the original languages ever. We can now be more specific and accurate in determining the exact meanings of words and passages, which enables greater certainty as we translate and interpret what Scripture says. Finally, the expansion of understanding at an individual level takes place on a progressive continuum, beginning with the most elementary principles, and moving up to more-complex concepts.

The best opportunities for studying the Bible, as compared with those throughout history, are taking place right now. And it seems timely, as the greatest spiritual challenges exist in this present time and in the future. It is important, then, that we learn the purpose of the Word, and that we spend time capturing its meaning. We will see that learning God’s truth is not, as some would say, an academic exercise. It is a *spiritual quest*, carrying us along a route that is narrow and full of holes, but one that takes us forward.

There are Conditions for Learning. For true learning to occur, as we shall see, all the conditions must be right; plus, we must be open to the truth and tuned-in to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. The result is good: When we follow all of God’s prescriptions for learning and attend to them regularly, growth will occur; and as understanding increases, wisdom will be acquired to help us live properly and well. We will at some point become lovers of the Word, thus entering a time of unprecedented enlightenment and advancement.

The Need to Learn. Those who do not study in one of the various ways that we will discuss, yet claim to be maturing, are mistaken. Growth will not take place without feeding on the Word consistently, and this is what we want to grasp from this chapter. Finding the right learning environment and the right teacher may take some searching, but these are available. If you “worship” where the Word is

not taught, you are not growing, and you must not settle there. Worship is an *outcome* of understanding and correct spiritual function, and can be a strong catalyst for edification *if teaching and learning are going on*. Everything in the Christian life revolves around one central requirement: we must *learn*.

All else that follows...meeting the requirements, receiving empowerment, applying the methods, functioning with our gifts, and so on...are predicated on a single initial foundation: *knowledge*. And we mean true knowledge, lodged in the heart, not just facts or intellectual conceits cerebrally recorded for recall and replay. This knowledge is spiritual in its origin, spiritual in its meaning, spiritual in its purpose, and spiritual in its application. This statement on the *spiritual* nature of our pursuit will take on great significance as we examine those parts of Scripture that tell us *how to live*.

We are not much concerned with the minutia of Scripture, though they have their place. We want to know how to LIVE THE FULL LIFE that matches God's will, pleases Him, brings glory to Him, and gives us in the mix the full bounty of His grace. We want to know how to get close to Him and experience His very best...His full power and presence in our hearts and lives. We want to know what He wants, because we want only God, more and more of Him, now and forever. And we can be certain that we will find Him in His Book of Truth.

B. The Purpose of the Word

Defining the Purpose. 2 Timothy 3:16 encapsulates the purpose of the Word in a short but powerful statement, which reads, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." This important verse tells us both the function and the purpose of the Word. If this were an exegetical study, where the meaning of individual words is analyzed, a study of this verse would consume a lot of space. But we are dealing with Scripture categorically, so please excuse a recap in place of a detailed analysis. The potency of these words is striking: "teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training". These are done by a BOOK! We are worked over by WORDS! And the result? We will be "thoroughly equipped for every good work". This is the place where training and preparation take place...and where we are outfitted for living. The road to maturity must pass through the curriculum of a single book...the Word of God. Anything else designed to contribute to our growth will not be effective if we bypass our initial responsibility to master the truths for living that we find in the Bible.

Advantages of Knowing the Word. We have already introduced one advantage that is derived from understanding the Word, and that is ascertaining the will of God. This begins with a comprehension of the *general* will of God, which applies to all believers in the sense of standards for living; then expands to a capacity to perceive God's will in unique and specific circumstances.

The Word builds us up and teaches us God's will. Remember that Epaphras prayed that believers being addressed by Paul would "stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured" (Col. 4:12). This followed Paul's prayer that the Colossians would be filled "with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding". This was a call for them to study in order to learn God's will and

grow. Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:27, “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God,” then he expressed in Acts 20:32b that the “word of his [God’s] grace” will “build you up”. The Word, once again, is an instrument of growth, causing us to be “built up”, moving us toward maturity. Knowing God’s will, pleasing God, acquiring spiritual tools and equipment, functioning in the power reserved for the mature, building faith in His methods and promises, living free of sin and false religions, thinking and behaving righteously: All of these will happen if we stay focused on the Word.

The Word in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Word is central, as you can see, and it is crucial for us to see how its purpose applies to us. The Old Testament was written for the Jews, and describes how they were to live as they awaited the arrival of the Messiah. Much of the Old Testament points to the cross, plus much of it has applications for believers in the Church Age. But the New Testament has now been provided as the primary guide for Christians...followers of the crucified Christ. The New Testament contains the gospel...the good news that the condemnation we are born into has a remedy in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who has paid the penalty for our sins. This remedy is available to all who accept it by faith. But get this: The purpose of the New Testament, more than any other, is to tell *believers how to live*. The gospel is for unbelievers and tells them how to be saved. But the gospel occupies only a small portion of the New Testament. The bulk of writing in the New Testament deals with *ways to live in accordance with God’s standards and God’s will*. Once we are believers, we no longer need the gospel; we need to move on to the techniques and promises that God has provided that prepare us for living.

The ability to see most of the New Testament as prescriptions for Christians, rather than for the human race at large, is essential. When we read the Scripture, we must look first for application to the lives of those who are already saved. This means that, each time we approach our studies, the correct question we must ask is this: What is Scripture telling us *as believers* that we need to know? Logically, if the message we see before us is not clearly designated for the unsaved, it is for the saved. The New Testament has been written mostly for *believers*, the same way that the Old Testament was written primarily for the *Jews*. This may seem like a minor point, but as we go through this book, the importance of this distinction will become clear.

A second point must be made about the New Testament: It tells us not only *what* we are supposed to do, but it tells us *how* to do it. If one glaring deficiency exists in teachings from pulpits around the world, it is that much is made over what to do, while very little is offered on how to do it. God, spare us from such an oversight in this book. We want to focus on the HOW of Christian living! Unless we know how life is to be lived, how can we possibly live it correctly, no matter how much we may know about what it should look like. Conformity to an image of life without the spiritual substance that comes only from God, is mere imitation of Christianity. Whatever we do with and for and by the Lord, let us commit to making it real, and not just some impersonation of a mature Christian. If we will do this, the purpose for the Word will be fulfilled.

C. Jesus' Growth Pattern

Jesus Had to Learn and Grow. Jesus Christ came to us as God, entering the human race by becoming a man, and—even though He was God—He presented Himself as One who needed what every believer needs...which is to grow. John 1:14^b shows that the divine part of Christ was fully equipped: "...who came from the Father full of grace and truth." Yet the human side of the Savior had to start at the beginning as a child...He had to learn, as we do. Luke 2:52 reports, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." He grew from one with less knowledge and spiritual status, into one with great wisdom and strength. And what did He do to ascend the spiritual ladder? He studied. Luke 2:40 describes His growth experience, saying, "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." Luke 2:46-47 adds, "After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers."

Jesus studied, and He grew by knowing the Scripture. This is—as we shall see—our charge. We are to study, not as seminarians or scholars, but as seekers of God and His truth. By learning truth, we are following the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we will experience the same kind of growth and favor and increased wisdom that He did. After all, we have the "mind of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:16), which means we have access to the thinking of His divinity, and—potentially—we have the same growing spiritual organism that He did, which can cause us to live lives touched by grace. When we learn the Word, we acquire the thinking of God Himself, and our view-point will emerge from a worldly and fleshly perspective to one that sees life as God does.

The Word Changes Us as it Did Jesus Christ. Studying the Word has the effect of changing us. Romans 12:1-2 has many layers of meaning, but one application that jumps out at us is that we can be transformed. This passage says the following, in its entirety:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Here, the quest for the will of God encounters the transformation of our minds...our hearts. They meet in the classroom where the Word is taught. New thoughts, new concepts, new awareness, new attitudes, and new outlooks evolve as our minds are renewed, resulting in real change. This newness is tantamount to the essence of the mind of Christ, the position and posture of God's own thinking, and the content of the Holy Spirit's curriculum. Our call is to feed, absorb, assimilate, and grow in knowledge and grace, as Jesus did. His pattern is our pattern, so that His life, as we shall see, can become our life.

D. The Command to Grow

The Importance of Growth. It is a sin NOT to be growing, because it is commanded in Scripture. Refusing to grow is the product of not spending time learning God's Word, which shuts down all nutrient sources, and places us on a path that moves us backwards...away from God and toward greater immaturity. Maturity is not a constant for which we attain a certain level and hold it; it is a *constantly changing* condition that is governed primarily by our consistent acquisition, mastery, and review of truth.

Maturity is measured by the level of our faith. More growth means more faith. And to have more faith, we must learn. Rom. 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." This verse has an application to unbelievers, in which case the "message" is the gospel. But—like many Scriptures—another application can be gleaned from this passage, and that is this: Believers must increase their faith by *hearing the Word of God*.

As Jesus grew in knowledge and grace, we are to grow also, as we see in 2 Pet. 3:18: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This charge is echoed in 1 Pet. 2:2, which says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." Crave it, so you can grow up. Desire the truth, so you can mature. This is the way to be built up, as Jude commanded in verse 20 of his short epistle: "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." Everything we will ever accomplish depends on our being built up, and this is especially important for new or immature believers: They must study BEFORE they begin service, because—face it—babies don't know what they're doing.

Eph. 2:12-14 describes the potential for spiritual expansion, as follows:

...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

The Perspective of Growth. The hope is that we will all be unified in uniform faith and maturity, at which time we can experience the full life that God intends for us all. But the responsibility for achieving growth is one which is satisfied individually...through personal commitment to the process of growth. Our *first job* is to GROW! It is the point of all the training we will do and the objective of God's plan for us.

When we have grown, then we can boast, but not about how great we have become. The boasting that's permitted is linked to our recognition of God's character and grace, as described in Jer. 9:23-24, as follows:

This is what the Lord says: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast

of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight declares the Lord.

Any bragging can only be directed toward God, crediting Him with providing the truth, with making His truth known to us, and with enabling us to apply the truth in our experience. Apart from what He does by His grace and power, we have no room to boast. All we can do is honor His deity and greatness by learning all we can about Him. Then we will grow.

Pathway to Growth. Meeting the commands to grow will come in three ways, which comprise the bulk of the contents of this book. These three methods for growth can be delineated, as follows:

1. Studying and processing truth.
2. Enduring God's training regimen, which can be quite rigorous.
3. Accessing the edifying gifts of fellow believers.

This pathway to growth is riddled with pitfalls, so we must be alert to deception and false teaching designed to make us believe that truth is a lie, and that false notions are true. Observe: Discerning and dealing with lies is not an intellectual event, but one that is spiritual, requiring full maturity and spirituality. This is because lies are perpetrated through the genius of Satan, which makes them almost impossible to detect and avoid. Demonically-derived lies can only be countered *spiritually*...by truth.

E. Avoid False Teachers

Seek the Truth to Avoid Lies. Ignorance invites deception. If we are not familiar with the truth, we will not recognize lies. The more we establish what is true, the better we will be able to judge the veracity of the postulates and claims that we encounter. Believers who are seeking the truth, meaning those with positive volition for God, will get it. They will be operating under the flag of seeking-and-finding, and God has promised that—if we seek Him—we will find Him. For those who do not find the truth, and who embrace false doctrines, the only viable assumption is that they did not *want* correct information.

Our first job is to seek the truth, and then our role is to claim it and internalize it when we find it. When we *hear* the truth and believe it, that information will process as understanding, and will at some point become wisdom, if we *embrace* what we have *understood*. We will see more on this later in this book, but for now we want to establish that wisdom foils deception. When our focus is on truth, the avenues for false teaching are closed, and our correct view-point remains intact. This is not an automatic process, though, which means that something must be done to create this resistance to wrong notions.

1 Tim. 4:1-2 says the following:

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving

spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”

Susceptibility to Deception. Notice that the deception comes from demons, but is often delivered through people of influence who have become calloused by untruths, and are openly propounding false ideas as true and accurate. These teachings are plausible and viable, and Satan backs his words with action, demonstrating that what he claims is true. Consider what was just said. Satan proves his claims. When we study Satan and his role in the world, we will see why this is true, even though most church leaders assert that we have Satan on the ropes. Not so! Not yet. Satan’s message is appealing and convincing, and if our guard is down, we will accept what he says, thus adopting his lies.

The areas in which we can be deceived are those for which we have not developed truth. Satan’s goal is to keep us away from the truth, and to distort our knowledge of God’s will and God’s plan. He misleads us, or *leads us into darkness and misunderstanding*, where he can control us easily. Col. 2:2-4 tells us how to avoid being misled:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.

If we do not know and absorb wisdom and knowledge, the arguments we hear will be undeniable and irresistible. Knowledge is a shield against teachings from the kingdom of darkness.

I Cor. 3:18 tells us that one of the dangers of believing things that are not true is that we may quit searching for truth, because we think we have already found it. This verse says, “Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise.” When we begin to measure the worth and value of our knowledge by the degree to which it corresponds with God’s Word, then we will have a truer picture of its usefulness to us. Contrarily, if we are well-educated by the world’s standards, but have not mastered the truths of the Word, we remain ignorant.

Countering Deception. When we drift in our studies, we will drift in our spiritual life, and we will be content that the ideas that begin to replace truth are acceptable. 2 Cor. 11:3 cautions against the creep of false teaching, saying, “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” When we are “led astray”, we will commit “errors”, as we see in Matt. 22:29, where Jesus said, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”

When we leave the Word we are suckers for sin, legalism, lies, and all kinds of false causes. So it is important that we stick close to the Word and feed on it daily. Then we can avoid false teachers, whom Jesus warned against, saying, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” If we follow them, we will fall, as per 2 Pet. 3:17, which says, “Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried

away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.” Are we beginning to see the dangers of ignoring the Word?

New believers or those who neglect the Word cannot withstand the attacks of Satan. Eph. 4:14 confirms this: “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” The only way we can overcome the bombardment of false ideas launched against us from television, Internet, movies, friends, printed media, ministers, teachers, and most leaders, is to fortify ourselves with truth. We cannot build our spiritual walls fast enough. The enemy is at the gate...no, *inside* the gate.

F. The Holy Spirit in Learning

The Holy Spirit Instructs. The Holy Spirit is our guide to truth. He is within us, as of the time of our salvation, and He clarifies the Word of God to allow truth to settle in our hearts. He then enables us, if we are meeting God’s conditions for spirituality and growth, to apply what we learn. He is our teacher, and the power for implementing what we learn. Without Him, and direct fellowship with Him, a believer will not be able to fulfill what we have been taught. So we need to do more than study. We need to be in constant communion with the Holy Spirit, so that He can energize us for the tasks described in Scripture.

The Holy Spirit, then, plays a crucial role in all aspects of managing and using truth. And it begins with His making it *clear* to us. John 16:13, 15b gives us the following:

But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come....the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

2 Pet. 1:19-21 confirms the role of the Holy Spirit in communicating Scripture. This passage says the following:

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 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.

The Holy Spirit gave the original content of the Bible, and now makes its meaning clear to us, if we are seeking the truth and following the prescriptions for learning. Eph. 1-17a establishes clearly that the source of wisdom is the Holy Spirit, and His medium for accomplishing this is two-fold: the completed Word of God, and the spiritual awakening that only He can give. He enlightens us indirectly through the written Word, and directly through His interaction with us as we hear and absorb the truth it contains. Here is the quote from Ephesians in the passage just cited that reflects His personal teaching ministry within us:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you....

This is not talking about receiving the Holy Spirit, as many verses in the Bible clearly establish that we receive Him at salvation. This is describing the aspect of the Holy Spirit that is connected with wisdom, whereby we come to know His specific operations and functions in and around us. When we learn more about the way the Holy Spirit operates, we will be able to relate to Him in a way that puts us into constant contact with His wisdom and power, which will enable us to fulfill the requirements He has specified within the information we acquire.

What follows next is a snapshot of the role of the Holy Spirit in learning, in juxtaposition with our role in the process:

Role of the Holy Spirit in the Learning Process

- Provide the contents for the Word
- Provide the gift of teaching to certain believers
- Provide gifted teachers with understanding of the message to be delivered
- Clarify the teaching for individual believers
- Enable perception of the truth in the clarified message
- Convert the knowledge received into wisdom to be applied
- Enable the believer to apply the wisdom
- Provide power for each and every step, when spiritual conditions (to be discussed) have been met

Our Role in the Learning Process

- Prepare ourselves for learning (to be discussed)
- Pray for understanding
- Hear the Word being taught
- Believe the truth in what we hear
- Receive understanding of what we have come to know
- Apply the wisdom we acquire
- Rely on the Holy Spirit for each step

Conclusion. Learning cannot take place without the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, study can become an academic and intellectual exercise, which makes what we learn useless. Or it can be a spiritual process made possible through our interaction with the Holy Spirit, whereby the

mind of Christ is infused within us, and the power of Spirit is engaged to renew our thinking and transform our lives. We will see with progressive clarity how this works, and how we can be prepared to assimilate the truth that God offers.

G. The Results of Learning

Learning is Important Enough to be a Daily Requirement. When we truly learn, and knowledge processes into our hearts as wisdom, we grow in knowledge and grace. We are reminded that 2 Pet. 3:18 tells us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”. This is not an occasional wandering into a Bible class, or a fleeting and casual discussion about God; this is a commitment to be studying and growing every day. The requirement to grow is a *daily* one. Look at the daily nature of our spiritual experience and growth, as seen in the following verses:

- “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lam. 2:22-23)
- “Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.” (Prov. 8:34)
- “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matt. 4:4) Just as we live physically on food that has to be taken in every day, we must also live and grow from daily intake of Scripture.
- “Give us today our daily bread.” Once again, intake must be *daily*.
- “I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.” Job saw feeding on the Word every day as more valuable than his daily bread. (Job 23:12)

We must acknowledge early on the importance of knowing and applying the truth. When we acquire truth, we are training our minds for our place in the royal family of God. We are gaining nobility. This is what we see in Phil. 4:8-9, which says the following:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Persistence in Studying. Our training in the Word will prepare us to train “in the field” (in our daily lives), and training in life will prepare us for performance and productivity.

But this is not easy. Solomon learned that wisdom is hard to come by; it takes perseverance and effort. We see his statement on this in Eccl. 7:23b: “I said, ‘I am determined to be wise’—but this was beyond me.” Then he followed his determination with action, reporting, “So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.” This is one area of the Christian life where work is required. The

remainder is about resting, relenting, and releasing. But study is work, in a sense, and requires discipline. Without study...a genuine, arduous search for the truth...there will be no meaningful achievement. Study gets no credit for the student, as the content of study consists of heaping servings of grace. But accessing these free meals of grace will require time and attention. If interest is there, study will seem effortless.

For those who persist in their studies, good will come. Prov. 24:5 says, “A wise man has power, and a man of knowledge increases strength.” The point is that consistent study of the Bible advances maturity, and lack of study will result in weakness. “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning...” (Prov. 1:5) The object of study and learning is to grow. Col. 1:25^a and 28, quoted together, confirms this, saying the following:

...to present to you the word of God in its fullness...the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints....We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present every one perfect [mature] in Christ.

With wisdom, we can mature. And then Paul adds, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught...” (Col. 1:6) The more we know, the more we grow. And there is no limit. Luke 6:40 tells us we can know what our Teacher knows: “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” The “word of grace” will build us up and up, until we have reached maturity. Acts 20:32 says, “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

The charges to study and consider and learn and absorb and contemplate are endless. We could go on and on. For example, 2 Thess. 2:15 instructs, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.” Wherever we can access the true teaching of the Word, BY ANY MEANS, we must pursue it. And look at the profound truths of 2 Pet. 1:3-4, which says this:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

We get everything we need through our knowledge of Him.

Commitment to Learning. Here is the charge: Believe that you must study. Commit yourself to regular, intensive, and faithful study of the Word. If you are not yet convinced of your need to do this, consider these:

- “Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight....” (1 Tim. 1:18) Observe the phrase, “by following them”. First learn; then follow.

- “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience....” (Col. 1:9-11)
- “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.” (Heb. 5:12-14)
- “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and faith in God....” (Heb. 6:1a)
- “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” (Heb. 2:1)
- “And we thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” (1 Thess. 2:13)
- “Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.” (Eccl. 7:12)

Learning Linked to Training. This book is about training. As we grow through study of the Word, we will enter advanced phases of training, which is characterized by the direct intervention of God into the events of our lives to give us the opportunity to apply what we know, or to learn the same thing in ways that are more difficult. When we stay with the Word, we will see God’s training regimen as growth experiences, and we will have a better understanding of the things that happen around us. We will know God is dealing with us as a loving Father, no matter how rough things get.

There are many benefits that come from following the Word. A verse found in the last chapter of the Bible sums it up nicely: “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” But the best summary of the benefits of study is probably Prov. 6:20-24, which gives the following:

My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life, keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife.

Knowledge of the Word guides us, watches over us, speaks to us, provides a light for us, and gives us

correction. It also keeps us from immorality. We must not deny ourselves these benefits. All the results of study are good.

H. The Results of Not Learning

Not Studying Leads to Discipline. When we do not study, there will be trouble. God will correct us, either through His Word, or through discipline. Not paying attention to His revelation to us is one of the causes for which He disciplines us. We see this again and again in Scripture. We must understand our responsibility for studying faithfully (in one of the ways we will examine later, e.g., church attendance, listening to teaching online, reading instructive materials, personal perusal of the Word, etc.). The longest chapter in the Bible stresses the importance and value of studying God's truths. One of the emphases in that chapter is that we should not stray from our studies. We are speaking, of course, of Ps. 119. Ps. 119:66-67 shows what happens when we do not heed our summons to study. This passage says: "Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." Implicit in this passage is a depiction of straying from study, experiencing the discipline this brings, responding by returning to study, being taught after we return, believing what we hear, and applying what we learn.

Discipline, as we shall see in more detail later, can be harsh and unpleasant. But it gets results. It would be easier if we made good choices to learn and follow God's Word, but that happens all too rarely. Heb. 12:11 says, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." When we study and learn, even if we have to be prodded to do so, we will be equipped to produce a "harvest of righteousness".

Absence of Study Leads to Loss of Faith. It seems harmless enough to bypass study for a day or so, but this soon becomes a week or longer, and suddenly we realize things are falling apart, especially our spiritual confidence and our trust in God. Only by studying can we maintain a strong faith. Jer. 22:21-22 shows us how this works, as follows:

I warned you when you felt secure, but you said, 'I will not listen!' This has been your way from your youth; you have not obeyed me. The wind will drive all your shepherds away, and your allies will go into exile. Then you will be ashamed and disgraced because of all your wickedness..

There is hope, however, if we will return and pursue a path of perpetual study. This is so stated in Jer. 31:18-19 which gives us this:

I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'" When we return to a pattern that moves us closer to God, we will be restored.

We will have much more to say about discipline when we talk about sin, but even at the introductory level, we start to sense that discipline...being corrected by God...is something to avoid. The quickest way to learn how to avoid discipline, and the surest way to bypass it altogether, is to give attention to our studies every single day.

I. Having a Love for the Word

The Great Value of Truth. The Word of God is deserving of praise. Ps. 12:6 says, “And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.” Many other verses can be added to this one extolling the value of the Word, such as Prov. 3:13-14, which offers, “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.” The more we know God’s Word, the more we love it, and then we want to know even more. Ps. 12:6 states this plainly: “Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.” The more we understand what is taught, the more we appreciate its power in our lives. We actually learn to love the Word.

By loving the Word and accepting its truths, we will discover and apply methods that enable us to walk forward one step at a time. The value of the Word is most pronounced in its application to *living*. Learning and re-learning the concepts and precepts of the Word is the way God has designed for us to be equipped with His techniques and promises for functioning in the world. But there are many conditions and prospects in the world that draw us away from study. Here are a few:

- Emotions. We often trust our own emotions, rather than the Word.
- Wealth. Money tends to make us feel invulnerable and invincible...perhaps we don’t need the Word.
- Possessions. Surrounding ourselves with “things” tends to give us a false sense of security.
- Health. When we operate without a consistent desire for the Word, health and life can become exclusive objects of our effort and attention, thus keeping us away from a Word-focused life.
- Position. Authority or influence in the world may make us feel “untouchable”.

All conditions in life are subject to change, and the Word is the constant we can access to give us answers and methods for accessing God’s peace and stability. When we learn this, we will love the Word as our source of truth and guidance.

Without Loving the Word, No Learning Occurs. Loving the Word is not just something it would be nice to do, so we can feel warm and tingly. It is an essential part of advanced growth. The heart is the center of our spiritual life...the place where learning lodges, if it is processed properly. This goes back to *wanting* the truth. Eph. 1:17-18 indicates that the eyes of the heart may be “enlightened”, which makes the converse an undeniable possibility, which is that the eyes of the heart may be “darkened”. We are the ones that determine whether our hearts will be enlightened or dark-

ened by exercising our free will to express either a true desire for truth about God...or a disinterest in His Word. Without an inner impulse to acquire truth, we will accept substitutes for it and will never know the kind of lives God wants us to have. God wants to give us good lives, not just so we can be comfortable and happy, but so we can fulfill His will and glorify Him. These reflect our real purpose.

When we do not “crave” the truth of the Word, and move into deeper darkness, we will become calloused...incapable of learning the truth. Matt. 13:15 reflects this process, as follows:

For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.

An important point emerges from this look at the condition of the heart, which is this: Our welcoming of the truth enables the processing of truth into spiritual compartments of the heart, from which truth...techniques, methods, principles, promises, processes...can be implemented and applied to our experience. We “hear” truth taught. At that point we believe it or reject it. If we believe it, this truth becomes understanding. Then the degree of our *welcoming* that truth determines how much of that “understanding” becomes wisdom. If we truly love and desire and crave and welcome the truth...embrace it with enthusiasm and delight...understanding can be transformed into “wisdom”, which is the enriched form of truth that can be applied to decisions and activities in everyday living. Otherwise, Eph. 4:18 will apply to us: “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.” Separation from the Word results in separation from the power of God in our lives. More on this later. By the way, this is not loss of salvation, but separation from fellowship and empowerment.

Like Job, we must value truth more than food. We must take advantage of every opportunity to learn (see Eph. 5:16). We must be like the Jewish converts in Acts 2:42, who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” We must seek truth as they did, and as we are commanded to do in Matt. 7:7: “...seek and you will find.” When we immerse ourselves into a study of the Word, we will find answers to our questions, and will see ways to do things that please God and benefit us. Learning the Word is good all around. Stop guessing and start learning...you will love it.

J. Getting and Applying Wisdom

What Wisdom Is. The *advanced* form of knowledge is understanding, which is what knowledge becomes when it is believed. The *ultimate* form of knowledge is wisdom, the end result of hearing the truth, believing it, and genuinely embracing it by welcoming it into the heart. Wisdom is the purest and most-refined truth, which rests in the heart, once it is processed there, where it awaits opportunity for application. Wisdom is the deepest resource for understanding God’s will and God’s plan, and for knowing what we are to do, so God can enhance our lives and enrich our production. Wisdom is His, yet He offers it *to us*. It is ours to attend and ingest, and we can never have enough of it.

Rom. 11:33 says, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” We are seeking what is beyond human reaching and searching, yet we are told it is ours for the asking. Only by knowing the unknowable can we begin to access the riches of God’s provision, both for our spiritual productivity, and for our physical and material lives. It is, after all, in life where we want renewal and change to occur. We want the deepest mysteries to be brought to the surface...to the place where we think and feel and respond to events as they occur. We want to live as “wise”, as we see in Eph. 5:15-17, which says, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

Wisdom Works, so Get it Now. Wisdom works. Scriptures that confirm this are numerous, represented in the following:

- Ps. 119:130: The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”
- Col. 3:10: We have “put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”
- Phil. 1:9-10: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...”
- Rom. 15:14: “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”
- Prov. 3:13: “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding.”

God emphasizes again and again in His Word the importance of acquiring wisdom. The command to get it is repeated often because it is crucial to everything we will ever accomplish as believers. Wisdom is a “tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed” (Prov. 3:18).

Asking for Wisdom. This is something we will need help with, so it is appropriate that we should ask God for wisdom. James 1:5 says this: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” But then James adds, in verse 6, “But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” Asking for wisdom *in faith* is part of the process of learning, and should precede all occasions for study. Ask for wisdom. This is part of receiving it. David asked repeatedly for wisdom and understanding, as we see in the following verses:

- “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths.” (Ps. 25:4)
- “Teach me your way, O Lord, lead me in a straight path.” (Ps. 27:11)
- “May my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word.” (Ps. 119:169)

- “Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth.” (Ps. 86:11)
- “Send forth your light and your truth; let them guide me.” (Ps. 43:3)

We have to ask for wisdom, and then we have to study. IF we do our part in the learning process, THEN God will do His part. Here is the “if” part of learning (*our* part; see Prov. 2:1-5):

1. If we receive God’s sayings (study)
2. If we cry for discernment
3. If we seek understanding
4. If we treasure what we hear
5. If we search for wisdom

When we fulfill the “if” condition, God will provide the “then” part. So here it is...what God will do “then” (*God’s* part; see Prov. 2:6-8):

1. He will give us wisdom.
2. He will shield us.
3. He will give us victory.
4. He will protect us.

The things God provides are contingent on our seeking what He gives. That begins in His Word and then works itself out to all part of our lives. But nothing in our lives that is offered or required is not covered in the Word. It is our resource for everything we are to do, without which we will not do anything correctly, and thus will—in effect—not do it at all. We must KNOW God’s truth to know how to live.

Head Knowledge vs Heart Knowledge. A word of caution is needed in regard to “head” knowledge vs. “heart” knowledge. Merely filing facts and lists and conceits away for future recall is not what is meant by “acquiring wisdom”. We can recite the Scriptures and even the doctrines they contain until the cows come home, but if what we learn has not been processed properly, such knowledge will be of no use to us. All around the world, there are those who slavishly recite copious Scripture and proclaim abstruse doctrines, but do not have a clue about God’s grace and power...they are espousing a “form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” (2 Tim. 3:5) Remember that truth must be processed into the heart before it can be applied. Once again, the process is this:

1. Prepare for study (more on this later).
2. Hear the word taught, which becomes knowledge.
3. Believe what is taught (after filtering out false teachings, of course), so that it becomes understanding.
4. Welcome what is taught by really wanting, even loving, what is learned. Understanding

then becomes wisdom.

5. Apply the wisdom acquired. When we know what to do and how, and follow it, wisdom will be activated and we will be living in God's will.

The result is a renewed mind and a transformed life. And that life is focused on God and His qualities. No accumulation of facts can bring this about. This is the result of a desire for God Himself, without which there will be no wisdom and no application. It is God we want, accessed through a relationship with Him as His children. We are able to participate in this relationship on a day-to-day basis, because we have come to *know Him*. The Word directs us to Him.

Being Doers of the Word. Finally, when we are applying the Word in the form of wisdom, we are becoming “doers” of the Word and not “hearers only” (James 1:21-22). And when we practice the truth we learn, we move into a special place of blessing. This is revealed in James 1:25, which says, “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” We must never emphasize the importance of the acquisition of truth without giving equal emphasis to its application. Knowledge without application is meaningless.

K. Guidelines for Studying

Finding a Place Where Truth is Delivered. We use the term “study” often, but this does not necessarily mean sitting at a desk with mounds of books, or even working studiously on lessons delivered through the computer. Study can take many forms, but—more often than not—it involves LISTENING. So we should listen to the *right message*, in the *right spirit*, to learn. We see this over and over in Scripture. Jesus said we should take care what we listen to (Mark 4:24), and how we listen (Luke 8:18). Picking out what we hear, and then processing what we hear properly, are crucial to the delivered Word having its desired effect on us. If we are listening to lies, or if we are listening to truth in the wrong way, we will not assimilate information that will enable us to grow. It is important to find—and listen to—the right information...and then listen to it in the right way.

According to God's sovereignly-determined system, the *primary* system for delivery of truth is through the pastor-teacher. All gifts are provided to facilitate the growth of all believers, and the purpose of gifts is to edify and build up. But the central gift in today's church is given to the one appointed to teach the Word to the local congregation. The instruction given through his gift will have the effect of increasing the maturity of those who faithfully access his teaching. Obviously, he must, first of all, *faithfully teach*, in order that his flock may *faithfully learn*.

Volition: First Step in Learning. Please pay attention to this next question: Who gets the truth...or in other words, who is *accessing* correct teaching and *receiving* the truth? This is similar to the question: Who will be given access to the gospel message? The answer is the same for both questions: God always accommodates those who are seeking Him. If an unbeliever thirsts for a relationship with God, God will get the gospel to him. If a believer wants a *closer* relationship with God, God will get

correct instructions for living to him. The volition of each human being, or WHAT EACH ONE WANTS, prompts God to release or withhold information from him. If anyone desires to know God, or know Him better, God will provide the means to make this happen. If there is no interest in God or His truth, God will be a gentleman, and will not impose something on a person that he does not want.

Study Guide. To provide specific guidelines for study, we will re-print here the entire list of suggestions from our previous book: *Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word: Pathway to Truth and Wisdom*, Volume 2, pp. 61-62. Here is how to study:

1. Read the Bible directly.
2. Use a study Bible to help you understand what you are reading. (I recently acquired the *Ryrie Study Bible* and like it).
3. Listen to an audio reading of the Bible.
4. Attend a church where Bible study is clearly emphasized and regularly scheduled. Refer to the previous chapter [in *Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word*] for more on choosing a pastor and a church. You are reminded to avoid churches which adopt extreme practices that obscure or downplay concentration on the truth of the Word. And then, the teaching that takes place should advance foremost the truths that acquaint you with God's techniques for living, and the promises and provisions He makes to assist us in serving Him.
5. Use audio or video lessons that teach Bible lessons designed to edify and strengthen. More on this below.
6. Some television programs are instructive, but avoid those that see Christianity as a way to make money, or that exhibit any of the extremes that we have discussed.
7. Associate regularly with gifted Christians who study, stay in fellowship, and contribute to the edification of fellow believers. NOTE: It is not enough just to spend time with believers. Two conditions must exist for encounters with Christian brothers to be instructive: 1) You and the other believers must be in fellowship, and 2) the topic must focus on God and His truth.
8. Carefully choose and read books, articles, and materials that 1) elucidate the words of Scripture, and 2) provide information and techniques that enable you to grow and *get closer to God*.
9. There are numerous courses offered online, through correspondence, and at local seminaries. Once again, choose wisely.
10. Search the Internet for Bible topics and commentaries. Here are some tips for places to go on the Internet:
 - One place I use regularly to collect verses on individual topics is *biblos.com*. When you (prayerfully) compile scriptures on a given topic...sort them, compare them, and analyze them...you will be able to get at core truths from the Word. In addition to "topics", *biblos.com* provides scripture-search features, and commentaries. Scriptures separated by

topic can also be found at *bibletopics.com*, or in a book titled *Where to Find it in the Bible*.

- A place that I have used to collect articles and multi-media studies is *bible.org*. I especially recommend writings by J. Hampton Keathley, III, at this site.
- If you are more serious and want to probe more deeply into the finer points of Bible doctrine, visit *tgm.org*, which offers concordances, lexicons, word studies, and other helpful study features.
- To find Bible-teaching pastors, church services, and programs, the Internet is a better resource than the television. You can find lessons in a variety of media, including “live”, on the Internet. Once again, choose wisely...and prayerfully. Outside of what I have already given, I have no specific endorsements for online services and lessons, outside of Robert McLaughlin Bible Ministries (*gbible.org*), but even then, as always, screen what you hear with the Word. I especially recommend a “feature” series by McLaughlin: *Ecclesiastes*. Pray and sift, check out what is being taught; then believe and absorb with great enthusiasm.

If you want the truth, you will get it. Make a decision now to embrace truth as your guide for living, and begin right away a life-long process of daily study. It is required, but more than that, it *will* make a difference in your life.

Chapter 4

Growing Faith

In This Chapter...

A. Faith Works

B. Living by Faith

C. Faith for Training

D. Faith Verses

A. Faith Works

Understanding Faith. Before we can get a handle on God's training program, we must understand faith. What is faith? Faith is assurance. Faith is confidence. Faith is a form of knowing. And faith is certainty in the absence of all evidence. Heb. 11:1 says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." As life presents itself with each oncoming minute, it is faith that represents the right response to all internal and external events. And this faith is not toward ourselves, or the world's systems, or some superstitious or mystical practice; this faith is in God. In fact, the value of faith is in its object and not in its mere existence. We must have faith that is well-placed. Faith in the wrong things, or the absence of faith, makes it meaningless and even counterproductive.

Another verse in Heb. 11, verse 6, tells us, "...without faith it is impossible to please God." This is the heart of all Christian practice and thought. This is the condition that distinguishes "believers" from "unbelievers". It is not what we *do* that brings our salvation, nor does what we do bring us to a higher spiritual plane. It is what we *believe*. This is the most important contingency in our lives: What do we believe? Or WHO do we believe. On this condition rests all the meaning and productivity we will ever see within and from ourselves. Without faith, we are useless. With faith, on the other hand, we can please God and live close to Him, in order to draw on all that He offers and all that He is.

First Application of Faith. Our first meeting of faith, as it is related to God, is that time when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, faith was expressed toward God the Father and His promises, and—symbolically—toward Jesus Christ, but the clear pathway to salvation in New-Testament times leads *directly* through Christ. In Genesis 12 God promised Abraham, "I will make you a great nation...." Abraham believed this promise (and others), which caused him to be credited with a divine righteousness, simply because he believed God. Rom. 3:3 says, "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" Today, we receive the righteousness of Christ directly when we believe in Him. The *condition* for righteousness is the same now as it was then; it is a condition of *faith*. This is stated clearly in Rom. 9:30, which declares, "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith...." The same condition applies to believing Jews as it does believing Gentiles, as we see elsewhere in Scripture, but the conclusion is inescapable: Righteousness comes through faith...alone.

Faith in God vs Faith in Self We have dealt in previous writings with the subject of law versus grace, and have asserted the truth of the Bible that we are not under law but under grace. And grace is accessed through faith..."by grace, through faith". Once again, faith applies to our being born again, and after that to our ongoing lives as Christians. A life with Christ *begins* with faith, and that life is then *lived* by faith. The difference is always *faith*. For believers, this is not found in morality or church attendance or service for God—those will come—it is found in *believing*. Believing in God and His promises, accessed through our position as members of the family of God (as per John 1:12), distinguishes us from other members of the family who put their faith in themselves or in some other means for ob-

taining meaning and satisfaction. Remember this: If an unbeliever can do it, it is not the Christian way of life. Repeat: Anything an unbeliever can do is NOT Christianity. The one thing an unbeliever *cannot* do is BELIEVE, because—if he did—he would be a “believer”, and would thereby no longer be an “unbeliever”.

Righteousness Comes through Faith. As stated before, we receive the righteousness of God when we believe in Christ. This is an eternal attribution...our “position” forever. After salvation we can seek to follow God’s prescriptions for achieving righteousness within our daily lives. This is based on our “condition”, which will exist in one of two states: either 1) following God’s ways...His methods for meeting His standards...or 2) departing from God. In either case, the statement in Gal. 5:5 applies: “But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.” This hope is not weak and wilting, but confident and strong, a “faith for the future”. We have an eye on divine righteousness, which is the potentiality of faith, accomplished “through the Spirit”.

When people think of Christianity, they tend to think of activity and motion and effort, whereas true Christianity is actually *trusting*, not *doing*. Gal. 5:6b says, “...the ONLY thing that counts is faith, expressing itself through love.” (emphasis mine) Faith stands alone as the thing that matters. And as we progress upwards toward maturity, that faith will become stronger and will produce in us the divine quality of love, expressed especially through the operation of our gifts to assist other believers along their growth trajectory.

The work God wants to see in us is not work at all. It is the opposite of work. It is faith. This is the single condition God expects us to achieve. So we want more of this, because it pleases the God we have come to believe. Yet the “work” of growing faith is not one of self-effort, but is the *product of growth*, and we saw in the last chapter that growth is based, first and foremost, on our regularly feeding on the truths of God’s Word. To grow and sustain our progress, we must saturate ourselves with the Word, and the result of persistence in this will be *increased faith*. Faith increases by growing. And remember: Any avenue of growth or service that does not include immersion in the Word will not work.

A word of caution: Faith does not make us smarter, stronger, or more capable. Faith allows God to do His work in our lives, the same way He worked to bring about our salvation. He does the work, and we end up “working”...but the work is still His; energy for work that counts comes from Him. Still, our bodies and minds will be involved, and the work that God does through us will leave us exhausted.

The key for accessing His divine energy for completing His work is trust. This faith doesn’t give us greater strength to serve; it just increases God’s involvement in our function, thus availing us of His eternal strength. Is. 40:31 shows how faith “builds” strength, referring to faith as *hope*: “...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.” The strength this brings is not actually ours, but that which belongs to God, and it will be our purpose in these studies to see clearly how we access this strength, so that it will—in its practice, though not in its origin—become our own.

Other Results of Faith. When faith is growing and getting “stronger”, what can happen as a result? Answer: There are many potential results. For example, 2 Thess. 1:11-12 tells us that we can access

God's power to *glorify Christ* through faith, as follows:

And in this regard we pray for you always, that our God will make you worthy of His calling and fulfill by his power your every desire for goodness and every work of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God, the Lord Jesus Christ. (NET)

God's power gives us strength. We must be clear that this power is not from us, and that we do not access it "at will". There are specific ways to draw on God's power, and we will look at divinely-designed techniques for growing our faith to make this possible. When we master these, we can anticipate results from God's working through us. The results will include the following, which our new "strength" enables:

- **Love.** I Tim. 1:5—"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."
- **Strength to overcome weakness and sin.** Eph. 2:1 with 1:19—"As for you, you were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient", BUT NOW WE HAVE "...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength."
- **Protection.** I Thess. 5:8b—"...putting on faith and love as a breastplate..."
- **Strength for resisting Satan.** Eph. 6:13, 16—"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground," AND, "...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."
- **Obedience.** Rom. 1:5—"Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."
- **Fulfilled promises.** Heb. 6:12—"We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."
- **Production.** I Thess. 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."
- **Blessing.** Gal. 3:9—"Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

Fear of the Lord. We can expect to see the things just listed when we learn to trust. If sustained, this trust will ripen into "fear". Such fear, rather than prompting escape, as from danger, enfolds *confidence* in the object feared. This is about trust, not mistrust or endangerment. Fear means "reverence" and "awe", which are appropriate responses to an all-powerful God. Fear is faith squared. It is a graduated form of faith—a synonym for *greater* faith. This is the place we reach when we mature. We trust, but there is more: with fear, we REALLY trust. Such a mature faith gives us the full panoply of privileges and provisions which are essential for us to completely fulfill our duty and satisfy our mission. Here are some verses dealing with "fear of the Lord" that will help us understand its urgency and its

effects:

- Deut. 8:6 “Walk in his ways, revering him.”
- Deut. 31:12a “Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God...”
- 1 Sam. 12:24a “But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart...” Notice that fear precedes service. There is a reason for that, as we shall see later.
- Eccl. 12:13 “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” What is the conclusion of everything we are to know about...and do? *Fear God!*
- Ps. 147:11 “The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.”
- Hos. 6:6 “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement [fear] of God rather than burnt offerings.”

When we fear God, we are conscious of Him, remembering Him and acknowledging Him. And that is the most important thing we can do, as we see in Eccl. 12:1a, where Solomon gives us the key to living: “Remember your Creator...” Add Prov. 3:5-6, which commands us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart [fear] and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge [fear] him, and he will make your paths straight.” Faith works. Everything we will ever achieve will spring from this embryo, which is small...smaller than a mustard seed...but it can become mighty. Learn to trust...and see what God can do.

B. Living by Faith

Lives That Function by Faith. In regard to Christian living, Gal. 2:20 offers one of the most concentrated encapsulations of truth in all of Scripture. In this verse Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” The point we want to isolate in this verse is found in the clause, “the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God”. Our lives, to the degree they are characterized by an ongoing faith...or lives that are conducted BY FAITH...will be pre-occupied with the life of Christ, and will actually have the life of Christ lived out through them.

Absence of faith causes a distance from God. It is hard to quantify this, but in a real sense, the amount of faith we have determines the degree to which we access God. He is always engaged with His children, with or without their living by faith, but when faith is deficient, the kind of involvement we experience with God will not be satisfying, and will not fulfill His purpose for us. We perceive and experience God only through faith, and until we have an abiding trust in Him and His promises, we will be aware that something really important is missing. And it is God. He will not force Himself on an untrusting believer; each believer must want and seek God for himself, thus inviting knowledge of

God and the presence of God into the routines of his life.

There is a short chapter in my book, *Bible Basics on Living in God's Plan*, titled "Faith in God's Plan", that gives a full discussion of the role of faith in our Christian walk. With a small revision for the sake of updating the application, we quote from that chapter below. One of the verses cited in that study is Hebrews 11:6, which says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." When we come to God, it is because we believe He is there...that He is real. From the chapter cited above, the following is given:

We come to the living God, sincerely and heartily and enthusiastically seeking His grace (which does *not* mean that we casually, or occasionally, or incidentally *check in*, known as giving a "nod to God"); we come to Him, because we believe that He is, and that He is *good*. We know we can trust in what He has told us, and that the things that He promises will come to pass.

When we trust Him, we come to know Him, and when we know Him, everything changes. Our function in this life hinges on the quality of the faith we develop. As faith grows, so life goes. There is no real life without real faith!

Faith vs Sight. When we walk away from God, and choose our own paths of pleasure or power or position, we are living by "not-faith", and life cannot be good when it is lived that way. We will be walking by sight...by what we can know through reason and the wisdom of the world, and not by faith. This is why it is so difficult to maintain faith, and stay strong when we are tested: because we believe our own lying eyes more than the Word. To combat such erroneous, yet irresistible conclusions, we must surround ourselves with God's truth. We must focus on the Word through all kinds of weather, past every fire and wind that purports to destroy us. We cannot believe what we see; we must believe what we do NOT see, because it is the invisible force of the Almighty God that stands as the ultimate reality. To trust in the visible world is to succumb to the draw of the devil and the world, as it deceives us into thinking that reality is understood only through the senses. This is a lie. Reality is seen in the eyes of our hearts, which is where we see and know God.

Walking by Faith. When we walk, it is to be by faith. 2 Cor. 5:7 says, "We live by faith, not by sight." As we get more concrete about what this means, we will see that the faith that sustains us comes primarily through our understanding of God's Word. This does not mean accumulating a myriad of "Bible facts", but actually understanding the nature of God, our place and role in His family, and specifically how to live. Understanding is central...the star promoter of our growth. But the *supporting cast* for study is essential, as well. We will cover them all.

One key component of the development of faith is fellowship with God. Faith cannot operate without fellowship, and—as we shall see—even mature believers can be out of fellowship, or walking in the flesh. At any stage of maturity, fellowship can exist, based on the sincere confession of our sins (more on this later). With fellowship, we can "walk by faith". In a message for believers, Paul encouraged the Galatians to live by faith, rather than under other systems, such as observance of the law. Here is what

he said to them: “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ This law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these will live by them.’” (Gal. 3:11-12)

Being “righteous”, so that we can learn to live by faith, means being in fellowship, or having all sins forgiven through confession. This is one of several techniques that we will examine that are crucial to our functioning properly within God’s plan for our training, thus giving us the full benefit of His program. When we reach the level that we are living by faith, it will be because we use and follow His methods.

Forms and/or Applications of Faith. Probing further into the issue of faith, we must be clear about its application. We must distinguish “living” faith from “saving” faith. When we look at a passage, it is important to know whether it is discussing the kind of faith expressed at salvation...a once-for-all event...or the faith exercised in our daily lives, which is, by design, a protracted, ongoing condition. In this book we are focused on the faith that we live by from day to day, as we look for ways to access the abundant life that God promises for the faithful.

One of the ongoing forms of faith is “commitment”. We discussed this advanced stage of belief in *Bible Basics on Living in God’s Plan*, presented in the chapter, “Commitment”. There we described commitment as a series of many choices and practices leading to greater faith. We saw commitment as the pinnacle of the faith-growth process. Other aspects or stages of faith include submission, surrender, offering ourselves, yielding, dedication, and consecration (and we have mentioned “fear”). None of these are once-for-all decisions like believing at salvation; they are the result of accumulated positive judgments reflecting a persistent preference for God and His ways over that of the world, the devil, and our own sinful natures. The eventual outcome is complete commitment, perfected by maturity and a pure spiritual walk. This is what we aspire to: full, undiluted, unsullied, unwavering commitment to God. This is where we are headed.

A smattering of verses reflecting various forms or preliminary states of commitment are offered here to shore up our understanding of their place in our growth. These include the following:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” Rom. 12:1

“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.” Rom. 6:13

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” James 4:7-8a

“You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” 1 Cor. 6:20

Notice that none of these is seen as a one-time event, but something we do repeatedly or continually as an ongoing practice. Coming near to God, or offering our bodies for His service, is not a single

event, but many events. It would be nice if we could yield just once and then we would be in a perpetual state of submission, but that is not how it works. Life is lived out one decision and one thought and one action at a time. Salvation is permanent and static; commitment is intermittent and progressive. With graduated trusting comes greater commitment.

Challenges to our Faith. The growth pattern, our moving toward commitment and greater faith, will not come without challenges, which is the main point of this book: dealing with the challenges that God brings to induce our growth. Much of the time we are in the middle of problems and setbacks. Often, we must wait on God to deliver us, because there is no apparent end in sight. That is when trusting is most important, and perhaps most difficult. In the realm of human experience, negative events tend to create disappointment and bitterness. But these deny that what is happening is part of God's plan for us, and that what we see is designed by God for our growth. When we are in the heat of battle, things are not easy, which is why we must drown ourselves in the Word to enable consistency in our view of events as decreed by God.

Faith in Standing Still and Waiting on the Lord. When we trust, we wait on the Lord. And while we are waiting, we must be trusting. Events hammer us with the lie that bad is "bad", and that we can only react negatively to bad circumstances with normal human emotions. Once again, this is a lie that we must reject. The truth is that God is in complete control of everything, and He has a specific outcome in mind that will glorify Him and work for our good. Confidence in this maxim will enable us to wait. Ps. 37:4-7a gives us assurance of this:

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him....

We will never lose when we wait on Him. Ps. 33:16-18 adds the following:

No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love....

God loves our faith, our surrender, our submission to Him, as He did in His own Son. Heb. 5:7 shows Jesus' surrender to His Father's plan, as follows:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

This is submitting without question. Our surrender makes us like Christ, knowing that God's plan is best and that we can trust our Father to love us and deal with us in great compassion and with enormous care. 2 Chron. 20 also give us a perfect example of trusting, beginning in verse 12, where Jeshoshaphat prayed, "O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you." God's response to this

prayer was typical and instructive:

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you. (2 Chron. 20:17)

Faith in the Heat of Battle. Verse 15b in this passage gives the summary: “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.” This is very convincing as to how God works. He does not depend on us. He wants us to depend on Him. He can fight the battles. We cannot. Our role is to rely on Him to be God, and to recognize that we are helpless without Him. David said it well in Ps. 130:5: “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.” That is faith. And it will have results, as expressed in Heb. 6:12, which says, “We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”

Faith in what God has promised shows that we understand His character, and accept the love He has for us. Knowing and believing the promises He has given is a key component in our acceptance of His training. Numerous promises were listed in *Bible Basics on Walking by Faith*, in a chapter titled, “Believing the Promises of God”. We refer you to that list for a good cross-section of God’s promises. These are God’s guarantee that He will always deal with us in grace, and that He will provide for us what we need. Great reassurance comes from knowing these promises, and from knowing God’s intentions for us.

C. Faith for Training

Faith in Difficult Times. When training is underway, which is most of the time as we shall see, it must be greeted with faith in order to endure it. When events come, and they will, we can respond in anxiety, fear, and/or rebellion; or we can respond with trust in the One Who is bringing the events. We will talk more about the purpose of training later, but for now we can acknowledge that the training *has* a purpose, and that it is designed for our benefit. The first tendency in any difficult occurrence in life is either to curse it, or to try solving it on our own. Either response is inappropriate. Cursing an event shows that we doubt God’s grand plan and purpose for us. And trying to solve it on our own—without God—shows that we have more faith in ourselves than in God. The best response to each circumstance is to trust that God knows best and that He is working on our behalf. All events are opportunities to trust God.

Anxiety is a common reaction to set-backs and pressures. God wants to know that we trust Him under all conditions, and He wants us to know that He *can* be trusted. His entire training program is designed to bring about a burgeoning trust in Him. The Bible is full of examples and admonitions for this, as we see in James 5:1-11. In verses 1-6 of this passage, we see the futility of trust in self and in the world’s schemes. This is contrasted in verses 7-11 with a call to trust in God and His program, which sustains us through all kinds of suffering. The passage closes with a promise for the outcome and reassurance about the One who brings it. Here is what verses 7-11 say:

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You, too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door! Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Farmers in Israel were not like the farmers of Egypt, who had the Nile from which to irrigate. They were totally at the mercy of the weather to enable them to produce crops. They planted in dry dirt and then waited for the rains. They were totally dependent on God. This is where God had placed them—in a location where they would have to trust Him. They had to acknowledge that God is always in control, He is always good, and He will always know best when rain fits His plan. And if the rains did not come, they knew God was still on His throne, and that He would provide. Likewise, Job—when he endured such intense suffering—waivered but ultimately persevered, and ended up with double blessings from God. The promise is that those who persevere in faith through dry seasons will be “considered blessed”. This is because God will change suffering into blessing, and the end result will make it all worthwhile.

Faith is the Alternative to Fear in Suffering. Fear is a typical response to the vicissitudes of life. We fear loss: loss of income, loss of health, loss of family and friends, loss of comfort, and even loss of life. David was afraid, but he knew how to handle it, saying, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” The correct response to fear is faith. This may seem trite, having been repeated often, but we will see before this book is done, that fear (the kind that comes from real *or* imagined danger) CAN be trumped by faith. Fear shuts down faith and blocks clear thinking. Fear is a sin, and—like any sin—alienates us from God. Fear impinges on our ability to reason, and switches us to pure emotion (psychology calls this “down-shifting”, or the reduction of rational thought under pressure). Negative emotions such as fear can undermine self-control and foster poor decisions. Decisions must be based on clear thinking, and bad news tends to cloud our ability to think. To maintain clear thinking, we must increase our understanding of the Word, which results in advanced (or “advancing”) maturity.

We cannot fear circumstances and trust God at the same time. But self-determination and merely *wanting* to trust are not enough. We can't sit where we are in this instant and generate more faith than we have acquired through the training we've already received through the Word and in life. We must follow the steps God provides for developing strong faith, so that we will not fall apart when the storms hit. If we do not learn to trust God *before* the calamity comes, we will not handle it *when* it comes. When the storm passes, at some retrospective point, we will know that we *should have* trusted.

Faith is the Correct Response to Prosperity. *Suffering* will test our faith, but *prosperity* can also be a time of testing. In either case, there is a temptation to look to self or the world for relief, continuity, satisfaction, meaning, and contentment, but—for believers—the real version of these come only

from God. Everything else is a counterfeit, and nothing in the world will sustain us. Eccl. 7:14 tells us that God brings forth good times and bad, and that we should trust Him regardless of what is happening. This verse says, “When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.” We can’t predict any specific outcome, but we can be sure that nothing happens that is not part of God’s plan for us. Therefore, we can trust. The verse before this one (v. 13) says, “Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?” When things happen, we can’t always improve them, but we can “consider” from a Biblical view-point what God is doing, and rest in a knowledge that His actions and decisions are perfect. We must SEE Him and TRUST Him, with no circumstance withstanding our faith. That is our goal.

Trust in God. God is insulted when we do not trust Him. Consider what Jesus said in Mark 9, which describes a father bringing his son to Jesus for healing. Jesus asked the father how long the boy had suffered his ailment, and the father answered (v. 21), “From childhood”, and then he added (v. 22), “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” This sounds like a decent prayer, but something is missing: faith. Jesus responded by saying (v. 23), “If you can?...Everything is possible for him who believes.” Jesus was indignant at the question this father had asked, but the father corrected his thinking as a result of Jesus’ instruction, expressed faith, and the boy was healed. God is insulted when we fail to acknowledge His power and purpose with trust, but if we receive correct instruction and grow, we will *learn* to trust. Adversity is inevitable; our negative response to it is optional.

Heb. 3:12 tells us that a sinful, unbelieving heart turns from God: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” The person not trusting will “turn from God”. But then verse 13 tells us how to avoid sin and lack of trust and departure from God: “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” By exercising our gifts to give correct information to each other, and by learning from the gifts of others, especially “teachers”, we can mutually assist each other in the growth process. When we learn and grow, then the chance that we will “turn away” will be greatly diminished. This places study and learning at the center of our growth process. Other components in our growth include confession of our sins, prayer, and—our ultimate topic—God’s training.

God’s training includes, as we will examine in more detail soon, both *discipline when we do wrong*, and *training when we are right*. All suffering will serve one purpose or the other. As blatantly self-centered as this may sound, it IS “all about me”. Everything that happens to me is generated from God’s plan FOR ME; this plan is calculated to cause me to study and pray and endure, so that my faith can grow. We are destined for trials and tests, for suffering and loss, and even for prosperity. But ALL of it is designed to prompt our growth. Nothing...NOTHING...is incidental or without purpose. It all has an objective, which is this: to purify our faith. Faith is refined through tests. They teach us to use God’s grace and trust Him, with or without comfort and ease.

D. Faith Verses

Verses on Faith. I believe you will benefit greatly by simply reviewing key verses on faith, as given in the following list. This collection also invites further independent study, whereby you look more closely at each of these and review the context for each, perhaps doing an in-depth study on word meaning, historical framework, and so on. At the end I believe you will come to the same conclusions that I have, which is this: 1) Faith is to operate regardless of conditions, 2) faith can grow through study and training, and 3) faith is the basis for all production in our Christian lives. Here are some verses on faith for you to peruse:

- Faith is the only thing that counts. “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love” (Gal. 5:6).
- Faith is directed toward God.
 - “...that we should not trust in ourselves but in God” (2 Cor 1:8-9).
 - “Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.” (1 Pet. 1:21).
- Faith is *from* God.
 - “Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief’” (Mark 9:24).
 - “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).
 - “...grace poured out on me, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:4).
- Faith protects us.
 - “...putting on faith as a breastplate” (1Thess. 5:8).
 - “...take up the shield of faith, with which you extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16).
- Faith brings God’s blessing.
 - “Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham” (Gal. 3:9).
 - “Blessed are all those who put their trust in him” (Ps. 2:12).
- Faith avails God’s rest. God has a rest for believers which is entered by faith in His promises. When believers enter that rest, they “cease from their own works, as God did from his” (Heb. 4:10, to be considered along with the rest of Hebrews 3 and 4).
- Faith enables God to fulfill His purpose through us, as seen in this: “...we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith” (2 Thess. 1:11).

- We *live* by faith in God.
 - “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).
 - “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4).
 - “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith” (Rom. 1:17).
 - “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20).
- Faith can increase.
 - “...count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4).
 - “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20).
 - “...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Col. 2:7).
 - “Yet he did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promises of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God” (Rom. 4:20).
 - “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).
- Faith gets results.
 - “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for” (Matt. 21:22).
 - “Ask for wisdom and you will get it, if you believe and do not doubt” (James 1:5-6).
 - “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible to you’” (Matt. 17:20).
- Faith gives the victory. “Everyone born of God overcomes the world...this is the victory...even our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4).
- Love comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1Tim. 1:5).
- Anything not of faith is sin. “But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith. Everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).
- The absence of faith and confession will result in shipwreck, as seen here: “...holding on to

faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith” (1 Tim 1:19).

- Without faith we cannot please God. “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

These verses are taken from *Bible Basics on Getting Closer to God*, pp. 61-63. *Getting Closer to God* is the first book we ever wrote, and it still stands as a great introduction to faith, showing how we can and should draw closer to God day by day by increasing our awareness of, and trust in, our Father.

Chapter 5

The War Against God

In This Chapter...

- A. Satan's Fall*
- B. Earth: Creation, Spoilage, and Restoration*
- C. Angels are Watching*
- D. The Fall of Man and the Fall of Angels*
- E. Satan's Tactics*
- F. Satan's Objectives*
- G. Satan's Mission*
- H. Whose World is It?*
- I. Christ Defeated Satan*
- J. Dealing with Satan*

A. Satan's Fall

Introducing the War Against God. Satan is the great opponent of God. He is the commanding general of a huge army of fallen angels that have followed him in a war against God. This discussion arises from work developed primarily by the late Robert B. Thieme, Jr. (Endnote 2), and embellished by Robert McLaughlin (Endnote 3). These two pastors/scholars/teachers represent sequential generations, and each have contributed greatly to the overall concept of Satan's opposition to God. A caveat should be registered that I have great respect for the scholarship of these men, but I do not endorse everything they say. I believe their contributions to our understanding of Scripture are inestimable, yet there are things they have presented to which I do not subscribe. A review of their materials and studies, however, enables a gathering of great and practical truths, and each student must determine through His own spiritual growth and increasing wisdom those things that need to be discarded or tabled along the way. I assume you will do the same with this current writing. I stand humbly in the shadow of these devoted warriors of Truth.

Having said that, I now build on their work, and launch my own take on the issue of Satan and His plan to undermine the position and character of God. I intend to show in this chapter how his activities affect our spiritual growth. The concept has been called the "Angelic Conflict", and has been embraced by many pastors, professors, and teachers around the world. I prefer the less-esoteric term, "War Against God". Satan has declared war against God, and has constantly sought, before and after creation, to recruit as many angels (a completed act) and humans (an event still in progress) as possible to join his army. He is far from through, but we are running ahead of ourselves. We must first go back to the beginning, when Satan was the most marvelous and beautiful creature ever to be fashioned in all of divine history.

The Background for the War Against God. Satan was the first prehistoric creature that we have a record of God creating. He was the pinnacle of a group of created beings known as angels. At some point in prehistory, Satan, after hearing so many times, even from God, how great he was, began to believe in his own greatness and ability. Without too much detail on the process of Satan's fall, we know from Scripture that he became arrogant and decided to form a revolt against the Most High God. Keep in mind that Satan was created perfect, as were all angels, but—like members of the human race much later—he had been given free will, and was at liberty to choose for or against his Creator. He and the angels were free to depart from the perfection he was initially given. Ps. 148:1-5 describes angels praising the Creator, Who "commanded and they were created". They were flawless creatures emanating from God's creative power. They worshiped Him, and had direct contact and fellowship with Him. Yet they were free to turn their backs on Him.

Satan fell by his own initiative, which was generated from an attitude of pride. He decided he had the equipment and genius to top his Maker, thus stepping over the line from being positive toward God to being positive toward self. He looked away from God and at himself, determining that he could be as good and powerful and effective as God. Isaiah gives the five declarations of Satan, in which Satan pro-

claims his clear and abiding aspirations. He declared the following “I will’s”, which have remained his mantras since the time he first uttered them:

1. I will ascend to heaven.
2. I will raise my throne above the stars of God.
3. I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.
4. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds.
5. I will make myself like the Most High.

Satan felt in himself a kind of invincibility and indomitability that he believed could grow into absolute divinity. Members of the human race often operate under this same delusion. Beginning as children, we imagine that we will be great and powerful, and that we will become unstoppable. And some never recover from this vision of grandeur and greatness, spending their entire existence trying to prove that they deserve great honor and esteem. When we say “I will”, we must temper our confidence with an awareness that God will be the architect and finisher of anything good. We are the tools, not the hand that works them...the gloves, not the hand that fills them. Exaggerated views of ourselves are futile and counterproductive, and they will end in disillusionment. It began with Satan, who turned his inflated self-evaluation into a plan to place himself in a position above God, to prove that he—the created—could surpass God—the Creator. The difference between him and us is that he is locked into a permanent view of himself as superior to God; whereas, we can change our minds about ourselves as relates to God. We can acknowledge Him *as God*.

Pride made Satan believe he could be like God, but what did he want specifically? That is given to us in Gen. 14:18, where God is described as “possessor of heaven and earth”. (Endnote 4) Satan wanted ownership. And what does ownership connote? It suggests power and influence and position and untouchability. And that is what Satan wanted. He wanted to own all that God had. He wanted to be known as the “Great Possessor”. Satan did not want to BE God; he wanted to possess what God had. He wanted the power and recognition and possessions that God had, and he actually thought (and still thinks) this is possible.

Ezek. 28 is the well-known passage describing Satan’s fall. Rather than quote this entire lengthy section of Scripture, I ask you to crack your Bible and read verses 11 through 19 of Ezekiel 28. We are told in these verses that Satan, embodied in the King of Tyre, exhibited perfection, wisdom, and beauty (v. 12). He was the greatest creature that ever lived. He was honored as the highest angel, the “guardian cherub” on the “holy mount of God” (v. 14). Apparently, he guarded the throne room itself, and was “blameless” in all his ways...until “wickedness was found” in him. Something on the inside of Satan sparked a self-will, a desire to break out of his created limits. He wanted more than God had given (v. 15). This produced rebellion in Satan, and he obviously plotted a violent overthrow of the True King (v. 16). And it all began with pride, because he was so powerful and brilliant and beautiful. He bought his own lie, and in so doing engineered his own eventual demise. (How often do we do the

same?)

The Outcome of Satan's Fall. The result of Satan's departure from his Creator into an eternal spin of self-service was that he lost his position. He still had his beauty and power, but he no longer had the endorsement of God. In fact, he received eternal condemnation, a sentence to eternity in a lake of fire. But was he through? No. He has been sentenced, but he is still free to wage war, since God decreed that there is more to be done to fully and finally defeat and discredit an enemy such as Satan. He is "out on bail" while he tries to further establish his case against God. In the meantime, he is exercising his freedom to lead a charge against all that is holy. He began his rebellion by recruiting one-third of all angels into his army. This is gleaned from a comparison of Job 38:7, where angels are clearly referred to as stars, with Rev. 12:4, where Satan is described as sweeping up one-third of the stars into his throng. One-third of the angels decided to follow Satan in his rebellion against God.

So the most perfect creation in all of eternity decided to lead a rebellion against the very One he had been designed to protect. Then later, when the creation of the earth and mankind occurred, the stage had already been set: Satan already had his army of billions poised to attack God and oppose His plan at every opportunity. The creation of man created just such an occasion. He will attempt to recruit from the new creation to strengthen his position as general of the opposing army.

B. Earth: Creation, Spoilage, and Restoration

The Gap Theory. It is difficult to be dogmatic about one's position, if there are reasonable arguments on another side. The following discussion will favor one line of reasoning, but will not spend time either explaining or discrediting other positions. After careful and prayerful word study and looking at counter-arguments, I have concluded that there is a gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2, consisting of perhaps billions of years. I will defend this position, because it is germane to our discussion on the war opposing God.

Background: Gen. 1:1 tells us of a time "before time", when the beginning of "creation" (not the beginning of eternity, of course) took place. God CREATED the heavens and the earth. This is the time when perfect creation occurred, when God carefully planned and performed the initial formation of the universe and all its contents. But then verse 2 indicates that the earth was "formless and void". If God created a perfect universe, why would the earth be in such a spoiled and unlivable state? That is because of what took place after the initial creation, which was the fall of Satan. Satan apparently had his headquarters on earth even before his fall, and enjoyed the garden (not the Garden of Eden) that existed on the earth at that time. But then he decided to lead a revolt against God, and that resulted in the spoilage of his "garden home", the earth. And who spoiled it? God did, as we shall see. So, by the time we get to verse 2, we find the earth in shambles, encased in ice, and in complete darkness.

At some time between verses 1 and 2, Satan began a revolt against God, with many angels joining him, and God began to respond with His plan to restore earth and create man. We will see the connection between these two events soon. As part of His plan, God began to prepare a home for man on

earth...right in Satan's back yard. God then created perfect man, but Satan—always recruiting—deceived Eve, after which Adam followed, resulting in the fall of man...a fall similar to the fall of Satan. And thus began a time of dilemma that God had to resolve. The dilemma was that some of His creatures rejected Him as God, which His justice and righteousness could not tolerate. He had to condemn those who rebelled. At the same time, He had to vindicate His character, so He planned a way to RESTORE HIS RELATIONSHIP with man, to show Satan and his followers that He was perfect, even though He had condemned the rebels. The time of the resolution of this dilemma is called human history, and it is our story. The story began in eternity past when God planned it all. But we are running ahead of ourselves again.

The defense of there being a time gap between verse 1 and verse 2 is a reasonable one, convincing me that the events in these two verses are not contiguous, but separated, perhaps by billions of years. Apart from the war against God, which begs the existence of a "gap", there is other evidence. For example, the Hebrew word translated "was" in verse 2, where it says, "Now the earth was without form and void", can mean "was", but it also frequently means "became". The earth *became* formless and void. There is no reason for NOT using "became", instead of "was". In Gen. 19:26, as in many other scriptures, Lot's wife "became" (same word) a pillar of salt. She was one way, and then was changed into another.

Original creation was perfect, as per Job 38:4-7, which clearly depicts the perfect and meticulous planning of God. To suggest that He did not know whether His first efforts would be "formless and void", or a mistake, is to suggest that He had no foreknowledge, or that he lacked the ability to make corrections BEFORE an error was made. The state of creation described in verse 2 does not reflect perfection. Creation was perfect in verse 1, including heaven and earth, finished products, but the earth "became" formless and void. Otherwise, we are left with an imperfect initial creation, which would not be in keeping with our understanding of God's perfection. Other points to strengthen the argument for a "gap" will surface as we proceed.

Jesus Christ was the primary agent for initial creation, as per John 1:1-2, which says the following:

In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The Word, or Jesus Christ, executed His Father's plan for creation of the universe. Then, after Satan's fall and the spoilage of the earth, the Holy Spirit performed the restoration of the earth to its initial perfection. Gen. 1:2-31 gives an account of this restoration. But between these events, there is a gap of time, during which there was darkness on the earth. This means there was no light on the earth, a phenomenon which occurred through natural and/or supernatural causes. Absence of light means unbelievable coldness, resulting in the encasement of the earth in ice, which happens to be corroborated by science. The earth was a snowball.

According to Job 38:4-7, angels were around when God performed the initial creation of the earth,

and they have been around ever since. According to Rev. 12:4, Satan took one-third of these angels with him when he started his rebellion. These angels were gathered with him on earth when the earth was spoiled. Earth became formless and void, and “darkness was over the face of the deep”. This shows ice over the oceans...the encapsulation of the earth in a thick, impenetrable layer of frozen water. Jer. 4:23-26 describes the scene that took place at that time, as follows:

I looked at the earth, and it was [had become] formless and empty [same word as in Gen. 1:2]; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people [not created yet]; every bird in the sky had flown away [pre-spoilage animals unable to live]. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert [ice pack]; all its towns [cities of angels] lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger.

The correlation of this passage with Gen. 1:2 is obvious. It is also clear that God is the one who spoiled the earth and trapped the angels in darkness, in response to Satan’s revolt. Is. 24:1, along with Jer. 4:23, makes this clear. But Satan still had a voice, even though there were no lights in his house; God was still allowing Satan to state his case, and still is, as per Job 1 and 2, which report Satan standing before God to accuse Job. Today, Satan continues to make his case against friends of God, and that is part of his strategy in the war against God. This is taking place right now, within our time...in human history. He is accusing us non-stop.

Purpose for the New Inferior Creature Called Man. God’s plan is far ahead of Satan. God surely surprised Satan when He brought a new creature called “man” onto the stage. Satan needed an object lesson to show him that God is just and loving and gracious and fair. Any punishment ever given by God will be justified, and this is what He wants Satan to understand. So God created an inferior being like man, who was lower than the angels, and gave him free will. And—just like Satan—man exercised his free will and turned his back on God. This set the stage for the vindication of God’s character, because, even though man failed, God showed grace by providing a way for man to be delivered from punishment. He deserved condemnation, because he chose to reject the God who made him, but God offered a way of deliverance through the cross, whereby Jesus Christ took on Himself all our punishment, thus giving us the ability to choose to unite with God and assume our place in His royal family.

The purpose of man is to demonstrate the quality and character of God to the angels. Our redemption shows God’s mercy and love and grace. Men who believe in Christ will spend eternity with God, and will be elevated to a position higher than angels, because of their union and identification with Christ. God is doing an amazing thing: taking creatures who are inferior to angels, and—through the work of His grace—bringing them to a status superior to angels. It is their position in Christ that makes this possible.

Satan did not know what to make of this inferior being called man, and assumed he could dominate him easily, since Satan was so much more powerful than he. But he did not calculate or understand the design of God to ultimately defeat Satan and elevate any man who accepted His salvation. Satan’s suc-

cess in engineering the fall of man surely convinced him that he was on his way to victory. If he could persuade all these new creatures to follow him, surely he could show God's deficiency and finally defeat Him. But God created man to demonstrate His perfection, and He depicts through our faith His perfect grace and goodness. God's objective is to counter Satan's appeal of his sentence with an argument observed in the free choice of man...some choose God and some reject Him. With choice comes responsibility, and Satan is responsible for having chosen himself over God. This is the great choice—for Satan, for angels, and now for us. Choose God, or suffer the consequences. But when the choice favors God, the benefits are infinite.

Even a rotten, inferior individual like man, who initially rejected God, can find mercy and grace with God, who offers salvation to all men. God loves even those people who are evil. Greater evil is countered with greater grace, and no one is refused access to God who seeks Him. And it is the profound presence of God's grace and mercy that proves God is good, and that Satan's accusations are wrong. God didn't just say, "I love you." He proved it on the cross, and Satan, without knowing it yet, has already lost, because God's grace is forever faithful and true. Even though we all "like sheep have gone astray" and each of us has "turned to his own way" (Is. 53:6), God is gracious. He gives us freedom to choose salvation over condemnation. That means we are responsible for our choices. Fair enough.

Satan Uses Subterfuge to Recruit People for his Army. Satan does not want to be alone in his choice. Like so many nefarious leaders in human history, Satan wants as many loyal subjects as he can acquire. And he goes after anyone who opposes him...tries to undermine and destroy anyone loyal to his opposition, the King. Satan wants to create doubt about the goodness of his enemy, and will use immorality (and human-induced morality), religion, pride, self-righteousness, worldly systems of wisdom, emotions (e.g., fear), and longing for power to discredit or distract from the One he opposes. But no practice of Satan creates more challenge to God's followers than his direct accusation of them before God. Even when believers do right, Satan accuses them of faulty motives and objectives, such as honoring God so they can hang on to the blessings they have. These induce tests and trials to challenge them. These will be permitted by God to strengthen believers on the "spiritual practice-field", as a chance for them to glorify Him through the exercise of faith. But when believers do *wrong*, and Satan accuses, he has an open and shut case against them. This induces God's negative attention to their behavior, also known as discipline. So whether a believer is doing right or wrong, Satan is making ACCUSATIONS against them to bring pressure on them, and to cause them to question and doubt God. He wants them to move away from God, thus causing them to become the friend and ally of evil.

No case demonstrates this process better than the account of a great believer in ancient history known as Job. The question posed in the record of Job is this: Is God good? Suffering is always for testing to spur growth; or for discipline, to prompt a wandering believer to return to fellowship with God. Job's story is a mixture of both of these, as he was both tested...and disciplined. Even though he was the most mature believer in the world at the time, Job was not perfect. He had sins dealing with fear, pride, improper sacrificing, and lack of faith. For a complete discussion of these, see "Is God Good? The Story of Job", which is a chapter in my book, *Bible Basics on Living in God's Plan*. (This chapter in

my earlier writing gives a complete analysis of what happened to Job, and why, and describes the outcome of his full restoration.) As a result of his testing and discipline, Job lost everything. But why was Job spotlighted the way he was? It is because Satan recognized the liability he was to Satan's purposes, and he wanted to cut him short and minimize any production that might emerge as a result of Job's close relationship with God. So Satan accused him before God. He claimed that the only reason Job was loyal to God was because of the benefits he had received from God. So God agreed to allow Satan to do everything to Job except kill him. When Satan was through, all Job had left was a nagging wife and three self-righteous friends.

The first result of Job's escalating loss was to trust God regardless. His second response, after the suffering increased, was to question God and to hate his own life. And his final response was a return to faith and fellowship with God. His maturity paid off after all. The point of this highly-abbreviated account of Job's suffering is to illustrate Satan's practice of accusing believers before God to get them to doubt His goodness. And if they doubt God, nothing good can happen until they are restored to an intimate relationship with God.

Satan's Attacks. Satan started accusing God soon after his fall. His war against God and His followers, both angelic and human, centers on his claim that God is unfair in sending His own created beings (Satan surely had himself in mind) to a lake of fire. God's reply to Satan's implication could go something like this: "Okay, I'll show you my fairness by demonstrating that condemnation to a lake of fire is based on YOUR choice and not mine. I will create an inferior being with whom I can demonstrate my justice and righteousness, by creating a dichotomy of choices, one *for* me, and one *against* me. All of these (human) beings will be given this choice. That choice is open for their entire lives, and if they want me, the Almighty God, they can have me. They must choose. But I will give you, Satan, a chance to see this before I actually execute the sentence you have received. Go and see my grace and goodness at work, and you will know in the end that I am good and righteousness and just, and you will worship me, but it will be too late. You will see." The time of Satan's observation, and his doing everything he can to disprove God's fairness, is the period known as "human history". Everything about our initial creation, our purpose in time, and our final destiny is about the conduct of this war against God, so that everything we do and experience is related to this ongoing battle.

This is why, billions of years ago, God made a plan to resolve this conflict at the right time by creating man and illustrating grace through the cross, which gives all men the opportunity to avoid condemnation. Grace provides salvation on the basis of non-meritorious faith, and allows believers the future privilege of sharing the throne with the Son of God, Who secured the outcome of the battle through His sacrifice. Grace offers relief from judgment, and shows that God is fair, because he provides a way out for all who choose it. This leaves Satan without a case.

So six thousand years ago, give or take, the Holy Spirit restored the earth, which is now the stage for the drama that teaches the fairness of God. And who is the audience? Angels, both elect and fallen. They all look on with intense interest at the choices and behavior of men. When men sin, even in the secret chambers of their minds, or when they praise and pray, even when no one is looking, they are

observed by angels. We can contribute to God's cause or Satan's cause, even in ways that are never witnessed by fellow humans. We can glorify God before angels, or we can—in effect—curse him, by what we do. You're being watched; there's no getting around it. And this helps us understand our importance in the super-universal scheme of things. It's about more than a tiny blue marble with relatively infinitesimal beings on it; it's about the depiction of God's great and perfect character for the observation of billions of angels.

God's Purpose for Man. Eph. 3:7-11 describes the purpose of this play called human history, giving us the following:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So what is God's intent, His purpose and objective? To show through the church the complete wisdom and character of God...and who does He want to show it to? "Rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms". The angels! Keep in mind that Satan and his followers, the fallen angels, are still "in heavenly realms", as they have been neither confined, nor sent to the lake of fire. (Some fallen angels have been incarcerated, but that's another story.) Angels are watching a demonstration of God's wisdom, righteousness, justice, grace, mercy, fairness, and patience. This screenplay or production shows the long-suffering nature of God, as he allows Satan and his crowd, along with elect angels, to SEE the error of Satan's ways. In the next section we will look more closely at these angels who intently watch our every move.

C. Angels are Watching

Stars in God's Play. We are part of a play presented to angels. Our importance in the larger scheme of the super-universe, God's space, is this: We demonstrate for angels the grace of God...His fairness and justice...and we show that God can take lowly creatures, give each of them the ability to choose, make each accountable for that choice, and elevate any who choose Him...while condemning those who reject Him. What could be fairer? God gives us an unforced choice and we decide freely whether to accept Him or to walk away from Him. And this is what angels, fallen and elect alike, see in this play...reality TV at its best. They understand from the example we portray that Satan and his fallen angels are being sent to the lake of fire, not because God is hostile or unfair or biased, but because they made an independent choice to oppose God. And God's justice and righteousness cannot accept rejection.

1 Cor. 4:9 makes a clear connection between our existence and the theater. This verse says the follow-

ing:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession [parade], like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.

The word “spectacle” is the translation of the Greek word *theatron*. This is the word from which we get the English word “theater”. We are being watched non-stop, because our decisions and our actions and thoughts either portray God’s grace and mercy, or they help Satan make his case against God. When we sin or trust anything or anyone (including ourselves) more than we do God, we are—in effect—rejecting God and serving Satan. And believers can serve Satan just as much as unbelievers, as we see in James 4:4, in a passage which calls for us to “resist the devil”. Verse 4 cautions us further, saying, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world [Satan’s domain] is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” We will see this repeatedly in other scriptures later in our study, but the point we are establishing now is that angels are watching to see the trends and outcomes of our daily lives, which will show whose side we are on. And, yes, believers can be fighting on the wrong side!

Angels Want to See. God’s character is seen through His plan for us, which demonstrates His wisdom and grace. God is using a pitiful creature like man, fallen and destitute, to show angels His greatness and goodness and wisdom. Angels watch, not only with interest, but with great passion. 1 Pet. 1:12 suggests the intensity of their observation in the following:

It was revealed to them [prophets] that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Angels are searching anxiously to see what happens with us. Elect angels want us to believe and then succeed, as per Luke 15:10, which says, “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Fallen angels, on the other hand, curse when we believe, and steel their resolve to disrupt our faith and prevent our accessing grace. This places us in the middle of the war against God. If we follow grace and seek Him with everything we have within us, we are sharing the victory which God is securing through His Son. If we follow our own sorry instincts and cave in to our sinful natures, influenced by the wiles of Satan and the lure of the world, we are striking blows, NOT AGAINST, BUT FOR the enemy. We are traitors to God every time we decide to sin, or doubt, or seek our own righteousness instead of His. We are no longer His sweet children, but vicious enemies opposing Him, and we have a huge audience witnessing this debacle. We have turned a comedy (with a happy ending) into a tragedy (ending in disaster).

It is certain we are being observed, as we have seen already from the Word. But there are other scriptures that verify this standard practice among angels. For example, Paul admonishes Timothy, “I charge you in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.” We are in their “sight”. They are also up close and personal,

as per Heb. 1:14, which says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” They are in contact with us on a continual basis...to serve us as we are serving God. Not so with fallen angels, who are also engaged with us, but not to help us. Eph. 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms [fallen angels].” This not only sharpens our focus on the immensity of our enemy, it shows that we are not alone on this field...there is a home team and an opposing team, and at any given time, we are supporting one or the other. Our objective is to make the right choice and contribute to the right team.

Choosing Sides in the Great Battle. Choosing well is not easy. The opposition has supernatural powers, which we cannot resist without direct divine connection and assistance. And the enemy is engaged ALL THE TIME, which requires us to be fully committed to all the things that strengthen our connection, such as study and prayer and the growth of our faith. There can be no time-out, and there is no margin for error. Satan is too smart to miss an opportunity. 1 Pet. 5:8 puts it well, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” And it is easy to get caught off-guard. Even Job, living comfortably and with no suspicion of impending disaster, was blind-sided by Satan, who had been observing him closely. Job 1:6 and 2:1-3 illustrated for us the way Satan attacks, as we saw in an earlier discussion. The devil’s onslaught against Job began with an accusation and ended with visible, tangible, measurable damage to Job and his family. The *battle* may go on against spiritual forces, but the *results* are often viewed in plain sight, and they can be devastating. The only shelter is grace...staying close to our Protector. That is why we must grow, and why we cannot step away from God, not for one second.

The purpose for our existence emerges as we begin to understand this great war. The object of our being saved in the first place is not so much about our being relieved from eternal condemnation, but about our glorifying God before the angels. We are to reflect His righteousness for angels to see, and we are to be witnesses for the efficacy of God’s character and plan. When we operate in the sphere of His grace, we affirm His love and mercy to all onlookers, human and angelic. Our lives are much more significant than the acquisition of houses and things, or having the attention of the opposite sex, or being celebrated for achievements and abilities, or filling our heads with the immense knowledge and wisdom of the world. Our purpose is higher...we were created to glorify God. We do this first of all by accepting Christ as Savior. After that we glorify God by accessing His grace and allowing that grace to work through us as we live. When we, as born-again believers, accept grace and apply grace techniques in our lives, we glorify God, because angels can see grace in action.

Invisible Heroes. Sometimes we think of super-believers as those who are most visible and openly influential. But that is not God’s view. He is NOT looking for OUR competence or greatness; He is looking for us to HUMBLE ourselves and access HIS ABILITIES. This is what angels are watching for...hearts for God. Even when we are in our eternal state, the angels will be watching for our reflection of God’s greatness, even though our “names” will be recognized by Him. Rev. 3:5 says, “He who overcomes [follows the grace-life] will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name

from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.” Angels will be applauding the grace that has been shown through us. The greatest heroism is that which is recognized by angels, and possibly never seen by humans, obscure acts of devotion and faith, such as those performed by prayer warriors agonizing in remote closets, or faithful supporters giving time and treasure to the limits of their abilities...in secret...and worshippers who quietly listen to the Word being taught day after day. Ordinary believers can be *invisible heroes*. These are the ones *we* may never notice, but *God* does. These are the ones who will get huge positions and rewards in heaven.

The point is clear: glorifying God is not necessarily a string of overt acts seen by humans. Even more than that, it is that which ANGELS recognize as devotion to God...unseen things...things not on a list. It is possible to sit alone in a room and glorify God, just as it is possible to perform great acts of religious service and still dishonor Him. It is the HEART that God sees first and foremost, and it is what angels measure to determine spiritual quality or its absence. We do not need to fret that we are not “accomplishing” enough. If we are learning and our faith is growing, this will take us to the kind and level of achievement that God wants. Paul understood this, as evidenced by what he said in 2 Cor. 6:9a, in which Paul saw himself as “known, yet regarded as unknown”. Jesus described invisible heroes in Matt. 6, especially verses 1-8, where he said worship and giving are better done inconspicuously, rather than ostentatiously...to be “seen by men”. He said our “light” should “shine before men” (Matt.5:16), but He meant *God’s* light, not our own. Being recognized by man is not as important as being approved by God. He is the judge. And angels are the primary audience. Any believer can be extraordinary, even those who are never seen. Remember this: Every time we glorify God we score a point for the home team. But when we don’t, we are chalking up points for the opposition; we are aiding and abetting the enemy. This is why training is so important, not just within our own limited environment, but across this grand stage we’re on, with all its eternal reach and implication.

D. The Fall of Man and the Fall of Angels

The Fall of Man. Man was created to demonstrate the grace of God. But Satan did not know, when man was created, that this new creature would play a significant part in God’s victory. He was likely surprised when the Holy Spirit began to restore the earth, as it was being prepared for the habitation of man. But, once man showed up, Satan set out right away to use this created being against his Creator. He saw man as a potential ally, an inferior being that could be managed and manipulated easily. And—to a degree—he was right. At some point after man’s creation, Satan implemented a plan to cause man to rebel against God by doing the ONE thing God had forbidden man to do, at peril of death: eat the fruit of *the* tree...the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Eve was easily deceived by Satan, because his line was one that everyone is a sucker for: “If you eat (or whatever), you will become supreme, superior, and all-powerful.” Everyone falls for the temptation to feed arrogance and see oneself as having unlimited potential and great innate ability. Imagination and dreams easily accommodate this tendency, as we envision ourselves having large capacity for greatness and power. This is pride...the original sin of Satan and his angels, and then of man. Notice the parallel

failures. In fact, the parallels between the whole pattern of the fall of Satan and his angels—and that of man—are clearly aligned. Consider the following, in which the fallen condition of man and that of angels developed on parallel tracks:

- Both were created innocent.
- Both were given free will.
- Both were given a perfect environment.
- Both lived with a risk that they would fall prey to an exaggerated sense of their own worth, a kind of potential for arrogance (a possible outcome from having free will).
- Both decided to operate independently of God.
- Both fell away from God.

More on the Parallels Between the Fall of Man and the Fall of Angels. The consequence for the fall of both man and angels is condemnation to the lake of fire. It is the same for both. And it is likely that parallels continue beyond this, in which case *salvation* may be similar for man and angels. 1 Tim. 5:21 says that “elect” angels are “chosen”. Their being selected on the basis of their own volition and choice would correspond well with the process for man’s being chosen, which goes like this: We want God and therefore we make a choice to seek God...then we get the gospel, believe, and become born again. This makes us “chosen”. The choice is ours, but the work is God’s. Since certain angels are also described as “chosen”, there is likely a similar process of volition and grace for them, closely resembling what we experience. We are saved by grace through faith. Their salvation logically requires some system of grace as well, since they would not be able to “save themselves”, and would have to depend in some way on the work of God in order to be delivered.

It is also likely that angelic salvation involves more than merely rejecting the deception of Satan, and may even involve the cross, as ours does. This is uncertain, but look at Col. 1:16-20, which says this:

For by him [Jesus Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth [man?] or things in heaven [angels?], by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

We see here the pervasive effects of the cross, not just on man, but possibly on angels as well. There is no doubt whatsoever that some angels are now marked for condemnation, while others are elected for eternal life.

Angels were deceived by Satan, as man was, but they are responsible for their choices, just as we are. Satan’s deception was convincing, as shown by the fact that one-third of all angels followed Satan. His

ploy worked, because of his compelling appeal to the arrogance of the angels, no doubt promising them greatness in his new kingdom. Leadership that appeals to pride is easy to follow, especially when the appeal is laced with promises of greatness. This pattern was exemplified in human history by Adolph Hitler, who appealed to the pride of a whole nation, convincing them of their superiority and promising them the world. This illustrates why Satan's deception works: Lies about our own worth are easy to believe.

The mastermind for all rebellion is Satan, who led the angels to believe they could be like God and have unlimited power, if they helped Satan dethrone God. And Satan is still trying to convince humans to join him in his rebellion...even believers. This is the yellow light of caution for us. This is why we must learn more about this enemy, his tactics, objectives, and mission. That is coming up.

Inheriting Adam's Sinful Nature does not Negate Personal Responsibility. We inherit the sinful nature and eternal condemnation from Adam, simply by being born. Before we close this discussion on the fall of man and angels, there is a question that many ask about the fairness of our inheriting the "sin of Adam". To explain this, we begin by acknowledging the difference between the fall of Satan and the fall of Adam...and the respective outcome of each. The fall of Satan did not result in the fall of all angels, whereas the fall of Adam condemned all mankind to a lake of fire (See Rom. 5:12-20).

The question is this: How can all of Adam's descendants be saddled with responsibility for someone else's mistake, when we weren't even alive at the time the mistake was made? Here is the explanation: Remember that God has perfect foreknowledge; He knows how each one of us will ultimately choose...for or against Him. He also knows what choices we *would make*, if we were born "perfect" in a "perfect world". He knows that every single human being, given the same choices and conditions as Adam and Eve, would exercise pride at some point and decide to go his own way, leaving God behind. Every one of us would fail, just as Adam and Eve failed. All would "sin" and "go astray" and "turn to his own way", as per Is. 53:6. If we were given the same choice, we would choose negatively. That is because of the overwhelming arrogance which each of us possesses. Even those who feel "inferior" are still plagued by arrogance. All of us have this quality about us: the potent tendency toward self-exaltation. It is the nemesis and downfall of the human race...and the thing God hates most. So we cannot claim that—if we had been in the shoes of Adam or Eve—we would have chosen differently, because we would have done exactly what they did. We have no pardon from our own culpability, just because we weren't around at the time of the fall.

E. Satan's Tactics

Satan's Self-Deception. Satan has fallen and is scheduled for eternity in the lake of fire, which was prepared for him and his angels. But he is still loose and has access to all parts of the universe, and to heaven (Job 1 and 2). He will be confined during the millennium, but is on the prowl today, recruiting followers and machinating strategies for winning the war. And he has an army of highly intelligent, powerful, wily, influential, and super-natural creatures (fallen angels) helping him plan and bring about his victory. He has lost sight of the reality of God, and no longer believes that God has the

power He proclaims. He actually believes there is a possibility he can beat God. So it is that he presses on in his scheming of ways to ascend to the throne.

Satan's Strategy. The next three sections in this rather lengthy chapter could probably be one long section, or even a separate chapter. This is because the topics of these three sections are so closely aligned. These include Satan's tactics, his objectives, and his mission. These are interwoven, and must be seen together, though we believe you will see the nuances for each. The first is Satan's "tactics", our current topic. This part shows how Satan conducts his attacks, especially against believers. If he can defeat us, he can make slaves of us. And that can happen to any believer.

Satan's Allies. Making this personal, which it really is, Satan is OUR enemy, but he has allies, which include demons (fallen angels) and people. *Demons* are unswervingly committed to Satan, and will never deviate from their devotion to him and his cause. *People* also serve Satan, and some of them are even indwelt by his demons, which places them directly under his control. Others are unwittingly serving Satan through their activities in the world. The question is this: Can any of these be believers? Much more than you might think. Believers can SERVE Satan just like any unbeliever, and they become enemies of God in the process. Satan especially loves to ensnare believers, because they can do more damage to God's cause than unbelievers. For example, nothing is more devastating to the credibility of God's message than for a gifted messenger (e.g., pastor or evangelist) to go off the rails into sin or legalism, and depart from the very standards they have espoused for others. Believers are clearly subject to the tricks and taunts of Satan. Recall 1 Pet. 5:8, cited earlier, which says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." He is waiting in the shadows to undermine our faith and our commitment, and he will use the very thing he knows will take us down. We will have more to say later about the need for us to "be alert", so that we can avoid being ambushed by our crafty enemy.

Types of Satan's Attacks. Among a string of defenses against Satan, known as "armor", we see one in particular that we have studied before, and that is faith. This is found in Eph. 6:16, which says, "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." These "flaming arrows" are actually live missiles that Satan is firing at us when we are not looking. These missiles might include philosophies, television programs, music, friends' opinions, and endless lures to sin. He will always attack us when we least suspect it, or take us down when we are weakest, targeting areas where our resistance is lowest. He has demons whispering...or screaming...into our ears all the time. They are everywhere, and they are gods. Ps. 96:5 tells us that "all the gods of all the nations are idols". A "god" is nothing but a demon. And demons are like mosquitoes, waiting to land when we are not paying attention.

Satan's attacks can be categorized into several types, as follows:

- One is a genetic attack, through which Satan tries to spoil the human race, as per Gen. 6:1-13, which describes a category of fallen angels that were capable of cohabitation with humans, and whose integration with human females resulted in a super-race offspring. This was designed to disrupt the genetic composition of *homo sapien*, thus spoiling God's creation

and God's plan for man.

- Another form of attack is possession, in which case Satan, or—more likely, his demons—inhabit human beings. Matt. 9:33a describes a case of this: “And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke...” There are many cases of possession in the Bible and in real-life experience. Possession is for unbelievers only.
- Attacks of negative influence take place for believers and unbelievers. This is an attack with *ideas*. 1 Tim. 4:1 says, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” This verse describes those who have “abandoned the faith”. Believers can be swayed through ideas introduced to them by Satan...and these thoughts come out of nowhere, it seems.
- Attacks can create physical and mental malady, as we see in Luke 4:34-35, which depicts a man whose perception and thinking were distorted by a demon. And attacks can affect the body, as per Matt. 17:18, 9:20, and 9:33, which show how the body can be devastated by demons.
- Demons are also capable of attacking by creating calamity in the environment. This will be particularly in evidence during the Tribulation, when illness, attacks by monsters, death, natural disasters, and perpetual suffering are brought on by demons. (Rev. 6-21)

So demons have direct interaction with human beings, inside and outside their bodies, and will use any aspect of human life and the worldly environment to diminish our faith. And we are much more fragile than we have realized. We are easy prey for Satan, who knows us better than we know ourselves. Without even knowing it, we can be “participants with demons”, as per 1 Cor. 10:20b, but we must know that we cannot “have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:21b). We will see that—if we are to ward off the attacks of Satan—we must have on the full armor of God, which simply means we must use all the grace assets at our disposal to enable us to remain standing when the attacks come. We will have much to say about this later on.

Satan’s Arguments are Convincing. Satan makes his arguments palatable and convincing, and he advances them both in the world and in our hearts. After all, he convinced one-third of all angels to follow him in a revolt against God, even though they had seen heaven and knew God and were aware that Satan was a created being, as were they. We can only imagine the kind of persuasion it must have taken to persuade these creatures of superior intelligence to leave God. Compared to angels, we are small and weak and unintelligent and this suggests how little we have in the way of our own resources to resist an opponent as winsome as Satan. Mark 4:15 tells us that even the teachings from the Bible are not safe: “Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.”

One of Satan’s primary tactics is to introduce thoughts into our minds that weaken our faith. And when faith is weakened, our whole spiritual and moral fiber is disrupted. If we are not equipped to resist these thoughts, we will allow them to set up camp in our minds, and make a home there. These

thoughts will readily undermine our spiritual walk, because, we remind you, they hit us at our most vulnerable spots, and with impeccable timing. What is your weakness? Greed? Sexual lust? Power lust? Fear? Anxiety? Anger? Talking about people judgmentally? Addictions? Satan knows our weaknesses, because he has access to our minds, and he brings to us the very thoughts that will harm us the most, at the time we are least likely to withstand them. Our only hope for resistance is *preparation* through study and training and prayer. We must repeatedly ask for protection from the evil one, as per the prayer Jesus taught His disciples in Matt. 6:13, which says, "...deliver us from the evil one". God hears this prayer, and this can make a difference when we face the onslaughts of the devil. If we do not rely on God to help us deal with Satan, we will be on our own, and will be ill-equipped to wage battle against such a far-superior foe.

Satan Preys on Puny Man. As believers, when we become a slave to Satan, and he sets our sinful natures up on the thrones of our hearts, it may be decades before we disentangle from his control. Whatever the form of our slavery, whether it resides in a sin pattern or in some legalistic practice, it will freeze, and then reverse, our spiritual progress, resulting in a reduction of faith. And when faith subsides, faithless sins abound, such as anxiety. Satan can actually stimulate anxious thoughts within us. This is why we must cast our care on God, as per 1 Pet. 5:7, which—interestingly enough—is followed by the verse that says to be alert because the devil-lion is lurking, looking to devour us. Constantly casting our care on God will have the effect of slowing down the onslaught of anxiety induced by Satan.

Satan Wants us Confused. Satan can also rearrange our priorities, and cause us to give exaggerated importance to things that matter very little, things that add nothing to our spiritual growth. In effect, he causes us to waste time, which stalls or back-pedals our growth. More than anything, he wants to cause us to minimize the importance of learning God's techniques for living. And when we do learn, Satan wants to scramble and distort what we have learned. 1 Tim. 4:1-2 tells us that we will be surrounded by "hypocritical liars" who want to corrupt our knowledge and dissipate our understanding. Satan wants us to be confused, disoriented, and misdirected, and he accomplishes this by keeping us as far from focus on God and His Word as possible. If you find it hard to study and pray, you now have a better idea as to why.

Another thing Satan attempts to do is spoil our use of gifts. We will discuss gifts later in these studies, but we must register now Satan's ploy to prevent us from using our gifts effectively. Have you ever noticed how gifted teachers or leaders, and others, are attacked in a way that prevents their gifts from operating effectively? The great exchange of gifts among believers...using our God-appointed and anointed skills to edify each other and promote mutual growth...must operate smoothly in order for God's will to be done by individuals and the church. If Satan can disrupt this system of reciprocal support, he can stop us in our tracks.

Things Demons Promote. Demons make up Satan's army. They are a big part of his program, as they promote anything that will be harmful to believers, or deleterious to God's plan. Robert McLaughlin suggested some of these in a sermon he presented in 1995. Here are some things he says

demons promote, that we can add to the ones we have already seen:

1. Idolatry. 1 Cor. 10:19-21
2. Drug addiction. Gal. 5:20
3. Religion. Matt. 5
4. Necromancy. Is 8:19
5. Phallic cult. Is. 2:6, Luke 8:2, Mark 6:9
6. Promiscuity of all kinds.
7. Sickness, physical and mental. Mark 5:1-13, Mark 9:17, Mark 9:25, Matt. 12:22
8. Violence. Matt. 8:28
9. Exceptional strength. Mark 5:4, Luke 8:29
10. Ravings and screaming. Mark 5:5
11. Self-mutilation. Mark 5:5
12. Foaming at the mouth. Mark 9:20
13. Teeth grinding. Mark 9:18
14. Suicide. Mark 17:15
15. Nakedness. Luke 8:27
16. Living with dead bodies. Mark 5:3

Fallen Angels Attack Believers. Demons actively cause all kinds of problems. And they are too powerful for us to deal with. All we can do is “resist” by applying the techniques God gives us for accessing and operating in His strength. If we try to resist without divine assets, we will expose our weakness and will be taken down. Furthermore, enfolded within our general weakness there are special areas of weakness, such as lust, preoccupation with possessions, religious fervor, pride, all kinds of sins, legalism, self-dependency, and so on. In our areas of weakness, which will be laser-focused-on by Satan, we are pushovers...soft targets. We are helpless to fight in general, but this is especially so in our own specific areas of weakness. He waits for the time and opportunity to cut our feet from underneath us. Luke 4:13 says, “When the devil had finished all this tempting [of Jesus], he left him until an opportune time.”

One of the most common forms of attack by Satan are those which are sensual. The following verses suggest where these attacks are concentrated:

- Eph. 4:22—You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires...
- Col. 3:5—Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: evil desires and

greed, which is idolatry.

- Eph. 6:12—For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

A Battle for Hearts and Minds. Satan will certainly take advantage of us whenever he can. 2 Cor. 2:11 tells us that Satan can “outwit” us in battle. His superior intelligence enables him to accomplish his purposes with us, and the main one is to overtake our hearts and minds. If he has our hearts, he has us fighting on his side. This is why it is important for us to understand his targets. He is battling for control of our thoughts, from which all else springs. When we speak of the “battle”, there may be a tendency to think that the struggle is primarily over “lost souls”. When we are close to God, we will certainly give the gospel to unbelievers as He directs, but the battle for lost souls must play out in the plan of God. He knows if positive volition is putting off signals, and He will get the word out when this happens. This is not the battle we are speaking of here, with us on one side and Satan on the other, competing for lost souls between us. God gives lost souls freedom to choose Him or reject Him, and He accepts their choices. The battle we are looking at here is for OUR OWN SOUL. His objective is to dominate our souls. Our objective is to mature, to become equipped for this battle which purports to capture our minds. This means we must grow while there is time. Ps. 90:12 admonishes, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Training must get underway!

Satan is trying by any means to win this war of ideas. And if he can prove God is a liar (as he attempted to do in the Garden, when he asked Eve, “Did God really say...?”, Gen. 3:1), he knows then that he can prevail. His arrogance convinces him that he can outsmart His Creator. So how can He prove God is lying? By recruiting us to challenge and impugn the character of God. Satan’s charge is that God is not good, loving, fair, gracious, or just. And God is a liar. God answers, as we have seen, by demonstrating His grace with, in, and through us. So grace is the counter to Satan’s charge, and grace, as we know, is accessed through faith. Satan wants us to help him disprove God, and God wants us to show His divine character. If Satan can draw us away from God, he knows we cannot use grace, and we will be powerless against him.

Satan also tries to get us focused on ourselves. He promotes “creature credit” and self-reliance. His greatest deception comes from his original failure, when he said, “I will”, suggesting, “I can”. He wants us to have the same attitude, to exhibit SELF confidence, rather than confidence in God. If he can convince us that we don’t need God, and that we can function adequately on our own, we will operate with the belief that our abilities and skills are sufficient. We will trust SELF. That’s Satan’s agenda for us, because he knows that—if he can get us to trust ourselves—he can get us to serve him.

Satan Promotes Worthwhile “Causes”. Finally, there is an area of deception that is the most confusing of all, and that is the embracing of “causes” in our society or in the world. Causes that are addressed with the leadership of the Holy Spirit are legitimate, and by His power we will be effective in addressing them. But note the caveat...this only happens IF we are led by the Spirit. The problem is that we want to interject ourselves as the determiner of what causes and what issues are most impor-

tant. Satan's role is to get us to adopt goals that are defensible, perhaps, yet they represent a meaningless "chasing of rabbits" that distracts us from our true spiritual purposes. When we look at conditions in our nation, for example, we want to improve them. Causes such as abortion, or prayer in school, or morality, are quite compelling. But these are not what we are commissioned to "fix", and Satan is content with us addressing these causes. Our job is expressed in Matt. 28:19-20, which commissions us to do the following:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

We are to do two things, primarily: baptize and teach. Baptism has to do with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which occurs at salvation. We satisfy this by giving the gospel, as directed by the Holy Spirit. And "teaching" has to do with instructing those who have believed the gospel, so that they can become students, or "disciples", of the Word. The first event takes place in an instant of time (salvation), and the second goes on all of our lives (learning how to live from the Word). Any cause that distracts from this mission, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ Himself, should be questioned.

So what are Satan's objectives, specifically? This is what we will see next.

F. Satan's Objectives

Knowing our Enemy. Satan wants to overthrow God's supreme rule and take all divine privileges and possessions for himself. He has an army of angels and a growing army of human beings to assist him in this insurrection. We want to understand these things, not just so we can "know our enemy", but more-so to motivate us to get the assistance we need to withstand his attacks. We need God's grace assets to fight Satan, and we are helpless without them. God makes the difference in this battle, and nothing about us *apart from Him* prepares us for it. Even the knowledge we get from study is insufficient to withstand the devil without the engagement of God's power through the use of His techniques. Perhaps you are tired of hearing this over and over, but the importance of plugging in to God's power cannot be overestimated, and we will see these techniques in even more detail before we are through. Using these can accelerate and enhance God's training program for us, as the battle rages on all around.

Being Vigilant. When birds feed, they dip, quickly take a sip or a nip, and bob back up. Birds are ever-vigilant for dangers that stalk and encroach. We are to be like them...dipping to feed (on the Word), followed by watching (in prayer)...constantly aware of the dangers. When 1 Pet. 5:8 says "be alert" in regard to Satan, this is something we do by KNOWING. We must be cognizant of the pitfalls that Satan positions along our Christian pathway. We must be *on guard*, and the best way to do this is to study the Word. As we said before, we do not study for *academic* knowledge, but for *spiritual* knowledge, known as wisdom, WHICH TELLS US HOW TO WALK IN GOD'S POWER. Satan wants to prevent us from accessing this power, and he is plotting schemes to pull us away from our loyalty to

God. In short, he wants us to serve him, so that he can add our voices to the billions of others that support Satan's campaign against God. To accomplish this, he uses *strategies*, some of which are discussed here. We will introduce four of them, as follows:

1. Satan tempts. Temptation is commonly seen as "enticement". (There is another connotation given below.) Satan *entices* us in two ways, and divine power is necessary for us to stand up against either of these primary forms of temptation. First of all, He invites us to sin, and does so in ways that we cannot resist in our own strength. Sin is common to us all; it is universal, because EVERYONE sins (1 John 1:8,10). Secondly, Satan persuades us to embrace religion and rule-keeping as a means to assuage the elusive "supernatural", or as a way to enhance our humanity. This is pseudo-Christianity (or other), featuring ourselves as the stars of the show; and, of course, we are always happy to take center stage. In true Christianity, God is the star.
2. Satan challenges us by confronting us with difficulties he knows we cannot surmount. He wants us to react to life's challenges with human view-point, rather than divine view-point, and to look to ourselves to meet them, rather than looking to God. When he can get us to look at our circumstances, he can undermine our faith.
3. He destroys lives and brings calamity. He wants to disrupt individuals, organizations, nations, and—if he can—the entire world. He especially wants to remove people and forces who are faithfully serving in God's camp. These are his greatest threat.
4. Satan deceives, accuses, and creates counterfeits. He is beautiful and attractive, remember, and he makes Madison Avenue's best appeals look like pencil drawings on cardboard. He uses the flashiest, glossiest, most breathtaking entreaties to draw us in and make us accept his lies as truth, and his fabrications as genuine articles.

Part of understanding God's training program is knowing how Satan operates in it, and what he is trying to achieve. He tempts, challenges, destroys, deceives, accuses, and counterfeits. We will look at each of these.

Satan Brings Temptation. We want to flesh out the meaning of "tempting" or "temptation". Satan is a "tempter". The Greek base for this word means to "test", as a test pilot tests a new model of planes. This word is used of Satan in Matt. 4:3 to show that Satan is allowed to test us, which means that he does basically two types of things:

1. First of all, he draws us into either sin or legalism, as we discussed above. To get us to sin, He puts extreme pressure on us inside and out to get us to choose our way over God's. Satan is not just leading us to do this; he's pushing. His temptation to sin is not some attractive, wiggling bauble that draws us; it is the siren's song, which cannot be resisted. He *drags* us into sin, because he knows this will disengage our faith and separate us from God's power. And keep in mind: ANY violation of God's standards removes divine power from our arsenal. Satan also coaxes us into legalism (also discussed above). This means Satan tries

to get us to achieve spirituality or “goodness” by following the Law. When we depend on ourselves to keep some code of righteousness, we commit *unrighteousness*, which has the same effect as sin. It truncates God’s empowerment. These two prongs, sin and legalism, are two major corridors for Satan’s attack; they are the primary weapons that he uses against human beings. Satan’s success in getting us to succumb to his temptations gives Satan a sense of victory, and hope that he will ultimately succeed. He has no foreknowledge and does not know that he will lose in the end. So he fights on, dangling low-hanging fruit, particularly sin, for humans. Face it, Satan has no trouble getting us to sin.

2. The second kind of thing Satan does is to “test” us, or impose extreme challenges, by bringing bad events and people to us. He wants to weaken our faith, and an easy way to do that is to bring greater physical and psychological “weight” on us to wear us down. He uses circumstances and our own friends and family to achieve this. These must, of course, be permitted by God, but Satan will push to the limit to cause us trouble and prevent the expansion of our faith. If we respond properly to these tests, we can cause Satan’s efforts to backfire on him, as we can actually get stronger as a result of the tests, but know this: Surviving the tests requires an advancing maturity.

Other Aspects of Testing. A major form of testing is “loss”. Satan loves to take things away from us, which can have the effect of causing us to doubt God, thus opening us to deceit. This is what happened with Job, as we saw. In Job 1, he lost his prosperity. In Job 2:1-10, he lost family, health, social life, and personal attractiveness. And in Job 2:11 to 42:17, he lost friends and was harangued by them. Something like this is likely in the cards for each of us, depending on our level of maturity. Fortunately, we will not be tempted beyond the maturity we have; and greater maturity will give us greater capacity to manage temptation and testing. 1 Cor. 10:13 confirms this:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

As a believer begins to mature, and things start to go well, Satan will then accuse God of favoritism, and will use any opportunity he has to maximize pressure on the mature believer to get him to crack. We have to stay one step ahead of Satan by continuing to mature at warp speed. We can’t slow down, because Satan is on our tail.

We have established that Satan tempts (entices), but he also challenges (tests) in various ways. In Job 2:4-5, we see Satan speaking to God about Job, saying, “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. ‘A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face’.” And strike him he did; Satan did everything but kill Job, the most mature believer in the world at the time. This is how he works. He has to derail strong or increasing faith through any nefarious means possible.

In Luke 22:31, we see another instance when Satan is said to be challenging a believer. This verse says,

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I [Jesus] have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Notice that Satan is going after *faith*, because that is the key indicator of loyalty to God. He challenges us in an effort to shred our faith and leave us defenseless. But Jesus prayed, and is still praying (1 John 2:1), that we will be delivered from the evil one. To make this prayer work for us, however, we must be in fellowship, studying, praying, and walking in the Spirit (more on these later). And observe what follows: After we “turn back” from sin, we can “strengthen our brothers”. This means that, after we confess and are restored to fellowship, our gifts can operate through God’s power in order that we may serve others.

We see Satan’s challenges once again in 1 Pet. 5:6-10, which gives us the following:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

So much truth is in this passage. We see that it is God’s power that delivers us. We see that Satan’s attacks can make us anxious, so we must cast this anxiety on God. “The faith” has a dual application. It means trust, our ordinary use of the word “faith”; and it means the whole body of divine truth...or *what* we believe. So we resist Satan with *faith*...and *wisdom*. And we support each other in the middle of Satan’s challenges, knowing that he brings suffering to all of us. And note that he brings “all kinds” of suffering. Finally, we see that it is grace that delivers us, even if we fail the test and do not meet the challenge with faith. If we will return, we will be restored and strengthened, so that we can stand firm.

Satan is a Deceiver. Another thing Satan does is *deceive*. After Satan fell, this is what he did: he deceived. And he still does. Here are some verses verifying this:

- Rev. 12:9—The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray [deceives]. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.
- Rev. 20:10—And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur....
- 2 Cor. 11:3—But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Satan deceives the entire world. Even churches can be deceived, with the result that many churches operate in Satan’s world system. Deception is everywhere. We quoted 1 Tim. 4:1 earlier, which cites the lure of “deceiving spirits and things taught by demons”. The irony is that many times Satan can *prove*

what he claims in his deceptive messages. This is because—as we shall see—the world is his, and he has great power in it to demonstrate that what he says is true. (This is why it is so important for us to base our view-point and assessments on the Word, and not on experience or circumstances.) When he advances his lies and tells us they are “truth”, he has great evidence to back them up. He has at his disposal the complete “wisdom of the world”, with all its science and philosophy and technology. His arguments *make sense*! We must get the connection: If we are doing what the world thinks is good, it is likely that we have been led into deception, and are doing the work of Satan. We will get more into this in the next chapter.

Deception can be overwhelming...and totally believable. And there are extremes to which Satan goes in deceiving that can only be described as sensational. This involves his posing as God by performing miracles and creating signs and wonders. 2 Thess. 2:8-10 gives a picture of this, as follows:

And then the lawless one [Antichrist] will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing [unbelievers].

All kinds of spectacular events can be caused by Satan, even miracles of healing and other phenomenal feats that are “supernatural”. We must be careful with those who claim special powers, even when they invoke the name of Christ, as they can very well be doing the work of Satan by fomenting deception.

Satan is an Accuser. Satan also *accuses* us. He does this in, of all places, heaven, and Rev. 12:10 tells us how persistent these accusations can be, as follows:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down.

Day and night, Satan is accusing us before God, seeking permission to test and challenge, to bring suffering and hardship to us. (Are we beginning to see why it is so important for us to pray that we will be “delivered from the evil one”?) Job 1:11 and following are a great example of this, as we saw earlier, where Job was accused, tested, and persecuted. Zech. 3:1 gives another account of Satan accusing a believer, in this case the high priest Joshua. This verse reports, “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.” Satan is always nearby, collecting dirt on us...especially the things we do that violate God’s standards. In Zechariah 3, read beyond verse 1, through verse 4. This passage shows that Satan is using *truth* to accuse Joshua. Joshua had committed sins of the tongue, and thus he had on “filthy clothes” (symbolic of unconfessed sins), and this is what Satan was using in his indictment. As the story goes, Joshua confessed his sins and was cleansed and restored. The point: If Satan’s accusation is based on our having failed, yet we have confessed the infraction Satan is citing, God will say “Case dismissed!” and the accusation will be thrown out. We may be tested for other reasons, but it will not be because our clothes

are dirty.

Satan is a Counterfeiter. Satan is also a *counterfeiter*. Anything that God has made or does, Satan tries to imitate. He is the great imposter, constantly trying to mimic God. When Adam and Eve fell in the Garden, they covered themselves with fig leaves. God later gave them animal skins, since the process of salvation involves the shedding of blood to cover sin. The idea for fig leaves as a covering for Adam and Eve's "nakedness" undoubtedly came from Satan, as his first attempt to counterfeit salvation. He wanted to short-circuit God's plan by presenting a false means of covering up sin. When Satan counterfeits, this presupposes some knowledge of the "real thing". It is therefore likely that Satan understood salvation when he counterfeited it. That makes it all the more likely that the counterfeit will look authentic. He is still doing this very thing today, creating a myriad of alternatives to true salvation, which, as we know, is accomplished ONLY by grace through faith in Christ.

One of the effective ways that Satan creates counterfeits, and deceives listeners and onlookers, is to mix lies with truth. His demonic and human messengers look like "angels of light", and are "servants [ministers] of righteousness", as per 2 Cor. 11:13-15, which says the following:

For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Satan Promotes Illusions. As we just saw, Satan is posing as an angel of light. He is promoting a kind of "righteousness", but this is not the righteousness we get from Christ when we are saved. This is man-made and Satan-induced righteousness, which is going to look deceptively like the righteousness produced by spiritual believers. It is usually impossible to distinguish these from the outside, which is why we cannot be sure when a "righteous" act comes from the Holy Spirit, or is generated and sustained by Satan. False teachers appeal to religious-minded people, and the highly intellectual. They also appeal to those whose entire Christian experience is based on emotions, rather than knowing and implementing truth. These "deceivers" undermine our faith in the truth of the Word, and in God. They convince us to trust ourselves, and to look to the world for answers. The light they draw us to is actually darkness.

There are even "fake" believers who intend to deceive. Gal. 2:4 confirms this, saying, "This matter arose, because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and make us slaves." This is also shown in 2 Cor. 11:26, which says, "I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers." False believers are *dangerous*! They may be *with* us, but they are not *of* us. So says 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." This group can include apostate believers as well as unbelievers, and it is hard to see the difference.

So how can we distinguish and know the truth, with deception swirling all around? By studying the Word and using God's methods for becoming spiritual and mature! That's the only way! 1 John 2:20 gives us the proper connection: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth." When we are in fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit will teach us the truth. But when we are not in fellowship, even if we are studying the truth, the knowledge we gain will be useless, because it will not process or be applied. This is because the Teacher of Truth has been cut off within us, due to lack of fellowship.

There is Hope. When we *use the techniques* we will learn and reach maturity, Satan will not ensnare us, he will not deceive us, he will not challenge us beyond our capacity, he will not break us, he will not successfully trick us with counterfeits, he will not enable friends or family or co-workers to destroy us, and he will not outwit us. There is hope, even though—since so many of us don't know how to handle him—a large percentage of us will be victims of the juggernauts he sends against us.

Satan also has a mission, and we must know what that is, so that our determination to put on God's armor and equip ourselves with the strength that He brings will increase as we move forward. This will be the topic in the next section.

G. Satan's Mission

Satan's First Target: Maturing Believers. Satan's mission is to oppose God. This means that he will also oppose God's followers. And this means, in turn, that he is probably *not* opposing unbelievers, and is less likely to worry about Christians who are not following God. Believers who have little interest in getting closer to God seem to get a pass from Satan. He is more concerned with believers who are maturing and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. These are a threat to him, and they must be hampered and halted by whatever means. There is no evil device that is not fully exploited by Satan against any enemy who may be gathering strength.

So, the kinds of believers that Satan is gathering data on and making accusations against and sending deceivers to and creating tests for, are those who are studying and growing. These are the ones who have positive volition toward the Word, and who want to know more God...those who *thirst* for Him. It is because these believers are increasing their faith that Satanic efforts will be intensified for them. He went after Job, and Paul, and even Jesus for this very reason. He wanted to dismantle their faith, so that he could manipulate them according to his nefarious plan.

Eph. 6:12 describes Satan's attempts to undercut the posture and position of growing believers. This verse says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." These are the armies of Satan. They include the generals, commanders, and soldiers of his legions. And notice the "spiritual forces of evil", who operate in the *spiritual* world. These undoubtedly include millions of spies who are observing and taking notes on each of us, and reporting these back to Satan's headquarters, so that plans can be formulated to take us out. These plans are made around a

huge conference table, where the highest forms of intelligence in all of creation consider options tailored to our weaknesses. These plans are designed for each of us personally, and are custom-made for the greatest destructive effect. We cannot ignore this. Our weaknesses are being analyzed and strategies implemented that are crafted to evaporate our faith and induce us to sin or abandon grace.

Every believer has an Achilles' heel, some soft spot where Satan can enter and begin his corrosive work on the believer's spiritual frame. He goes after the "sin that so easily entangles" (Heb. 12:1), which is different for each of us. We all have at least one particular sin or legalistic practice that has us in its net, and no one is exempt or impervious to Satan's Trojan horse that enters through any "crack in the door". Eph. 4:27 calls this a "foothold" for the devil, and gives the example of anger as one possible leverage point. We must be aware that THIS CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NO CAKE WALK, even though it can be a great joy and fulfillment, if we learn to do it right.

Training for the Battle. That is why we are writing...and why you are reading. We must be *trained* to counter this evil force. We are weak, but we are not without help. We have divine resources that will enable us to overcome those constant, nagging sin patterns. And if we don't use God's resources so that we can overcome sin, then discipline will be next. Sin must be dealt with, and God's method for dealing with wayward children is correction through discipline. Heb. 12:4-11 tells us how this works:

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

To "throw off" means to quell any pattern that perpetuates sin, such as not confessing, or refusing to pray, or ignoring studies, or failing to endure God's discipline and training. What we want to throw off is the control of the sinful nature, which is Satan's emissary inside our hearts. Gal. 5:16 says, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." The areas of weakness that make sin irresistible to us CAN be overpowered, but only with rigorous and persistent training, which will allow us to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit, for whom Satan is no match. When we stop our refusal and rebellion, and once again embrace God's grace techniques, real victory can be ours. But—as we have said—this will not be easy, and the opposition to our success is, by human measures, unstoppable.

We repeat that Satan will marshal and deploy forces against believers who are following the path of growth and spirituality. We mentioned earlier that this is why he paid so much attention to Paul. The scripture that describes this is 2 Cor. 12:7, in which Paul says, “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” God allowed Satan to test Paul’s faith in ways that must have been severe, even though only a few specific details are given. Those who expose Satan become his arch-enemies, and are on his sniper’s hit-list. He is even now adjusting for “windage and elevation”; we are in his cross-hairs, with a bulls-eye on our chests.

Satan’s Plan. Satan’s plan schedules an outcome in which believers stay locked up in a prison of sin, legalism, and insurrection, resulting in their destruction. God’s plan involves salvation, cleanliness, use of His assets, and ongoing faith in Him, which results in the abundant life. Satan wants to see his plan override God’s plan by achieving the following:

- Prevent unbelievers from believing in Christ.
- Prevent believers from learning about God’s techniques and assets.
- Prevent believers from applying what they learn.
- Get believers to be 1) sinful, 2) religious, and/or 3) self-serving.

To do this, he uses his fallen angels to control unbelievers and influence believers. These angels exercise great power with remarkable efficiency. Satan also uses human beings; these will be backed by and organized into a highly-structured and well-planned offensive. Human followers provide Satan with an army of sinful natures that freely serve him, and their contribution alone represents a formidable force against growing believers.

Two Major Areas of Satan’s Opposition. Satan’s mission can be divided into two major areas of opposition. He levels his opposition toward the following:

OPPOSITION TO FAITH

Luke 8:12—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.

2 Cor. 4:3-4—And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Thess. 2:9-10—The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Col. 2:8—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.

OPPOSITION TO GROWING BELIEVERS

2 Cor. 2:11—...in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

James 4:6-10—But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture say “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Matt. 13:19, 38-39—When anyone who hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown along the path. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

Conclusion. Satan’s mission is to build a barrier between us and God. He runs interference and attempts to block all paths that lead to spirituality and maturity. The force of opposition that Satan brings against us from outside ourselves, and even more so from the inside, make this walk of faith very difficult. No “cloud nine” here. So buckle up. That means get to Bible class...quick! Or keep reading.

As proof of the difficulty of the life of believers, take a look at Heb. 11:35-38, which follows:

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

Think this can’t happen to you? Satan is planning. Better sleep with one eye open.

H. Whose World is It?

The World is Satan’s Domain. We have mentioned before that the world is Satan’s domain. We need now to further frame our understanding of this truth. We will say much more about this, giving the full picture, when we reach the next chapter. But we want to establish before then that we are aliens in a strange land; we will never be fully at-home in the world as it is. This is because Satan is the king of the world, its ruler, and its master. He has the freedom and power to manipulate the world al-

most at-will. Believers who are following God's righteous path have special protection against Satan and the world, but the world system itself belongs to the devil, limited only by the restraint of a sovereign God. Once we understand this, we will have a correct view of what we see in the world and realize that we are looking at Satan's kingdom.

There are numerous places in Scripture that tell us that the world is Satan's. In Luke 4 Satan tested Jesus in the desert, where he offered Him kingdoms. And why did he offer these? Because they were his to offer. For the most part, all the "kingdoms" (nations) of the world are part of Satan's operation. The exception: God will always have a "client" nation or two, such as the United States (for now), that will for some time represent God in the world. But the *world* is Satan's. 1 John 5:19 says, "We know we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." John 12:31 adds, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." So when Satan was offering kingdoms to Jesus, he did so as one who could really authorize it. Luke 4 describes the offer this way:

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Satan's Promotions vs God's Promotions. God has the final say on everything in the universe, including the placement of "rulers", but He has provided a lot of room for Satan to operate. He is allowed to control many world events and the positioning of many leaders to give mankind a freedom of choice, and to allow Satan to make his case against God. God does enforce a limit on Satan's control, but the potency of the dominance that Satan is allowed touches us all. The outcome is that Satan has almost unfettered control of the world.

The fact that Satan virtually controls the world indicates that he has great power to promote within his world system, or—as some have called it—his "cosmic system". He can and will promote those who serve him. These are to be distinguished from God's promotions which, as we will see later, go to those who serve Him...in His way. The difference between the devil's promotions and those that God brings is found in their scope: Satan's promotions are *temporal*, while God's promotions have an *eternal* connection. God's promotions are not necessarily apparent in the world; they may or may not be visible. God promotes for *spiritual* purposes, which means that those who associate God's promotions with material prosperity are embracing the wrong values. After all, God is not a slot machine. Those who see God as a Genie that brings money and power to those who play by the rules are embracing elements of Satan's world, not God's kingdom. Provisions from God have implications that reach far beyond the world and the present time. Our objective is to seek *God's* promotions, which are lasting and meaningful.

Incidentally, Scripture is clear that those whom Satan promotes are there by God's permission, and we should respect their authority REGARDLESS of their performance! Our goal is to get closer to God to receive *His* promotion and protection. If we are "armored up", as per Eph. 6:13, we can withstand and endure any attacks that come through Satan's appointed leaders.

The Phenomenal Power of Satan. We must never minimize Satan's power. 2 Cor. 4:4 tells us that Satan is much more powerful than we have thought. This verse calls Satan the "god of this age", who blinds unbelievers so that they cannot see the truth in the gospel and thus be saved. As the highest authority in this age, he has a lot of latitude and power to implement his systems and organize his opposition against God. Satan is the lord of this world, and a great deal of suffering that goes on is because of his evil plans for the cosmic system. He wants to disprove God, and uses the world to achieve this, creating questions about God's existence by bringing tragedy and calamity to the world.

Satan and Religion. Religion is also part of Satan's world. John 8:23 shows us the connection between the world and religion. In this verse, Jesus said, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." He was speaking to the highly-self-purified Pharisees, who slavishly kept the Law. They represented the main-stream religious thought and practice of the day, and yet they were "from below" and "of this world". They were keeping God's Law, but they were serving Satan. This shows that Satan can be involved with religious practices, and explains why many churches today are part of his cosmic system. Churches that do not concentrate on teaching the Scripture to their flocks; that emphasize some form of rule-keeping to please God; and that talk about Christian values and goals but exclude the Holy Spirit as the means to achieve them, are "from below"! Some of the greatest opposition to God takes place in what is called "God's house". And some of the most celebrated "saints" are actually only aggrandizing themselves. They display prosperity, morality, generosity, and even a form of spirituality, but their hearts are far from God. These are the ones who serve Satan and do great damage to the cause of Christ. They are of the world. And many of them are believers.

What Must we Do? When you look at world systems, the involvement of Satan in them is endless. Nothing is what it seems. There is no area of society that is not owned by Satan and designed to promote his ends. Politics, business, education, entertainment, the Internet, social gatherings, and on and on. So do we just drop out, and stay away from these? No. Paul said to do this we would have to leave the world. We live in the world, and must participate in all its systems as we pick our way along the tricky pathways of life. But we bring God to the world. We are His ambassadors in this strange land. And we must represent Him well. To do this, we must remember that the qualities we bring are not ours; and they are not designed or executed by us. They are God's, and He is the One Who gives the instructions for our function here, and then sponsors and enables our mission in this place. If we become separated from headquarters, we will be on our own, and we will be joining Satan's world as an enemy of God. For our lives to have meaning in this bizarre place called "the world", we must keep the lines open with the Supreme Commander (study and pray, friends). Otherwise, we will be captured by the enemy. After all, we are behind enemy lines...in his territory.

We will have much more to say about the world in Chapter 6, which is coming up soon, but already we know this much: The world belongs to Satan. But this must not cause us to despair, because there is hope. We have a written guarantee that we are on the winning side. The victory is already won; the next section tells how this plays out.

I. Christ Defeated Satan

Deferred Adjudication. If it is true that Christ defeated Satan, why is Satan still on the prowl, and able to act in a maniacal pursuit of victory and dominance of his own? Satan's defeat is a foregone conclusion, but that defeat has two phases, and right now we are between phase 1 (the judgment) and phase 2 (the punishment). It is like the proceedings of a criminal court: A convict can receive the death penalty, but the execution may not be carried out right away. There are appeals and official delays that cause a time gap between the sentence and the execution. Satan has been sentenced to the lake of fire, but there is a delay in his sentence, during which time he is appealing his case. Eventually, he will be sent to the prescribed lake of fire, but right now he is trying to prove his innocence by demonstrating that the Judge is unfair, and that the (divine) legal system is flawed. All the conditions for the defeat of Satan have been met, but while he is awaiting the execution of his sentence, he is remonstrating his fate by pursuing his rebellion and recruiting his armies for battle against the One who has issued the verdict.

Defeat is Certain. What is it that makes Satan's defeat certain...the one event that seals his fate? It is the cross of Christ. To say anything about this central occurrence is to say too little. And even if we wrote volumes, as many have, we would still not be saying enough. We refer you to the volumes out there that have been written and taught. We will not try to emulate them here. Particularly poignant, yet thorough, are sermons on the cross presented by Robert McLaughlin back in the early 1990's. Title: *The Cross*. (Endnote 5)

The subject of the cross is crucial and pivotal to an understanding of God's plan. Why is this? It is because the cross is the place where sin was judged and God's justice was satisfied, so that He can be true to His own character and still justify man. The cross, the sacrifice of God's Son to remove the penalty for our sins by paying the price for them in full, is the occasion that gives man the opportunity to move from inferior and fallen, to superior and redeemed. This occurs when we are placed into union with Christ. The cross placates God's antipathy toward sin, the only exception being the sin of refusing to accept the work of the cross. His response to non-acceptance of the work of Christ, which is to say "unbelief", is condemnation, while His response to "sinners" who believe in Christ is to declare them "righteous" for all eternity.

Verses that site the effects of the cross on the state of man are numerous. For example, 1 Pet. 3:18 says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit..." 2 Cor. 5:21 further portrays this work of Christ, saying, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." And John 3:17-18 shows how we participate in the effects of the cross, as follows:

For God did not send his Son into the World to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Participation in the Victory through Our Connection with Christ. Christ paid it all, but not all access it. The gift is waiting at the store, pre-paid, but many refuse to pick it up. 1 John 2:2 says, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” There is no longer a barrier between man and God that prevents our joining Him, as all sins have been paid for. Christ died for all, and anyone can be saved by believing in Him. God is satisfied with the work of His Son, and accepts the payment He made on our behalf.

When we accept Christ’s work by receiving His gift through faith, many things change. Lewis S. Chafer cited 39 of these things in his *Systematic Theology* (Endnote 6). We have featured these things in previous writings, and will not try to duplicate the entire set here, but here are some examples of things that occur at salvation:

- The believer is reconciled. 2 Cor. 5:18
- The believer is redeemed. Col. 1:13-14
- The believer’s condemnation is removed. John 3:18
- Every believer receives justification and propitiation for his sins, because God is satisfied with the work of His Son.—Rom. 3:24-25
- The believer is regenerated. John 3:7-8
- The believer is made righteous. Rom. 3:22
- The believer is adopted by God. Eph. 1:5
- The believer receives eternal life. John 3:15
- Every believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 12:13
- Each believer is placed into union with Christ. John 17:20-21

We were created a little lower than the angels, according to Heb. 2:7-8, but we move into a higher position because that position is now in Christ. Eph. 3:12 says that “in him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” This is because we have been qualified by the finished work on the cross. This enables us to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19). This causes us to become superior to the angels, a distinction we enjoy right now *positionally*, but which will be a complete reality in the eternal state. This position is enabled because we have been placed in Him, which Satan must find terribly disconcerting.

1 John 4:4 re-captures our position, saying, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” While we are still in these bodies, we cannot overpower Satan, but the day is coming when our union with Christ will make us superior. Our union with Christ is further substantiated in other scriptures, as we see in the following:

- Eph. 2:6—And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms

in Christ Jesus.

- Gal. 2:20—I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- 2 Cor. 4:10—We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.
- Rom. 6:4-5—We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Recognizing and conceptualizing our union with Christ is extremely important, first of all because it destines us for a higher place in God's kingdom, and also because it now gives us confidence that the devil who is out to get us, and who marshals all the forces of hell against us, is no match for the One who indwells us. We are indwelled by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and we have all His power at our disposal. But—slow down a little—the *function* of this power does not operate automatically. It is conditioned on the engagement of mercy and grace in specific ways: we must confess, pray, study, and be trained...methods which enfold many others. These *must* be used, and this is why we must learn. Being in union with Christ is not enough by itself to give us the victory in life that we want and seek; we must activate the force of this union by moving into maturity and by maintaining a steady connection with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Follow this carefully: The cross effectively disarmed all fallen angels, and Christ triumphed over them. What is happening now is the consummation of that victory through believers who are in fellowship and maturing, as they vindicate God's grace, mercy, righteousness, and justice before all angels. There is no question that Satan was defeated at the cross, as per Col. 2:14-15, which says the following:

...having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities [Satan and his demons], he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

This victory is completed, except for the future and final demonstration of Satan's incorrectness and inexcusability. Satan and his work were devastated at the cross, but he has yet to surrender. So says 1 John 3:8b: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." But the war is still going on, while Satan is being given a chance to appeal his sentence. The war is coming to an end, however, and the defeat which was accomplished when Christ "disarmed the powers" and "triumphed over them" will soon be celebrated. So Christ has already won the war in the eternal frame, even though the war rages on in the present time. It is over for Satan, even though we do not yet experience the victory, EXCEPT AS WE EXPERIENCE GRACE THROUGH GROWTH AND MATURITY. The day is coming soon when full victory will be celebrated...when Satan will become an ottoman for

Jesus Christ, as per Heb. 1:13b, which says, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet...”

Victory in our POSITION is Complete; Victory in our CONDITION is Potential. We can have victory over sin, because the Bible says that we can. But this will be the hardest part of our ongoing battle, and—I am convinced—the greatest weapon Satan uses against us. We are identified with Christ and imputed with His righteousness, yet *we still sin*, according to 1 John 1:8 and 10. It is the practice and condition of sin that was serious enough that God had to send His own Son to His death in order to deal with it. Rom. 6:6 tells us that we should no longer be “slaves to sin” because our “old self” was crucified with Christ. All these seeming paradoxes: Imputed righteousness and current sin; no longer slaves to sin, yet we all sin; the old self is crucified, yet we are told the sinful nature persists as long as we are in these bodies. We must remember that there is an eternal *position*, which is encapsulated in our union with Christ, and a temporal *condition*, which is life in these carnal, self-serving bodies. It is finding the *right* life and the *right* way of living that will move the *condition* toward the *position*, so that our *practice* will resemble our *place*.

If we follow God’s techniques for achieving spiritual power, we will fulfill Rom. 6:9-14, which sets up our mandate, as follows:

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

We cannot say, “It will be okay; just stay under grace,” because Satan and the world and our own inner nature bring raging, tormenting, soul-shredding forces against us to make sure we don’t. Paul tells the Romans how to prepare for this fight, which is to follow “the form of teaching” they had been given. Only then could they be “set free from sin...and become slaves to righteousness”. (See Rom. 6:18-19) Even then we can’t rest. *Learning the way* is only the beginning. We must then *apply* what we learn. It is **DOING** what the scriptures tell us to do to beat sin that enables us to surmount and move out from under its domination.

Also, remember this: only God is the One who can judge. Rom. 8:33-34 makes this clear, in the following:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us.

Christ always speaks in our behalf, even when we fail. The verse in 1 John that tells us He is our advo-

cate (2:1) immediately follows the verses that say we all have sinful natures and all sin (1:8, 10). Our sin and its solution are not linked to our abilities to conquer them, but to His victory and His power. The method for making this happen is narrow and specific, and we must learn it exactly. As we learn more and practice what we learn, we will begin to have what it takes to deal with sin, with all the armies of Satan notwithstanding. We start by storing correct information in our hearts. As Ps. 119:11 says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” If you are reading these words, you are on the right path. (To understand better what the heart is, see Chapter 24, “The Internal Make-up of Man”, p. 226, in my book *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*. This is available for free download at biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com.)

Christ has given us the victory. Our task is to find out how to live in it. This means we must constantly deal with Satan who fights us every inch of the way, and who laces our paths with mines and traps that are meant to take us out. We will see more on combating him in the next section.

J. Dealing with Satan

The Crouching Tiger. Satan’s point of contact with our heart is the sinful nature. His primary objective is to put this evil nature in charge by inducing self-dependency and separation from God. Independence may seem innocent enough, perhaps even commendable, but it inevitably leads to evil, seen either as sin...or legalism. Evil puts us out of fellowship and places the sinful nature at the helm. It is easy for Satan to manipulate us when the sinful nature is in charge, because that nature is a receiver of lies. This makes it easy for Satan to persuade us to ignore our spiritual lives, eventually casting us into abject slavery under him. We will see later that spiritual decline is self-perpetuating, because the loss of fellowship leads to retrogression and a weakening of faith, and the absence of faith keeps us out of fellowship. And it all began with a small suggestion of one sort or another from Satan. It starts as a small seed, and then sin and carnality grow quickly. The sequence for the creep of Satan’s influence runs like this:

1. Satan gets us to look away from God, and even for an instant is long enough to have us moving in a negative direction.
2. He gets us to minimize any sinful thought or behavior we have, and to ignore our study and prayer regimen.
3. He gets us to focus on ourselves and to begin operating in a posture of self-sufficiency and independence.
4. Our sinful natures then follow his lead into various patterns of sin or self-righteousness, particularly in areas where we are weakest.
5. He prompts us to move away from God and live in carnality, where God’s power is truncated as we unwittingly become servants of Satan.

All we have to do to serve Satan is *nothing*. Don’t confess. Don’t study. Don’t pray. Don’t acknowledge

God. Don't trust. Don't give thanks. It is easy to relax...and not resist. But this has consequences: The downward force of Satan's draw is like gravity, always pulling us downhill as he subtly coaxes us into thoughts that lead us away from God toward full-tilt reversionism, and into eventual devastation.

Countering the Pouncing Tiger. Our best and most constant defense against Satan's subterfuge is the application of the techniques we learn from the Word. The technique of prayer is especially helpful in our efforts to resist Satan; as we shall see, it protects us from the evil one. All the techniques taken together give us full protection...they are our armor. Satan is all around in our lives, and we cannot ignore the threats he brings. We are told to be "alert" and "aware" of Satan, but at the same time, we are told to keep our eyes on our Rescuer, and not our attacker. When we focus on Satan's world, or on ourselves, rather than the Word, we become exposed to Satan's fraudulent ploys. By staying in the Word, we become alert to the stalking enemy.

Satan uses *offensive* weapons against us, but we are told to use *defensive* weapons against him. We are to resist, withstand, and hold our ground against Satan, but nowhere in Scripture are we told to "fight" him (See James 4:7 and Eph. 4:13). Eph. 4:27 tells us, "and do not give the devil a foothold." We must *defend* against Satan, not take him on directly. People who attempt to "rebuke" Satan are not following God's Word. We are NOT told to capture him or "bind" him or defeat him or send him on the run. We are told to *stand fast* against him.

Using God's Armor. Eph. 6 tells us how to be equipped to stand in one place while the battle is raging, and still have protection from the damage Satan can do. This is the "armor" passage, and we will go through each item of armor, but first, this principle: We are to equip ourselves with God's armor, which will protect us *while He does the fighting*. Verse 1 in Eph. 6 tells us to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power". We are strong only *in His strength*. Then verse 2 tells us, "Put on the whole armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

The armor of God is listed in Eph. 6:10-20. The parts of this armor are worth looking at individually, as follows:

- **Belt of truth.** This belt is for holding all weapons. Truth is what holds our spiritual armor together, enabling us to assemble and organize our weapons. This connotes the strengthening of our faith and the organized and purposeful use of divine assets and techniques.
- **Breastplate of righteousness.** The breastplate protects the heart. When we are in fellowship, our hearts are protected.
- **Footwear of the gospel of peace.** This particular "gospel" is the good news of the reconciliation that takes place when believers return to fellowship with God. When we confess our sins to God and are forgiven, our footing is regained. Recalling a previous writing, "peace" means "reconciliation", which always stands as the primary condition for fellowship.
- **Shield of faith.** Faith protects us from Satan's lies, accusations, and distractions, and curtails the incursion of doubtful thoughts.

- **Helmet of salvation.** This is deliverance from the evil one, which is the operation of the Holy Spirit to enable righteousness in us within our daily lives. This will be sustained as long as we are in fellowship, growing, and walking in the Spirit.
- **Sword of the Spirit.** This is an offensive weapon...the Word of God. But notice who wields this weapon: the Holy Spirit. Through us, the Spirit holds out His Word like a sword, to the extent that we are pure and following a consistent growth pattern. The more wisdom we have, the more the Holy Spirit will be able to empower us to apply it in battle, as He uses HIS offensive weapon of truth against Satan.
- **Prayer.** It is worth noting in this passage that, after all the armor has been delineated, we are told to do one thing: PRAY! Verse 18*a* concludes, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Praying “in the Spirit” is praying in fellowship, as we will discuss later. Proper prayer is a great weapon, as we appeal to our Champion to protect us from forces that we can’t possibly beat. We pray for each other, and we pray for ourselves, that we will be guarded from the evil one. This is not just so we can have smooth lives and be successful; this is because life is an absolute waste of time when it is spent in the service of Satan. Mark 9:14-29 shows that prayer is an effective tool against extreme demonic influence. See especially verse 29*b*, which says, “This kind [of demon] can come out only by prayer.”

Being Self-Controlled. We are told to be “self-controlled” (by being Spirit-controlled) and “alert” (by being focused on the Word), as per 1 Pet. 5:8-9. We are to “watch out” to keep from losing what we have gained (2 John 1:8). And we are to study carefully, since—for those who are learning—more will be taught (Luke 8:18). These all pertain to study. Learning is paramount in resisting Satan, as we saw in our discussion of the armor above. This is confirmed in 1 John 4:6, which says, “We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us.” Listening is learning.

The Battle is the Lord’s. None of the things we are told to do regarding Satan involve our exercising our own strength to come up against Satan. The enemy is invisible. How can we fight him? We can only stand still and let the Lord deal with him. David said it well in 1 Sam. 17:47: “All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s...” David knew that Goliath was an enemy of God, and—even though God had David hold the slingshot—David knew that he alone against such a formidable foe ensured an outcome of defeat. He knew Who could win, and Whose battle it was. 2 Thess. 3:2-3 tells us why we must let the Lord fight the battle: “And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”

God’s protection is very important in dealing with Satan, as we have said repeatedly. 2 Tim. 4:18 says, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.” Job 1:10*a* describes a “hedge” that God puts around us to protect us. When we ask for protection from Satan, we are asking God to block all avenues of attack: deception, temptation, thoughts of pride and

evil, accusations leading to testing, and direct demonic whispers that persuade us not to trust God. We need God's protection every second of every day, because the attacks do not stop.

Maturity Strengthens Resistance. Reminder: Maturity will cause us to depend on God's protection, because our faith in His ability to take care of us will be strengthened. 1 Pet. 5:9 says, "Resist him [Satan], standing firm in the faith..." When we are firm in our faith, we will not be worn down by the teachings of demons; the barrage of missiles that Satan is sending against us from all directions will not penetrate.

God's protection is available to us. And He always limits Satan's activity, as He did in Job 2:6, which reports, "The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life'." We must also understand that Satan is not all-powerful or all-knowing, and he can be in only one place at one time. He cannot force us to do anything that we decide not to do, and when we follow God's path to maturity and spirituality, our choices negate Satan's power against us. This is what is meant by standing fast. When we study and pray and trust and access the gifts of fellow believers and endure God's training, we will develop a choice-mechanism that is reliable and trust-worthy as we engage in this battle. We will finally learn who to trust. But this will not come automatically; we must train as quickly and thoroughly as we can to enable ourselves to choose well...all the time. In the meantime, we must not minimize or under-estimate Satan's ability to influence us.

Conclusion. Satan's self-appointed role is to take us down, primarily through ideas. He introduces thoughts directly, I am convinced, through our minds, and indirectly through our external environments. When we find ourselves in a pattern of sin or legalism, we can trace it back to a thought, which may come from Satan, the world, or our very own natures. Each of these are included in this study. The war Satan wages is *invisible*...spiritual and ethereal. But he also uses external events and messages to weaken us and make us vulnerable to his jabs. This is particularly true with false teachers, who are everywhere. They are part of Satan's psychological warfare, which softens us up for full-on physical, material, and corporeal assault.

As we examine the "world" in the next chapter, we will see aspects of Satan's attacks that are more visible, and learn what to watch for in our surroundings. We will be examining the world that Satan rules, and see that the world is not our friend, because it is dominated by him. Nevertheless, hope endures.

Chapter 6

The World

In This Chapter...

- A. Pride and the World*
- B. We Are Foreigners Here*
- C. The World Opposes Us*
- D. Chasing After the Wind*
- E. Seeking Fulfillment in the World*
- F. The World Promises Success*
- G. The World is Satan's Kingdom*
- H. The Wicked May Prosper in the World*

A. Pride and the World

Introduction to the World. An important part of our training is coming to understand what the world is, and seeing how it fits into our spiritual walk...or better, how it does NOT fit into our spiritual walk. We will be seeing our place in the world, and come to understand how Satan uses his world against us. We will see conditions within us that cause us to be open to the world's influence, how much the world attracts yet opposes us, and how futile it is for us to search for ultimate accommodation in the world. Why is it that growing, maturing Christians struggle in the world? Why does it not seem to work for us? We will look at all of these in this chapter. Our first consideration is this: What condition is there in us that makes us so susceptible to the magnetic draw of the world?

Believers in Enemy Territory. The condition is our sinful nature, but there is a specific aspect of this nature that has a direct connection with and affinity for the world: It is *pride*. James 4:4 says, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." When we consort with the world, we become haters of God, His enemy. It seems odd, but even God's own children can become His enemies. This happens as we are looking the other way, and as we are going about the routines of our daily lives in seemingly-normal ways, just doing what people do in the world. And while we are doing this, an acid is working beneath our feet to undermine our stand. We are smack-dab in the middle of the world, Satan's primary tool for capturing us.

Meet Yourself. We live in this world and cannot escape its activities and influences. Even if we determine not to become an enemy of God, and flex our will against Satan, we will be controlled by the world most of the time. And that makes us God's enemies. And who is the core participant in the world? It is the "self". And awareness of self gives rise to self-concern, and self-concern gives rise to self-interest, and self-interest gives rise to self-sufficiency, and self-sufficiency gives rise to pride. And pride is the place where self identifies with Satan. What was Satan's original sin? Arrogance. Pride. And what does he want to see in us? Pride. And what does God oppose? According to James 4:6, it is pride...and those who exhibit it. And who exhibits pride? All human beings! Pride is not about a good or bad self-concept; it is more primeval than that. It is about the drive to survive and thrive. And we all have it. And we all tend to believe we have to make it happen by ourselves. We are proud to the degree that we look to ourselves for happiness, meaning, success, security, and significance. And who is not doing this? Virtually no one.

Symbiosis of Pride and the World. So the universal problem of pride encroaches on us all. Everyone is looking to satisfy himself and make provision for the needs of his individual self. And where are his resources for satisfying himself? In the world. The world is the supply house for self-care. Certainly, we get "essentials" from the world: food, water, clothing, shelter, and so on. And these can be a problem, if we start to see them as proofs of our abilities and worth, and determine to get more and more of them to substantiate our value and create a hedge against extinction. In comes greed, envy, lying, stealing, murder, and so on.

Beyond the essentials, there are other needs, especially psychological needs, where we get into real trouble. We compare ourselves with others, and aspire to self-sufficiency, power, supremacy, recognition, and invincibility. Even those who never achieve any of these things harbor a desire for them, and are motivated by a frustrated pride; pride is still their energizing force.

It is impossible to be alive and awake, and not develop some expectation that the *world* is the place to get all our needs met. This is why pride is universal, because it focuses on the world to *supply* all *demands*. And the more we see the world as the place to get our needs met, the more we tend to rely on ourselves to make this happen. We end up creating our own kingdoms apart from God, where the world often validates and vindicates our pride. Faith in the world will pay off, because the world belongs to Satan, and he will do everything he can to make sure that pride is accommodated. But that pay-off is temporary and unfulfilling, and God will not let this go on forever. Deut. 8:10-20 expresses this well in the following:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. **Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God**, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. **You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth**, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today. **If you ever forget the Lord your God** and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that **you will surely be destroyed**. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so **you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God**. (Emphasis mine)

This was written for the Jews, but the application is for us. Pride leads to destruction. Our first task is to avoid “forgetting the Lord your God”. But when we look into the world, and see the world as our source for satisfaction and success, we inevitably ignore God and look to the “strength of our own hands” to sustain us. We must work in the world, of course, but we must do it with God, instead of without Him. We must “remember the Lord your God”, or we will face serious consequences.

Our pride is married to the world, and the more pride we have, the more we embrace the world as the place to find and get every good thing. And the stronger our connection to the world, the more our pride convinces us that *we* are the finders and keepers of our own good things. But what are we missing? It is this: We are not “remembering the Lord our God”, Who is the real source of good things.

The only problem is that “good things” are those that God declares good, and these do not always agree with what the world calls good. The good things we get from God have spiritual and eternal implications, as we shall see more clearly in a future study, and the more we grow and have His view-point, rather than the world’s view-point, the more we will value the same things He does.

1 John 2:15-16 says the following:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world.

Notice the connection between the world and pride. If we love the world, we are operating in the flesh, and will end up in unbridled, unmitigated pride. We will “boast” about what we have and what we do (or grumble about what we don’t have and can’t get). How often do we want what others have, or long to do what others do; or—in some cases—gloat that we have things and resources that others don’t? In either case, pride is at work, and it will sink believers into a slush pit of frustration and disillusionment leading to carnality and sin. We will find ourselves far away from God, though we are still in His family. John 3:19 says that when we are away from God, we are walking in darkness. But a solution is offered, as per 1 John 2:17, which says, “...the world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever [keeps on living].” John 16:33b adds, “...But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Sharing in Christ’s victory over the world is similar to sharing in His victory over Satan: It is accomplished as an eternal fact, but is seen in experience only as a conditional outcome, based on spirituality and maturity...or “doing God’s will”.

Reining in Pride. Paul commanded the following in Rom. 12:3: “By the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.” Remember, pride connects us with the world, which is why Paul had said in verse 2a, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” And what is the pattern for us in the world? It is one of pride, or “thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought”. And then Paul gives the solution, which tells us what to do, and then tells us how. Both are found in verse 2b which says, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” What are we to do? Be transformed. And how are we to do it? Have our minds renewed through the Word. Then verse 2c gives us the result of this transformation: “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Doing God’s will depends on our being changed through a process of being “renewed”, which is a suitable way to say, “matured”. Everything we do to train and grow will lead to CHANGE, so that we can know and do the will of God, and no longer be grafted into the world, serving Satan and hating God.

Hab. 2:4-5 describes the proud, and distinguishes them from the righteous, as follows: “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith—indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest.” Notice that the proud have an exaggerated view of their own importance and place in the world, whereas the maturing believer in fellowship is living by faith in God, rather than the world. The proud live according to their own prescriptions and solutions for life, and develop a desire for the details that the world offers. But they can’t rest, because there is never

enough. How many millionaires have taken a fall, because they decided to get more and more money or property or possessions through dishonest means, and ended up with nothing?

2 Pet. 1:3-4 gives an apt conclusion for the real source of all good things, saying this:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

We access “everything we need”, including “godliness”, through “knowledge”, a key word implying maturity. There is escape, and this escape is available to all believers. When we put on the divine nature of God by growing in grace and staying close to God, we will learn how to cope in this place that harbors such great dangers that they have to be “escaped”. One of the first requirements for escaping corruption and all the other deleterious conditions in the world, is to become humble before God. We want to know more about this and will discuss this in more detail in a future study. For now, we have established that pride and the world go together.

B. We Are Foreigners Here

Strangers in the World. “This world is not my home.” So go the lyrics of a song by the same title that recognizes that we are aliens here on earth. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will not feel settled here, and will not feel that the world is a place where we can drive a stake and hang our hat. We are foreigners here, and the more we try to concentrate on fitting into the world, the more we will be disappointed with our environs. This does not mean that we isolate ourselves from the world or that we don’t show manners and courtesy to all people. But we are not at home here, even though this is where we live. Living is more than a physical condition; it is a state of mind; the soul is the place where unrest is experienced. Heb. 13:14 confirms that we do not live here, saying, “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” The world is *not home*.

Satan has his kingdom here on earth; and that makes it a dark place. Col. 1:13 says, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” We live in a kingdom of darkness, where Satan is king and we are either his opponents, or his subjects. If we are maturing and staying in fellowship, we are opponents; but if we walk in darkness, we are citizens of his kingdom. As opponents, we will not be welcomed or rewarded in this world, except by God (more on this later), but as subjects of the kingdom of darkness, we will fit right in. Remember that believers can look and act just like unbelievers, and will be accepted as one of them. On the other hand, if we are walking in the Spirit, we will not fit in, and will not receive a warm welcome from the world.

Temporal vs Eternal. The world is a temporal place, confined within time and space. But the kingdom we seek is beyond “place”...it is eternal. Things limited to time or location do not hold value in the eternal order. Only God’s presence and holiness can give value or importance to anything, or *anyone*, on earth. Our whole objective is to find out how to **let God be God**, so we can participate in his

righteous kingdom. Ps. 89:5-8 points out His uniqueness in all of the eternal state, as follows:

The heavens praise your wonders, Lord, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies above can compare with the Lord? Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings? In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

God is eternal, and His values are eternal. This is why we can't live up to His standards in our own strength...because we are still body-bound and time-trapped. And we live in a material world of darkness that does not fit into God's kingdom (even though it will when Christ returns and establishes His millennial kingdom). This temporal life—and the temporary place it occupies—is fleeting and vain. Ps. 39:6 says, "Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it." No matter what we acquire, it is not ours, and we cannot keep it. Everything we have and are that is connected with the world system is meaningless. James 4:14b says, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Like the steam of our breath on a cold morning, we are hardly seen and then we disappear. Earthly life is a vapor, and there is no time to make ourselves at home in the world. Who are you? You are nothing; "mere men", as Ps. 9:20 says. And Heb. 2:6b adds, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" Our importance does not come from ourselves, but from the One who made us. That is the true perspective of our place in life. God is God. We are not.

Chasing After the Wind. When we pursue satisfaction in the world, we are "chasing after the wind". We will say more about this later in this chapter, but we want to see at this point that this strange land we are visiting will not give us anything of lasting value. This place of things and worldly societies and human wisdom has no permanent substance. Eccl. 1:3-11 is worth perusing in its entirety, as it describes the world and suggests that our place in it is brief and transient. This passage says the following:

What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Life in the world is pointless, except for God's place in it and our situation within it as determined by His plan. The world, remember, is a stage, as voiced so well by Jacques in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: "The whole world is a stage, and all the men and women merely actors." We are actors portray-

ing God's grace and mercy and justice for the angels, and we will play our part well or poorly, and then exit the stage. But our time on the stage is but a tick of the clock, and then we are history. We are just now learning our parts in the great divine play, to see how our role should be played. But we do not reside here; we are just playing our role.

C. The World Opposes Us

The World Rejects God and His Word. If we live our lives by God's Word, we will be hated by the world. This means that a believer who is getting closer to God will not have a great reputation in the world, and will be discredited for his narrow and extreme views. This is because the world, which belongs to Satan, rejects God and His truth. Many believers, and the people to whom they trust their spiritual upbringing, think that Christianity is simply a source of prosperity and promotion. But the world does not work that way for maturing believers. They are blocked by a world that is against them, because the world is against God. Do you see the connection? Satan is against us, and the world is Satan's, so the world is against us. This is one of the most profound truths we can understand, because it helps us see why we seem to be walking in molasses so much of the time as we pick our way through the world. And it may explain why people-problems seem to plague us. The Christian life is not easy. But we will see as we work through this study on God's training that God uses the advances of Satan and the intrusions of the cosmic system to sharpen us and move us closer to Him.

The world does not hate unbelievers, in general, nor does it despise carnal believers. Unbelievers and unspiritual believers get a pass, because they are cooperating with Satan and the world; but the world loathes those who are serious about their spiritual walk...those who use grace assets to move closer to God. The targeted ones are those who seek to know Him better, and get this: To KNOW God is more than just being His child, eternally saved and bound for heaven; truly knowing God is about knowing His *truths for living*, so that we can conduct ourselves in an attitude of faith toward Him. The rub? Those who do this will be hated by the world. Paul said that "...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). This persecution comes as a result of "living a godly life", and not solely on the basis of our being born-again. Those who want to live godly will enjoy the distinction of being hated and persecuted.

In John 15:18-21, Jesus stated clearly that the world will hate those who follow Him, as we see here:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

Jesus also said, in John 17:14, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world." We are splitting hairs a little at this point, in

our application of the concept, “not of the world”. It is easy for us to understand that the world is the absolute master of unbelievers. But the world is also the master of believers who are out of fellowship with God, and those who are not following the steps to greater faith. This is significant: If we are “walking the walk” and are hated by the world, we can know that our spiritual condition is invoking that hatred. Conversely, if we are loved by the world, we should examine our lives, because it is likely that we are not walking in the light of fellowship with God. Remember, loss of fellowship is due to harboring our sins and not confessing them to the Father. If we confess, He forgives, and this removes any impediment that might be preventing fellowship. The caution: When you are growing and in fellowship, be aware that hatred and persecution will follow in some form.

Luke 6:22-23 tells us in the following what our response should be to the world’s hatred:

Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

Don’t Kid Yourself...It’s Bad. Let’s be realistic about this. It is very difficult for us to enjoy being hated by others. How, then, can we “leap for joy” when we are leered at and avoided and castigated because of our stand for God and the truth? This is not easy to achieve; it is a potentiality reached only by the most mature believers. You can’t just force a smile and claim, “I am happy at all this disregard and disdain”. This is because, until we reach a higher level of understanding, we will not have the perspective that God does. He sees the whole picture and knows how He intends to bless us in this life, and He knows that some day we will receive rewards for enduring the hatred of the world. When we can learn to see reality from God’s view-point, rather than human view-point, we will find great exhilaration in our experience of hatred...and even persecution...from the world. Acts 5:41 reports, “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Many times the worst hatred and mistreatment can come from those to whom we have been the closest...our dearest friends and closest family members. They will turn their backs on us and this will hurt us deeply. This injury will be mitigated when we mature to the point that we can reconcile their behavior as normal and inevitable, given their rejection of or distance from God. But at the time, it causes us pain. David expressed such pain in Ps. 55:12-14, where he said the following:

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God, as we walked about among the worshipers.

Even dear Christian brothers and sisters can turn on us when spirituality and maturity are beginning to be in evidence in our individual lives. And this can be almost unbearable.

In order to deal with hatred from the world, we must learn to see it through the eyes of faith. Otherwise, we will not see God’s purpose in allowing it. Remember this: If we are in fellowship and growing, our being hated by the world can be a time when God uses what is meant to harm us...to benefit

us. He has a way of turning cursing into blessing.

D. Chasing After the Wind

Solomon Testifies from Experience. Solomon had wisdom, pleasure, wealth, sex, exceptional achievement, romantic love, friendships, possessions, looks, education, power, fame, and intellectual stimulation. But he spent 35 to 40 years out of fellowship, during which time he relied on assets in Satan's world to satisfy himself. These things, however, brought him no joy, and he came to see it all as meaningless...or "vanity". Ecclesiastes is an account of Solomon's failure to achieve happiness in the cosmic system. He drew from the world all that it offers, but did not receive and experience what the world promised. He relied on the world for provision and forgot all about God and His superior provision, because his faith was directed toward a meaningless world.

For much of his life, Solomon lived by sight, not faith. When he finally came back, he wrote Proverbs, which encapsulated the lessons he had learned during his time away from God. The wisdom of Proverbs is the product of eight experiments conducted by Solomon. He learned from his experience, because he had stopped learning the "easy way", and had turned to the world for what he thought he needed. He had stopped listening to God...stopped learning God's Word. This is a tragedy, and this is the story for too many believers, who fixate on one or more systems in the world to bring meaning and satisfaction to their lives. Solomon's experiments exhibited the kinds of mistaken assumptions that a world-view generates. They show the effects of faith in the world, rather than in God and His Word.

Delineation of Solomon's Eight Experiments. Robert McLaughlin, in his sermon series and book *Ecclesiastes*, provided many of the concepts on the world presented in this section. In his heuristic study, McLaughlin offered an excellent discussion of these experiments, from which we created the following summary:

1. Anthropocentric academic speculating. This high-sounding phrase simply describes a man-centered focus and study. This attempt to rationalize man's existence and worth sees the natural man as the center of the universe. Participating in academic education and acquiring human wisdom are seen as the way to achieve meaning and significance. Solomon concluded that these are vain pursuits.
2. Partying. This includes drinking, taking mood-altering drugs, seeking pleasure, and doing whatever you can think of. Solomon found out how endless, exhausting, and unsatisfying this practice can be.
3. Being overly-focused on the family. Focus on the family has a nice ring, and is usually appropriate, but when concentration on the family and its legacy reaches extremes, it easily becomes an idol that supplants God. This turned out to be a disappointing experiment for Solomon.
4. Becoming over-organized and time-oriented. Over-scheduling and obsession with time is empty apart from its connection with the eternal Father.

5. Being preoccupied with money and success and achievement. Solomon now has our attention. He believed that money made his world go around, until his life spun out of control and he found out that acquiring great wealth apart from God's plan leads to a dead-end, and eventually a precipitous drop. He also discovered that his brilliant achievements did not bring peace to his troubled heart.
6. Building power and a reputation. Fame and absolute authority are appealing, but these almost always lead to disillusionment and even bitterness. Solomon was highly acclaimed as the wisest man in the world, and had thousands of slaves to command, yet he was miserable. All the accolades from all the sycophants in the world could not fill the hole in his soul.
7. Seeking sex. Once again, Solomon captures our notice. This one is a trap that draws us in and then throws its nets around us. Sexual lust is never satisfied and will inevitably lead to an insatiable search for the ultimate, final experience. But this will not come, and Solomon learned that the pursuit of sexual satisfaction through man's own devices can only usher in shattered illusions and emptiness.
8. Being a hero. We are all the heroes in our own stories, and this can become a drive that motivates us to seek recognition through our own achievements. This causes us to focus on ourselves as the source for all greatness and nobility, but this drive cannot be sustained and will eventually fade, leading to frustration and foolishness. (Endnote 7)

Anything Solomon wanted, he got. There was nothing in his imagination that could not become his. Eccl. 2:10 tells us, "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure." He was the wealthiest, most powerful man in the world. He did and acquired anything he wanted, yet in the end, after decades of searching for satisfaction and meaning in the world, he concluded, "'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the teacher. 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!'" (Eccl. 1:2) He meant that everything *in the cosmic system* is meaningless, empty, pointless, and vain. After all his experiments, Solomon finally found meaning and purpose, as indicated in the following:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (Eccl. 12:13-14)

Solomon's Lesson. Fearing God is the ultimate outcome of all growth and training. And fear is faith. This means that the one ultimate conclusion to our place and purpose can be only one thing: TRUSTING GOD! As we have emphasized, knowing and applying Scripture is the key to building this trust. When we build our faith, we will avoid evil and achieve good. We must trust God or we will fail and be judged (disciplined). This is God's way.

We have seen what Solomon learned, but the path to this knowledge was a long and tortuous one. Eccl. 2 provides a summary of all Solomon's quests and ventures, and tells what he was left feeling at the end of all his experiments. Eccl. 2:17 tell us what he felt: "So I hated my life, because the work

that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” He sucked from the world all that it could offer, and ended up hating his life, knowing that he had wasted his time looking for happiness and meaning in the world. And it was like running after the wind, which is a chase that takes all our energy, but it never ends, and it leaves us with empty hands. Like much that we do, chasing after the wind is pointless, because we can never catch it. When a believer pursues what the world offers to the exclusion of God’s will and God’s plan, he finds that the finish line keeps moving farther away, which means that satisfaction can never be found. This is what the world offer believers: nothingness...emptiness...air that is receding.

Contrast Solomon’s state of mind, “I hated my life”, with that of Paul, who said, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” (Phil. 4:11b) Solomon had everything and was miserable. Paul had nothing, but was “content”. The difference is in the phrase, “I have learned”. Look at Phil. 4:11-13, where Paul uses “I have learned” and “I know” several times. This is repeated in Scripture because it is important. Paul was able to do what he did because he had learned to apply the methods for living that God offered, which enabled him to operate “through him”, or in the power of Jesus Christ. This comes from using the techniques, so that divine power can go to work. Grace assets lead to grace operations.

In Eccl. 1:14, Solomon said, “I have seen all the things that have been done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” Here it is again: chasing after the wind. Believers who drift from God will inevitably be “chasing after the wind”. Without maturity and spirituality, this is the essence of our lives. Life in the world, which represents carnality and immaturity, will lead to the same pursuits that Solomon conducted: prosperity, sex, social recognition, reputation, power, philosophy, and achievement. These exist in the world, where Satan is king, and where he rewards and promotes on the basis of our pursuing his counterfeit happiness and fulfillment. He promotes the gullible and the empty-headed with his attractive distractions and cunning deceptions. They believe that, when they can get “everything”, they will be content. But Solomon proved just the opposite. Ps. 127:1 tells us the following:

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.

The point is that *if God is not in something, there will be no joy in it*. Even getting everything you desire will not satisfy. Acquiring the things of the world for their own sake brings sorrow, not joy. Eccl. 1:18 says, “For with much [worldly] wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.” Nothing in the world has substance that will satisfy the heart. Only eternal things will satisfy.

Innocent Things in the World may not Turn out to Be That Way. We are reminded that we live in the world, and that experiencing peace and prosperity are not bad things. These are goals we all have, even the most mature. The problem occurs when we value anything in the world more than we value God and our walk with Him. Innocuous things, even good things, can become bad if they take the place of our spiritual growth and fellowship with God. Anything that pulls us away from God is a bad thing. Most of the pursuits of Solomon have a “normal” side to them; they are “common to man”.

Education, success, achievement...these are normal and praiseworthy activities, but when they exclude God, they become gods in themselves and can prevent the growth of our relationship with God, with the result that we will not be satisfied with whatever we get or achieve.

1 Tim. 6:9-10 says the following:

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Notice that money itself is not evil; it is the “love” of money that does the damage. And wanting to increase your income is not bad in itself; it is when you become “eager” to get it that your pursuit becomes destructive. When we love money, or are eager to get it, what does this suggest? That we are placing our faith in money, rather than in God. Anytime our faith in the world is increased, our faith in God is decreased, and we will not find joy in anything that is damaging to our faith. As Heb. 13:5a says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’.” To find satisfaction in life, we must maintain a spiritual connection with God, and build our faith, because He is always faithful to us.

Jaded Treasure. We recall that Eccl. 1:11a says, “All things are wearisome, more than one can say.” Anything we will ever see, experience, or acquire will become old over time. Anything can become tiresome and monotonous. This is why there must always be more and more and more. They all become boring after a time. No prosperity, fame, possession, or experience in the world will withstand the erosive effects of time and custom; familiarity will eventually cause a desensitization to any of them. Even if they stay with us, they tend to become invisible to us. Truth is, we will always tend to lose what we have. An example of this is given in Prov. 23:4-5, which says, “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.” God’s provisions have eternal value. The world’s supplies are temporary and unreliable; their value will diminish. Jesus asked, “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:26a)

When we focus on the world, and see the world as the way to sustain and enhance our lives, we are living by what we see, and not what we believe. We will pursue the world and not God, and we will be living for self-satisfaction, rather than the glory of God. This is a life of vanity (nothingness), and when our hearts are buried in vanity, they will become dark and evil. We will find ourselves wearing the uniform of Satan’s soldiers, serving the enemy in heart and soul and body.

To further understand what happens in our search for meaningful lives through the resources that the world offers, we continue our discussion of what happens when we seek fulfillment in the world.

E. Seeking Fulfillment in the World

Worldly Things Mean Nothing in Eternity. God does not see as we see. God focuses on the *eternal*; we focus on the *external*. God looks at the heart and sees an eternal prospect; we look at our surroundings and see tangible possibilities. God's reality is unlimited; our reality is finite. God transcends everything; we are confined to one time and one place. It is *natural*, given our limited scope, for us to view ourselves as the center of the universe, and *normal* that we should attach value to those things that lie within our proximity. Thus it is that we live our lives from self outward, and it becomes inevitable that we should focus on things we can experience directly. This causes us to live as bodies with a soul, rather than as souls with a body. Our locus is earthly and our focus material, instead of these being heavenly and spiritual. Is it any wonder, then, that Satan would use our environment to produce distractions from God? He creates conditions in the world that convince us to live our lives with eyes on self, and he tricks us into thinking this world is full of things we can't live without.

Things that we think are important in the world will become nothing in eternity. But having a mindset that accommodates this truth requires a mind makeover. Our values and perspectives must be moved in the direction of the eternal, rather than the external, or we will end up like Solomon, who "hated" his life. Solomon said he had "all he desired", but his desires came from a worldly view of life and not a spiritual view. After many years of living with the wrong view, Solomon learned that desires can lead one away from God. This happens whenever desires become attached to or dependent on the world for fulfillment. James 1:14 says, "...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." Evil desire is any attraction that pulls our attention away from God. A desire may be harmless in itself, but when it leads us to ignore God, or to spend inordinate amounts of time doing things that do not contribute to our growth, it becomes "evil". We cannot displace God with *anything* and still expect our spiritual lives to be sustained. You snooze, you lose.

Life Under the Sun. We repeat a verse here that we saw earlier, in order to glean additional truths about life in the world. Eccl. 2:11 says, "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." Solomon used the phrase "under the sun" a number of times to show the distinction between that which takes place "under the sun", as opposed to that which goes on "above the sun". Our focus tends to be on that which is happening *beneath* the sun, whereas God calls our attention to Himself, and all that exists and happens *above* it...meaning in heavenly places. There is hope inherent in things above the sun, while no real hope can be offered under the sun. When we learn to attend to heavenly things, earthly things will be taken care of.

An example of the truth that our best care *below* comes from *above*...and that seeking satisfaction below will not work for us...is found in Job 27:13-23, which is quoted in its entirety here:

Here is the fate God allots to the wicked, the heritage a ruthless man receives from the Almighty: However many his children, their fate is the sword; his offspring will never have enough to eat. The plague will bury those who survive him, and their widows will not weep for

them. Though he heaps up silver like dust and clothes like piles of clay, what he lays up the righteous will wear, and the innocent will divide his silver. The house he builds is like a moth's cocoon, like a hut made by a watchman. He lies down wealthy, but will do so no more; when he opens his eyes, all is gone. Terrors overtake him like a flood; a tempest snatches him away in the night. The east wind carries him off, and he is gone; it sweeps him out of his place. It hurls itself against him without mercy as he flees headlong from its power. It claps its hands in derision and hisses him out of his place.

The "wicked" could obviously be those who are living in carnality or legalism, but it can also represent those who are living honorably and responsibly, if they are not tending to their spiritual lives. The wickedness of a person is measured by his distance from God (which may or may not be evident to other people). When one walks away from God, even if it is over some innocent thing (name yours), he is walking into "wickedness". This is because the value of an action is determined by its effects.

Clarification. If attention to some thought pattern or activity becomes excessive and is taking away time from study and prayer, it has become "wicked". We are to enjoy life, as God intends, but *any* activity, however benign or harmless, as stated earlier, can become a trap that will have us cracking the door for Satan, and a crack is all he needs. He will have us forgetting God, gradually at first, then with greater regularity. Eccl. 2:26a says, "To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God." God is pleased when we seek first the *finding* and *doing* of His will, which means *attending to our growth*. Anything outside of that, even our labor, will not please God. God must get first priority.

Going After What we Want. Regardless of the power of Satan, and the influence of the world, we must remember that ultimate control belongs to God. He is sovereign, giving authority on earth to Satan for a time, so that Satan can appeal his sentence. But God is still God. We must understand that, as believers, we are operating within a plan devised by God. His plan endures, even if we are failing. Here is what sovereignty has determined: God's plan will function around our choices and determine outcomes based on what we choose. We will decide what to emphasize in our lives...what we want and what we want to do. But we must understand that there are consequences for our choices. The outcomes they bring will be seen either as discipline or as training, and these may not deliver what WE expected or wanted. What we want may be unattainable within God's plan, if our objectives are not the same as God's. Eccl. 6:7 and 9a suggest that our desires may not be well-placed. This passage says, "All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied....Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite." When our desires are controlled by any attempt to fulfill ourselves through the mechanisms of the cosmic system, the results may not be satisfying, and can even be devastating.

Finding Contentment. The alternative to seeking what we desire from the world is to grow and be pleased with what God brings. We will work in the world and attempt to achieve and succeed, but this must take place within an arena of faith, so that what we acquire or do has meaning, and will therefore be satisfying. The problem is that a lack of divine view-point causes us to measure our own success by

what we do NOT have. This is why Paul said, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” The object is contentment, not a huge inventory or a full itinerary. If we are content, and the inventory and itinerary fill up afterward, we can then enjoy what we get; but going after these things for their own sake will never satisfy. We must remember that what we have is not ours; we must follow God and take what He gives and the life He brings, and we must do so in a spirit of contentment.

Contentment is for those who are close to God. But we may not be there yet. 2 Tim. 3:4b tells us that many are “...lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.” The *center* for believers is in “loving God”. When we love God we will be waiting on Him and trusting Him for provision and promotion. But until then, we will be loving and serving ourselves first and foremost.

When we go to the world for what we failed to trust God to provide, we may get what we go after, but any prosperity or promotion from the dark kingdom will not have real value. Only God’s promotions will be fruitful in His kingdom of righteousness. This is confirmed in 2 Cor. 10:18, which says, “For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” Real promotion for spiritual believers comes from God, and they know that they can depend on God for all they need. Whatever we are doing, He is the only One whose supply can satisfy. When we use what He gives for His glory, that which is given will become the source of legitimate enjoyment.

Growth vs. Stagnation. When we are focused on the things of God, we can grow. When we are focused on the things of the world, we will not grow. Paul charged the Colossians, “Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2). If we follow this, we will move toward the life of righteousness and production that we see in verses 15-17 of this chapter (Col. 3), which tells us that the following will happen:

- The peace of Christ will rule in our hearts.
- We will experience peace within ourselves and within the church.
- We will be thankful.
- The Word of Christ will dwell within us “richly”.
- We will teach and admonish each other with all wisdom.
- We will sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude.
- We will do what we do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every good thing in this passage comes from being in fellowship, studying, praying, and walking in the Spirit. But it will not happen if we are not meeting these conditions. When we do what God requires, all kinds of godly production will take place. To make sure that we do these, we must continually search for God’s truths for living as presented in the Word, rather than seeking answers in the devil’s world. When we decide not to go after God through His Word, we will invariably pursue other desires

that take us away from Him. And when we move away from Him, and arrogantly seek to please ourselves in the world, our faith and hope will dissipate. 1 Tim. 6:17 says it well,

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Accept no substitutes.

F. The World Promises Success

The World's Claims are Empty. The world contains nothing of spiritual value. This is a problem for believers who live here, because their search for assets can only properly take place in the spiritual realm. The world is empty for them. If we seek pleasure, happiness, success, and meaning from the world, we will be disappointed. For believers, the world is a dry well, and will produce nothing of real worth. It is futile and pointless for us to seek life from the world. But even though this is true, the world still promises that it can fulfill our dreams. The *promises* of the world, often accompanied by lures and temptations, give us guarantees that we will find what we need and want there.

According to human view-point, the ones who attain success *in the world* are seen as “winners” and those who fail to hook the brass ring are seen as “losers”. This is all backwards. Real winners are those who ignore the world as the source of all good things, and turn to God for anything of true value. Relying on God is a safe option, because God CAN give, and WANTS to give, to those who trust Him. What we get from the world may *look like* success, but whatever God gives will be the ABSOLUTE BEST...for us. The irony is that losers choose the *world's* best and believe they are winners because of it.

Helping Ourselves. When we turn to the world for success, we are assuming that certain *personal attributes* make us more likely to acquire what the world promises. We think there must be something about ME that qualifies me to become a winner in the world, and that makes ME eligible to get the world's “stuff”. Such thinking begins with an attitude that, if good things are going to happen, I...I...have to make them happen. I can trust myself...I just have to have faith in my own worth and abilities. As any motivational speaker will tell you, if I am deficient in some way, my job is to shore up my weaknesses and turn them into strengths through self-improvement. Many things are available in the world, so I must get started and go after them, if they are going to be mine. Along the way, whatever additional abilities or skills I need will be acquired; I just have to keep my eye on the prize. And what are the abilities and qualities that I need in order to distinguish myself and succeed (thinking in worldly terms now)? Putting this question another way, what do I need to make it in the world? Believe it or not, the Bible answers this.

Eccl. 9:11a suggests the qualities that we need to enhance our opportunities in the world. These are couched within a statement that describes the very things that help us in the world, and observe this: These are NOT things that will help us in the kingdom of light. This verse says, “The [spiritual] race is

not to the swift or the [spiritual] battle to the strong, nor does [spiritual] food come to the [worldly] wise or [spiritual] wealth to the brilliant or [spiritual] favor to the learned..." The things that equip us for competition in the world do not qualify us for winning the race that God has laid out for us. The race mentioned by Solomon in Eccl. 9:11 is a spiritual one; it is not the worldly race of clamoring for whatever we see and want. The real race is the one being run toward God, as we study and pray with all our energy and might. This is the *right* race. The race in the world, which looks like a massive free-for-all, is toward what the world holds, its alluring prizes. The world's race, according to the verse we just quoted, goes to these:

- The swift
- The strong
- The wise
- The brilliant
- The educated

These will enable one to win in the world. But *this is not the race we want to run!* The race we run is not won by the swift, strong, wise, brilliant, or educated. Our race is different. We want to run the race Paul spoke of when he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim. 4:7) The "good" fight is a spiritual one, and the prize we seek exists only in the arena of the divine. The race to be won is a heavenly race, not one to be won through self-improvement and self-aggrandizement. God's race can only be won by FAITH! This is what we need in order to become winners, and there is no superior ability or brilliance or education required. We only need to *believe*. And the result? "Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:8) This is "payday someday", but there are also prizes that we will receive on this earth...as we proceed through this life. The world will not be our source for these, and these will not come from our own strength and prowess.

God's Promises vs the World's Guarantees. In contrast to the spiritual promises of God, the world claims that it has what we need, and assures us that the world will deliver. The world says, "If you can dream it, you can achieve it." This may work *in the world*, but this is not God's prescription for the good life. Unbelievers and carnal believers use the world's formula to achieve success, but believers who are growing and walking by faith will not find success in this way. Maturing believers live by a different standard, and receive their provision from God, rather than the world. That's the mindset in which they operate. And notice: All believers have the potential to reach this level of maturity, so that *all* can hear God say, "If you get close to Me and learn to trust me, you will be surprised at what you get that will *truly* satisfy you...much more than you ever desired!"

Believers can count on nothing in the world, because it belongs to the devil. Solutions and life templates found in the world will provide only temporary relief or superficial achievement. They work for a time, and seem permanent, but they will soon wane and eventually evaporate. What God gives us is for our benefit, and it will be refreshed continually, as long as we are walking close to Him. 2 Cor.

4:15-18 gives the right perspective on this:

All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Good Times vs Hard Times. It is difficult to frame and describe the “troubles” we have, as contrasted with God’s “blessings”. It is easy to believe that, if we are trouble-free, God is being good to us; and if we have difficulties, God is mad at us and withholding the good stuff. This is the result of an incorrect view of life. “Troubles” may indeed be “blessings”, as we shall see in some detail later in these studies. God knows what we NEED in the way of provisions, and He knows how to empower us to participate in His plan in a positive and productive way. If we are trusting Him, we will know that what He brings to us is for our growth and good. The world, on the other hand, may “bless” on the surface, but the world gives with strings attached, and we will pay a price for putting our faith in the world. Things in the world do not work for maturing believers, no matter how good they look. A higher form of reality will eventually show the vanity of the world’s vast inventory. This is sounding a little repetitious, but the *world will not satisfy!* This is so hard to get across and to learn. Heavenly things may look uninteresting and unfruitful, until their true worth is shown and known. This is because things are not what they seem, when they are viewed through worldly eyes. The more mature we become, the greater our heavenly eyesight will be.

When we view life through the world’s lenses, and live life for success in the world, we will be headed toward a mirage. The illusion is that we can succeed in the world, doing things the world’s way. Oddly enough, we may succeed in the world in some ways, but we will fail in life, if worldly success is our goal. Life “under the sun”, rather than “above the sun”, will lead us to measure our worth by the world’s standards, and we will be choosing the “lesser life”, regardless of all appearances. The world promises to open our eyes and give us life, prosperity, and security, but it actually *blinds* us as to what is real, permanent, and life-giving. Remember what Satan said to Eve? “It will open your eyes”. But it blinded her.

Contrasting the World View and God’s View. The world’s light is darkness, and its wisdom is folly. Human wisdom is impressive and verifiably accurate by the world’s gauge, but it ends up in capriciousness and emptiness. Keep in mind, we are speaking of the world, and the way it works, for *believers*. Education and experience in the world promise stability, but lead to uncertainty and instability. On the other hand, when we walk steadily toward the truth, we will realize that the world is beneath our feet, working like a conveyor belt to carry us in the opposite direction. We cannot stand still spiritually, because—without our lifting a finger—the world will move us quickly away from God. When we stop moving forward, we will move backward, and the world will start to look more and more like a friendly place.

We mentioned human wisdom, and we have mentioned divine wisdom. Human wisdom, as a foundation for thought and action, is found in philosophy, whereas divine wisdom is found in the truth of the Word. Philosophy is compelling and convincing; it seems so “deep” and true. We could branch here and introduce a myriad of philosophies dealing with ontology (reality), epistemology (truth), and axiology (goodness and beauty). We could also deal with the history of philosophy, which is as old as man, or the “great philosophers” of ancient history. But we are most interested in the contrast between philosophy and Scripture, and those philosophies that run counter to divine view-point. We will mention here a few philosophies that were prevalent during the times that the Bible was being written. The following is a summary of some of these philosophies:

- Materialism. The major thought behind this philosophy is focused on getting a lot of “things”. These include money, possessions, and the privileges of wealth.
- Epicureanism, also known as Hedonism. The thinking behind this philosophy is that life is a party, a search for self-fulfillment and pleasure. If it feels good, do it. The Epicurean philosophy was founded on sensual pleasure and lack of restraint, or a “playboy” mentality.
- Humanism. This philosophy says that we should exalt man as a superior being. It sees good in everyone, and believes that we are “self-made” and dignified and valuable in our own right. We are masters of our own soul and captains of our fate. Humans are central to all existence, and they are the greatest power in the universe. Brought closer to home, *Christian* humanists depend on themselves for achievement, rather than God. Many churches espouse this...you can depend on yourself and you must generate your own goodness. This is subtle, but it makes us the gods of our own universe.
- Fatalism. The game is fixed. Resign yourself to your fate. You can’t change the way things are, because life is determined for you.

Solomon concluded that all these philosophies are overshadowed and trumped by God’s truth and His way. He said, in Eccl. 9:1, “So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.” (Eccl. 9:1) God is sovereign, yet He is never unfair or unjust, as we have seen before. He has a predesigned plan that determines the outcome for each choice we make, and the timing for all events. God’s plan and truth and essence outweigh all of man’s notions and activities, because He is supreme. When something happens, it is because God caused it or allowed it. Everything that happens, all events and outcomes, ultimately belong to Him, not us. And with God, we have hope, but *only in Him*, not in the world. Eccl. 9:4a says, “Anyone who is among the living has hope...” God is our hope in life. Acts 17:24-25 tells us, as follows, why our hope is in God and not in man or the world:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

God made it all, and He needs nothing. But we need Him, and the success He offers is infinitely better

than anything the world can offer.

G. The World is Satan's Kingdom

Satan Has Virtual Control of the Cosmic System. 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” There is a lot of talk about parallel universes and multiple dimensions. Well, here it is: This is Satan’s world, which he controls, and yet Scripture is clear that God controls everything. It is as though two universes exist in virtually the same space. Satan’s kingdom occupies the world, and God’s kingdom includes heaven, the universe, *and* “the world”. God “owns” the world, but He has marked out the earth as the place where Satan can freely roam and enlist soldiers for his war against God. God is allowing this to be Satan’s kingdom, in which he attempts to demonstrate his superiority over God.

Within his kingdom Satan has a lot of latitude, but God is always right there to place limits on his activities, overseeing them on a case-by-case basis. When God allows Satan to do something, it is because it serves some higher purpose, such as demonstrating Satan’s evil nature, or providing discipline or training for believers, or even teaching angels about God’s grace. Satan, for his part, creates a gravitational pull on the world as he drags them toward fulfillment of his evil plan. He is constantly proposing and engineering all kinds of evil, which he uses to discredit God and recruit human support in any way he can. There is apparently no part of the world to which Satan does not have access, which makes his influence ubiquitous.

Satan Offers the World. This is Satan’s world. In this world he promotes “positive thinking” and *self*-confidence, rather than surrender to God’s will and faith in God’s plan. The world is full of Satan’s deception. Whether it is through sin, legalism, or objective secularism, Satan draws human beings into his world. And when he is able to sucker people into following his plan, they will serve him, and he will deliver for them. Satan rewards evil thoughts and behavior, as much as God will allow. When we look to the world for meaning and prosperity, we are going before the throne of Satan to ask for his provision. This may yield short-term results, but the end will not be good, because eventually Satan’s system will disappoint, and even destroy.

Satan wants us to believe that we do not need God...that we can have what we want and be content without God. Satan promises greatness and grandeur to lure us away from God, and he has the authority to provide these. Remember what we saw earlier in Luke 4:5-6, where, Satan offered Jesus complete authority in “all the kingdoms of the world”. The “world” is Satan’s kingdom, and this means that the “kingdoms” of the world are also under his control. He has the ability to offer authority in these kingdoms to those who will accept and follow his lead. And in the same way that Christ responded to Satan’s temptations with Scripture, we are to respond to the world and its lure with understanding and wisdom, based on God’s Word. When we learn to apply the truths we acquire, we will be able to function in the power of the Holy Spirit, which will enable us to resist Satan and his cosmic system.

Satan’s “things”, objects, and experiences, which we see in his world, may come into our possession,

but they will not be ours. God allows us to *use* the world's things, according to His will and plan. This means that the things we get as we grow are things we are supposed to have to fulfill our purpose on this earth. And we can be sure that we will get *what we need*. But we cannot allow the things God gives to us to become an end in themselves. If we become preoccupied with the "details" of life, our spiritual purpose will be choked off and we will not fulfill God's will. On the other hand, when we grow in our faith, we will be able to receive the things we need and see them as part of a larger plan, and not as things to have for their own sake. Luke 8:14 says, "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." It is easy to see why Satan lures us into concerns about our condition, and gets us excited about getting things...because it keeps us from growing, as per the phrase, "they do not mature".

This is why we must not adopt the world as our source and resource for good things. We have to maintain a kind of distance from the world, and operate in the realm of God's kingdom. We will see more on the way to do this later in this book. For now, we must be aware that this world is Satan's dark kingdom, and we must separate from it. 2 Cor. 6:14-17 gives us this command:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

This passage takes the concept of separation from unbelievers and expands it to not even "touching" anything that is unclean. This includes everything in the world. We will see later how to deal with uncleanness, which we cannot avoid, but we must recognize at this point that the more separated we are from the world, the more likely it is that we will be in a place where God will "receive us", or keep us close to Him. When we are functioning in God's camp, we can train, but we cannot train and grow if we integrate ourselves with the values espoused by the world.

H. The Wicked May Prosper in the World

Prosperity for the Wicked. We want to be clear that it is possible for an unbeliever or a carnal believer to prosper in the world. All this takes place under the limiting sovereignty of God, but the world is, after all, Satan's domain, and he can distribute his goods pretty much as he chooses. God can give and take away, but he gives Satan a lot of sway in the flow of the world's things. As a result, many unbelievers strike it rich and "live the good life". Some of them are vile, vicious, cruel, heartless, obnoxious, and despicable, while others are sweet and appealing. All are self-serving. It is hard to understand how people who live in the world and follow Satan's pattern of self-service, still make it big. It is easy to question the fairness of this outcome. That is because we tend to assess values on the basis of the cosmic system's assets.

There are many scriptures that deal with the wicked escaping punishment and, instead, prospering. We open with Eccl. 8:11-13, which tells us this:

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

Two Different Standards. The standards for consequences in the lives of unbelievers are different from those for believers. Unbelievers are *in the world*, and are free to be prosperous and well-received in the world. Believers are in God's kingdom, and have different and higher standards. Consequences for sin, for example, occur relatively quickly for believers in the form of discipline, whereas the punishment of unbelievers is delayed until they are no longer on this earth. We must keep the perspective of our occupying a separate kingdom, living with a separate purpose. We are not like them (even though we *act* like them sometimes). When we can see our lives as a place apart from the world, we can avoid envying or resenting the affluence of evil people. Ps. 73:2-28 talks about this in some detail, and is a convincing look at the futility of wanting what evil people have. In verse 3 of that chapter, the psalmist said, "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." What makes it harder to stand is the way the "undeserving" sometimes flaunt their lavish lifestyles, and look down on those who are less "fortunate"; sometimes they are downright cruel. They are "wicked", yet they still prosper.

We see this again and again in the Bible. The following passage is long, but clearly recapitulates our point, so we will quote it in its entirety, as follows (don't skip this!):

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?" This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments. If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I

was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds. (Ps. 73:2-28)

Notice especially the phrase, “When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God [place of fellowship]; then I understood their final destiny.” When we are walking in the Spirit and growing, we will have an understanding of the true value of the world’s wealth, as contrasted with life in the sanctuary of God. Life is much better there, in spite of the way the world views it.

If we choose the world’s standards and opportunities as our primary resource for living, God may permit it, but there will be no joy in it for us, and it will not end well. There is ONE source for true blessing, peace, joy, and strength, and we will be able to access these only when we move closer to the Origin of all good things. When we admire, covet, and seek what others have, we are failing God and disregarding our purpose. We will be chasing after the wind and living under the sun...not living in the light of the Son.

Ps. 37, in its entirety, covers this topic well. Please take time to read this excellent psalm. The first verse pretty well sums it up, saying, “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” And what is the alternative to fretting? Waiting on the Lord. Verse 7 of this chapter says, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.” God’s provisions are worth waiting for because they last, and they bring what they have promised. The result of waiting is seen in verse 34: “Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.” Prov. 24:19 adds, “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.” It is clear that the world brings its substitute form of “grace” to the wicked. Don’t fall for this phony gift; hold out for the real thing.

Chapter 7

Our Nature

In This Chapter...

- A. Human Good vs Divine Good*
- B. Sin vs Works*
- C. Our Sinful Nature*
- D. The Forgiveness of Sin*
- E. Consequences for Unforgiven Sin*
- F. Stop Trying*

A. Human Good vs Divine Good

We Have Found the Enemy. As we begin to see the workings of all the parts and players connected with our training—those that promote it, and those that prevent it—we will understand better where to search for the “good”, and where to avoid the “bad”. We have looked at the workings of Satan and his world, as they machinate day and night to halt, and even reverse, our spiritual pilgrimage. Now we want to look at the biggest culprit in our spiritual undoing, and that is US. Our own nature opposes any thoughts of following God’s spiritual pathway, and throws ropes around us that grip us firmly while it is dragging us into sin and/or legalism. What a potent force our sinful nature is...or our “flesh”, as it is often called. We must deal with this part of ourselves...this integral component of our make-up...that drives us and most of the time controls us. When our nature is in charge, we can do nothing right, and will constantly volunteer for service in Satan’s army. We must learn how to deal with this foul nature which (who) shares a major spot at the console of our soul.

What is Good? What is Bad? In this section, we want to grasp the distinction between deeds that are produced by the sinful nature (sin/human works), and those produced by the Holy Spirit (divine good). This is the dichotomy: 1) sin and human good, and 2) divine good. These must be dissected properly so that we can see their inner parts and workings, as we determine the difference between them.

This may shock you: Our performance in the world is in no way a criterion for acquiring or maintaining spirituality. We live in the world, and as long as we are here, we will “perform” in one way or another; but the quality of that performance does not gauge our spiritual standing. *Our conduct* is not the basis for acquiring spirituality. This concept is difficult to frame, but is integral to our understanding of the differences between human good and divine good. Notice I said “our” conduct, which implies *we* initiated it; it comes from our nature. This is contrasted with conduct which comes from the leadership of the Holy Spirit. If conduct comes from the source of our nature, it is *bad*, even if it “looks” good. On the other hand, if what we do is the product of our fellowship and peaceful relationship with God, then it is truly *good*. We will see later *how* to achieve this “good”, but for now we must discriminate the existential reality of the good and the bad.

Prov. 14:12 helps us frame our discussion on the difference between good and bad. This verse says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” There are things that we can do that are moral and righteous and selfless and so on, but these “lead to death”. This means they lead *nowhere*, or to death of a certain kind. Death in this case is the loss of fellowship, or the cessation of the control of the Holy Spirit. Many acts that we believe are “righteous” can lead to carnality and reversionism, just as readily as certifiable sin, because they originate in our humanity, and not from spirituality. Human nature can imitate the activities of the Spirit of God, but these are “counterfeit good”, which makes them not good at all.

The Flesh can Produce no Good. Human nature cannot produce real “good”, because our nature, the “flesh”, is interminably bad, even if it plans and performs good deeds. Even trying to “help God” in

the world is bad, if it is not energized and led by God the Holy Spirit. Abraham tried to help God fulfill His promise for a son, when he and Sarah schemed to produce an heir. This is when they engineered the birth of Ishmael through a surrogate mother. This provided a son, but did not fulfill the promise God had made, and history has recorded the disaster that came as a result of Abraham's substitution of his own will for that of God's. Our attempts to make good things happen will not only *not work*, they can cause disaster. We see many examples of this in our schemes and searches for such things as marriage, position, prosperity, and even service to others. Our efforts, apart from God, will not end well.

No one is good, but One. All human good is worthless. Is. 64:6b says, "...all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..." This tells us how useless our human efforts are. A "filthy rag" might find some use, even though it is dirty, but this term, as it is used in the original language, shows that it refers to something much worse than a dirty cloth (details omitted); it clearly establishes that this rag is *absolutely* useless. So it is with human good. It is worthless and can only be discarded.

Another illustration of human good/sin is yeast. In the Bible yeast is a symbol for the production of the flesh, which includes both human good and sin. An example of yeast representing sin is seen in 1 Cor. 5:6-8, which says the following:

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works its way through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

Yeast is seen in this passage as wickedness, which must be discarded. Yeast must not be included in the "batch", meaning that acts of the flesh must be gotten rid of. Sinful acts of the flesh are to be replaced with "sincerity and truth", which represent faith and maturity.

Matt. 16:11-12 establishes that yeast applies to human good, as well as it does outright sin. This verse gives us the following:

"How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

And what was the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees? That we can achieve salvation and spirituality through keeping the Law, or through legalism. They saw man as the maker of good, capable of producing righteousness that would somehow get the approval of an infinite God. This is still going on, and is one of the most insidious forms of attack ever used by Satan. He wants us to believe "good" is not only worthwhile, but that God requires it from us. Please understand this: God wants good *in* us, but what He wants does not come *from* us. This is confirmed in Mark 8:15, which shows that both legalism and sin should be avoided. This verse says, "Be careful", Jesus warned them. 'Watch out for the

yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod’.” The yeast of the Pharisees is legalism; the yeast of Herod is sin. Whether our penchant is for doing good or committing sins, Satan knows our weakness and will prompt us to move in the direction of our greatest propensity for evil, whether it is in the form of human good or that of sin. Whatever we *tend* to do is what Satan will exploit.

We will have much to say about sin later on, but for the present, our topic is human good. Human good is seen as religion and legalism, which represent things WE do. Grace, on the other hand, is about what GOD does! Our greatest failing as Christians is not that we seek out Satan and depend on him or worship him. Our greatest infraction is that we depend on ourselves, rather than God, to live good and righteous lives. And this is the choice we make. Satan does not control our volition...he can only influence it. We are responsible for our own choices, and when we decide that we know more and can do more than God, what is the suggestion? It is that we are greater than God! This is pride. So *trying to do good* on our own leads to the greatest sin in the universe: PRIDE!

Self-reliance Reflects Trust in an Impotent Force. Independent or self-dependent action excludes trust in God. Our greatest challenge is to trust God in everything, and to wait for Him. When we act independently, we are giving in to Satan’s temptations and are rejecting God and His way. Even good, solid Bible teachers slip off into this, as they call for us to “do, do, do”! But they forget that the key to meaningful doing is based on the *internal state of the “doer”*. If a believer is in fellowship, what he does will be good; if he is in carnality through legalism or sin, then what he does will not be good for as long as he remains in that condition. We are reminded of something we saw earlier, which is this: “Anything an unbeliever or carnal believer can do is not the Christian way of life.” This is because the only recognized “doing” is “God-doing”. Real Christian living comes from our relationship with God, not our self-effort.

Our object in life is not to “do”, but to “be”, and if we are “being” right in our hearts, we will “do” plenty, from the source of our Teacher and Provider. Key point: We must be clean, through CONFES- SION OF OUR SINS, so that we will be in fellowship, walking in the Spirit, trusting Him, and producing in His strength. This summarizes the Christian life. Here is a catchy way to say this: Our *contri- tion* leads to a *condition* that results in *submission* to bring us to *fruition*. Growth and faith are implied, but the point has been made that all production begins with repentance for our failures. Confession enables study and growth, leading to greater faith, which allows God to work through us. Then we will see divine good, as opposed to human good.

Prepare First; Then Proper “Doing” Will Take Place. We won’t DO, until we PREPARE to do. Until we start maturing, we will be babies...infants without knowledge and without resources. We can know the standards, but until we know intimately the One Who sets them, we will not be able to meet them. Conversely, when we advance in grace and knowledge (wisdom), we will grow and good will come. Most new believers have zeal, and they may try to “do”, as many pastors may mistakenly push them to do, but to attempt this without preparation leads to failure. Conclusively, misdirected zeal does more harm than good. When church leaders call for action without attitude, they are encourag- ing legalism and human good, and they just as well set up a school for thieves and murderers. Obedi-

ence to God's commands begins with the right attitude, so the first act of a new believer should be to develop correct thinking by learning the Word; then he will be equipped to obey...and do...because he will have the Spirit "doing" through him.

We must be clear: Nothing done as a perfunctory act of compliance or conformity carries weight with God. Even learning the Word and prayer do not bring credit to us. They simply prepare our faith, so that God will be able to use us to bring credit to Himself. What we DO independent of Him will never PLEASE Him. Straining to meet a standard, or imitating what we assume is the "good behavior" of others, can only make matters worse, both for the person doing it, and for those around him. Self-driven and self-appointed behavior will alienate us from God, because it is self-dependent and not God-dependent. God will only be pleased by actions which are His own.

If we focus on God, all jobs will get done. If each believer is growing and staying in fellowship and cultivating his/her gift, all needs will be met, and all deficiencies covered. We must move our attention away from the "job to be done" toward a "God to be trusted", so that the job can get done right! Our effort alone will not bring success. No matter how hard we try, we will produce nothing without Him.

Finally, we must refine our view of who it is that is doing the work. We use the terms "enable" and "empower", as though we are taking away something from God that has been deposited in us to make us powerful and capable. This is misleading, because what we have received is not capability or courage or strength or skill that we will possess, even after reaching great maturity and spirituality. What we have obtained is *greater faith* that *frees up* the One Who has all these qualities already, so that He can perform His work *through us*! We are the tools He uses, the vessels He fills, and the instruments He holds, as He does the work that can be done by Him alone. Nothing good exists in our humanity. The difference between bad and good...or human good and divine good...is God.

B. Sin vs Works

What Will Believers be Rewarded For? This is a difficult topic, even though it seems quite simple and straightforward. It is complex, because it involves the doctrine of "rewards", which is abstruse and controversial. My assumption (what I believe) is that we will be judged by Jesus Christ when we are taken to be with Him at the end of the Church Age. At that time, SINS will NOT be judged, since we have been identified with the righteousness of Christ forever, and have had our sins removed. That is our eternal position. But our "works" have been recorded and will be evaluated in a fire that will determine the merit of what we have done as believers. Trying to sort out which works will be rewarded, and which will be burned up, is the hard part. This is where we will try to distinguish *certain good works* as compared with *other good works*. (Remember, the *sins* of believers will not be judged.)

We have already established in the previous section that human good is "evil", and we just stated that the evil of believers will not be judged. This must be established: Anything done in the flesh is sin, which means that the form of evil known as human good is actually sin. As further proof that it is sin, human good is not done in "faith", and anything not of faith is sin. Firm conclusion: human good is sin.

So, neither human good nor sin will be judged, since these are both *categories of sin* for which Christ has paid the penalty. Even sins that were not confessed in this life will not be judged. But *something* is going to be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, and if it is not sin, what is it? The only thing left to be evaluated is “good”, and that good can only be “divine good”, because human good is SIN which will NOT be considered. This is the conundrum: If divine good is the only thing judged, how can we reconcile some of it being burned up, and some not? Is there a distinction between *qualitative* divine good and *not-good-enough* divine good? We will explore this.

Recapping the Dilemma: Divine Good vs Divine Good. All actions of the flesh are actually “sin”, including human good, which means that neither human good nor sin will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ. All that is left to judge is *divine* good, and apparently some of it is not good enough to survive the fire. The purpose of the judgment seat of Christ is to determine what our rewards will be, and only *acceptable good* will add to what we receive. If rewards are given only for *special* divine good, then we need to see what this good is and how to produce it. Keep in mind, in case you tend to think it is selfish to seek rewards in eternity, that our rewards will *glorify* Jesus Christ! That makes them valuable far beyond just giving ourselves better lives in heaven.

So, we are considering two issues. The first deals with the difference between sin and human works; the second looks at the kinds of “good” that will be evaluated and that can withstand the fire of the judgment seat of Christ. In regard to the first issue, we take the position that there is virtually no difference between sin and human works, since both are generated by the sinful nature; this means that legalism is a form of sin. Both sin and human good fall short of God’s standards; they both represent man’s failure...for which Christ died. The “good” in “human good” is actually a misnomer, since human good is “bad”. But we call it that to distinguish “sin” from “legalism”, as these implicate two separate areas of weakness within our sinful nature. The greater distinction between sin and human works is a simple one: **There is none!** But this leads to the second issue, which is this: If both sin and human good are “sin” and neither is judged, what deeds are going to be inspected to determine our rewards in heaven? And which ones will survive the fire? We believe the Bible gives the answers.

Narrowing the Search for “Rewardable” Acts. 1 Cor. 3:10-15 provides our initial basis for a discussion of what will be evaluated when we face Jesus Christ at the *Bema* seat. Here is what this passage says:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert [wise] builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Jesus Christ is the foundation. What is built must rest on Him, and to the degree that He is the under-

pinning for what we build, the structure will have permanence and indestructibility. So what is built on this foundation? Gold, silver, costly stones...or wood, hay, straw. These are two types of substances that are used in the construction. One of these sets is flammable; the other is not. Wood, hay, and straw will not survive the fire, while gold, silver and costly gems will. Notice that, even within the group that will burn up (wood, etc.), there are varying degrees of resistance to the flames. Straw burns quickly, green hay takes longer, and wood takes a while to catch fire and burn up. Wood, hay, and straw are *lower levels* of our work that will mostly be burned up, and for which little or no reward will be forthcoming; but the differences among them may suggest that miniscule vestiges of them may remain after the fire (open for discussion). The other levels: gold, silver, and gems, will survive the fire and remain afterward as values which will merit rewards. We need to remember that the deeds that receive merit come, not from the performance of the believer being judged, but from what the Spirit does as a result of that believers' maturity and spirituality. As per the passage we just saw, the "quality" of the work done will be the basis for rewards. Quality is derived from the One doing the work (Holy Spirit), made possible by the appropriate *spiritual state* and the *faith status* of the one through whom the work is done (a mature, spiritual believer).

The work will be shown for what it is. In 1 Cor. 4:5, we see the real basis for reward. This verse says the following:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

When we get right down to the finer point of what determines good and bad...it is our *motive* for doing one thing or another. Our "motive" is the state of our heart at the time we do something. This exists in two arenas: 1) our spiritual status, and 2) our level of maturity. We have seen already and will see again that spirituality, or being controlled by the Holy Spirit, is based on our being clean, a state we achieve through confession of our sins. This changes rapidly, since sin strikes quickly; this means we can move abruptly in and out of fellowship. The *constancy* of staying "in fellowship" depends on the strength of our faith, and from stronger faith comes greater production. Strong faith is a mark of maturity.

Clarification. We will try to make these things clear. Sin and human works don't even make the evaluation. They have been culled out before the inspection even begins, because they were removed by the cross. All that is left is divine good, which—according to 1 Cor. 3:13—has a "quality" that will range from "barely satisfactory" (gets little or no reward), to "excellent" (merits great praise and reward). The *nature* of a deed is determined by the controller of the heart at the time it is done. If it is the sinful nature, it will be bad, and the deed will not be judged; if it is the Holy Spirit, it will be "true good", and it will be evaluated. It will then be the *quality* of that "good" that places it somewhere between satisfactory and excellent. And now, the next question: What is the basis for this quality? This is what we need to see.

The Relative Qualities of Divine Good. Qualitative good comes from perseverance and persis-

tence. The only achievement which can reach the level of “excellent” is that done by a *mature* believer. Why is this? This is because an immature believer will live mostly in a carnal state until he grows enough to maintain his spiritual status and operate in constant faith. The immature believer will not stay in fellowship long enough to finish a job. But we must understand this: what the immature believer does when he is controlled by the Holy Spirit will be divine good, because it is generated by God. But for the immature believer, the production of divine good is so fleeting that no recognizable record of good can be accumulated. On the other hand, the mature believer will persevere in a walk in the Spirit and will perform serious work, as motivated by the Spirit’s power. Diamonds can then be forged. This believer has survived the pressure of intense training, and is performing at a *higher* level, which qualifies him for greater rewards. Connection with God’s strength, then, is most valuable when it is sustained, and that is the objective of our training.

Good-quality, smaller jobs performed by novices may get little or no reward; whereas good-quality, bigger jobs get more. Rewards are based on the status of your faith, which is, once again, the mark of maturity, and faithful believers get to do big jobs (even if they are not “visible”). Their deeds are productive and worthy of recognition. 2 Cor. 5:10 assures us that “good” will be rewarded and “bad” will not, saying, **“For we [believers] must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”** (Emphasis mine) The “good” shown here is the product of sustained spirituality and strong faith. The “bad” is “good which is not good enough”, or that which is relatively small. “Relative” divine goodness is inadequate, and is insufficient for rewards. Most of this will not survive the fire of Christ’s judgment. The “good” in the verse above is “mature good”, and the “bad” is “immature good”. All divine good will glorify God, but not all will pass the test of fire when deeds are evaluated by Jesus Christ.

Strength of Faith adds to the Quality of the Work Done. Keep in mind that the state that qualifies our deeds as divine good is not a self-generated condition, but is a product of grace, attained through the use of grace techniques and assets. The credit for anything good must always be traced back to God, and our faith operating in His grace makes it all happen. Works based on “weak faith” will not accumulate value sufficient to warrant divine acknowledgement, while deeds based on “strong faith” are creditable. This is why we must be careful “how we build”. If we do not develop our Christian walk in the way prescribed by God, we will not move forward, and we will not honor God through divinely-meritorious attitudes and conduct. Jesus Christ is the foundation, and everything we do to build our faith adds to the structure of our tower of trust. Unlike the Tower of Babel, which exalted man, we are building a super-structure of faith that will honor Jesus Christ. The following chart illustrates what this should look like. Start with the bottom floor and work up as you review this chart:

Super-structure of Faith

Floor	Floor Directory
Top Floor	Superior Production: Walking in the Spirit Continually
Fourth Floor	Maturity: Building Strong Faith
Third Floor	Production: Learning to Work by Means of the Spirit
Second Floor	Techniques: Using Grace Assets
Bottom Floor	Foundation: Believing in Christ at Salvation

The achievement of a transformed mind, a constant faith, a pure heart, and a submitted will is both the means to and the outcome of maturity. When we follow the steps that we will lay out in this book, we will grow, and as we grow, our path will become ever-clearer. And it all revolves around our training.

C. Our Sinful Nature

Facing Our Nature. We have seen Satan and the world, and now we want to look at the *sinful nature*, which is the third part of the triple threat against us (often referred to as the flesh, the world, and the devil). Our nature is sinful; sin comes naturally. It is the nature of scorpions to sting; it is the nature of humans to sin. In order to sin, we do virtually nothing, because the sinful nature is predisposed to sin, and will do all kinds of dastardly deeds on its own. The sinful nature is an unruly monster within us, even though it often speaks softly and in dulcet tones. When we neglect our spiritual walk for one second, our opportunistic nature rises up to claim the moment, or the day, or our entire lives. This is not an attachment to us...this is our very “self”. We ARE our sinful natures, which lies at the core of ourselves. Anything related to survival, perpetuation of the species, and a personal sense of worth is connected with our nature. This involves greed, sex, and pride, and these branch into endless other conditions that fall into the realm of sin and self-righteousness.

When we sin, the sinful nature takes over, and becomes the driving force for all we do. Our nature is a dynamic force, strengthened by Satan and the world. We cannot resist this evil nature, and until we are equipped with—and make use of—God’s tools for avoiding its control, we will blindly follow its lead into sin. What’s more, it operates night and day, without letting up or slowing down. It constantly pulls and drags, trying to coax us into misbehavior of all kinds, and even if our nature did let up, it would be awakened and enlivened again by Satan and his world, to energize it for further mischief.

Paul said the sinful nature will lead us into sin, and prevent us from doing good, and its influence is

virtually irresistible. We will take time here to quote an entire passage from Paul that gives the full picture of our sinful nature's operations. This is found in Rom. 7:14-25a (don't skip this!). These verses tell us the following:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of [or that is subject to] death? Thanks be to God [who delivers me], through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Our Nature Does No Good. Even when we want to do good, evil is working within us, with the objective of pleasing itself, and with the effect of disrupting our spiritual walk. We end up doing what we hate, and can't do the good we aspire to. We end up doing the bidding of the sinful nature, and become its slave (as per Rom. 7:25). And when we are serving our nature, we will do one or more of the following:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (Gal. 5:19-21a)

These are just a few of the kinds of sins that the sinful nature drives us to commit. There are numerous others. We will do most of them at one point or another, and many of them we will do repeatedly. This is because the sinful nature, which resides in our heart, is truly sick! "The heart [the sinful-nature part] is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" So what is the greatest deceiver in all the world? Satan? No. The world? No. It is our sinful nature, which is deceitful "above all things". Our nature wants us to believe our sins are of no consequence, but we fool ourselves if we think that the sins we are committing are harmless and that God will not notice them. This is self-deception! And where does this lead? To self-destruction. Is. 1:5-6 describes this well, as follows:

Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

Once we are "hooked", and are being led by our nature's bridle, sin will pull us down, eventually leaving us destitute and damaged. This condition will persist until we are "cleansed". Sound familiar? This

is what happens when we confess. And what soothes us? The “oil”, which is a common symbol for the Holy Spirit. Sin is inevitable, so confession must be incessant in order for us to maintain our spiritual fellowship with God.

Where Did our Nature Come From? This is an outstanding question: When did our “stowaway” nature get on board, and where did it come from? Ps. 51:5 says, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” We had this sinful nature as soon as we were conceived. Ps. 58:3 echoes this, saying, “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.” We are imprinted with our nature before we are even born, and it is our most constant motivator throughout our entire lives. It all began with Adam and Eve and the sins of pride and rebellion that they committed in the garden. 1 Cor. 15:22 tells us, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” Want zombies? Look around. The “world” is full of dead people. We are all born spiritually dead, with only our sinful nature to drive us. The impact of this condition is this: We are left without resistance to the corruption of our own nature. This makes us totally subservient to it. Eph. 2:3 adds, “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were **by nature** objects of wrath.” (emphasis mine). We will say more about the solution for the wicked nature in the next section, but our current focus is on the nature itself. It CRAVES sin. Its appetite is insatiable and it will stop at nothing to satisfy itself. We are born in sin...with natures that are rabidly compelled to commit sinful acts and constantly obsessed with sinful thoughts.

The question arose earlier, “How can it be fair for me to be saddled with Adam’s sin...to have his nature imputed to me before I blink an eye or take my first gulp of air? Rom. 11:32 says, “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.” God has strapped us in with disobedience, so that He can show His grace. This action by God is in response to our rejecting Him. We failed, and now God allows us to *live* in that failure; yet He shows grace by allowing us to *recover* from that failure. We recall the angelic battle for our hearts, and that God is demonstrating to all angels His fairness and righteousness and justice. To do this, he let man, beginning with Adam, choose to rebel. When man rejected God, He cast him into a perpetual and “natural” state of rebellion, not to leave him there, but to offer Him a way out of the alienation he had chosen. As we saw before, we are no different from Adam. Even if we had perfect environment, and no sinful nature to begin with, every single one of us would reject God and go our own way. We would take our free will and choose to wander away from God in search of self-fulfillment and self-aggrandizement, because—at some point—Satan would get to all of us...through arrogance.

God is always fair, and the sinful nature we receive is based on what He knows about us and our propensity for selecting ourselves over Him. So God permits our rejection of Him, and binds us with a nature we cannot escape; but then He provides the ultimate “break-out” through His Son, Who offers us freedom from the prison of our own nature. In doing this, God shows Satan His divine character, and at the same time allows us to avail eternal life with Him. We start out as prisoners of sin, which forces us to appeal to grace for salvation, rather than relying on our own ability to achieve it. It is only

through God's grace and His Spirit that we can be saved, since we cannot save ourselves. And it is that same grace and Spirit that can enable us to move out from under the control of the sinful nature as we live our Christian lives. This is confirmed in Gal. 5:16-18, as follows:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law [sin].

The Sinful Nature is a Potent Force Promoting Both “Good” and “Evil”. The only power strong enough to overcome our sinful nature is that of the Holy Spirit. This is why we will spend so much time later talking about ways to access this power. Our helplessness to stop sin on our own is clear. This makes it crucial for us to get on the fast track to growth, because with stronger faith, we will have greater resources for resisting sin. It is important that we stay one step ahead of our nature...that part of ourselves that loves and embraces sin.

The sinful nature leads us into evil, but there is also a connection between our nature and legalism. We have covered “human good” and have connected it with our nature in previous studies. We have identified human works, not only as being unfruitful, but also as bearing the full insignia of sin. We will not rework this topic here; but later, we will delve more deeply into the role of our nature as a motivator for *being good* and *performing righteous acts* independent of God. We will see that good things done in a wrong way...are wrong! The “flesh”, our sinful nature, uses the benevolent side of ourselves to get us to embrace causes and issues in the name of “service” and “making the world a better place”. We can easily adopt these as a way to become more “Christ-like”, when all we are doing is following a pattern that alienates God and serves our deceitful nature. (We will see more of this as we proceed.)

Sort it out: All “good” is not good. If good is generated from the sinful nature, it is bad. If it comes from the Holy Spirit, it is truly good. With our emphasis on externals, we assume that “good” is anything that “looks good”. This is a lie; we cannot tell which acts are truly good and which aren't, because we can't judge the motivating force behind them. We repeat 1 Cor. 4:5, which confirms this, saying the following:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time, each will receive his praise from God.

Something can look good, or seem good, without being good. Even within ourselves, it is hard to determine motives; how can we hope to see this in others? The point is this: Things are not always what they seem. The sinful nature can duplicate any righteous act and make it appear authentic, but if our actions do not come from a genuine peace with God, they will not be righteous at all.

We turn now to the *management* of our sinful nature. How can we control this fierce monster? Hint: We can't.

D. The Forgiveness of Sin

Introduction to the Topic. This is going to be a lengthy section, and is actually more like a chapter on its own, but—regardless of how extensive it is—it is crucial that you not omit any part of it. The information that we will give in this section is at the very CORE of all that we will ever become or produce. Forgiveness is a big subject, and one that—if omitted—will leave us with no ability to crawl out of our cribs and start walking.

Sin and Justice. What is it that needs to be forgiven? It is sin. So how are we going to deal with sin and find forgiveness? The first step is to address God's justice. We cannot do anything if God's justice has not been satisfied. It is only when justice is placated that good can be done. When we sin, we offend our Father's character...His justice...so something needs to happen in order for justice to be satisfied, thus enabling us to get forgiveness for our offenses and be restored to comfort and peace in our relationship with God. Hab. 1:13a tells us that God does not tolerate sin; He can't even look at it. This verse says, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." He has to judge sin, which is why it was necessary for Christ to die on the cross: The cross is the when, where, and how of God's justice being satisfied, because Christ paid the penalty for our sin.

Once Jesus Christ paid for our sins, this opened up the opportunity for human beings to receive what was paid for in order to claim eternal life. His sacrifice is efficacious; it satisfies the Father's justice. The result of this is that sin will not be the reason for condemnation, which comes ONLY through rejection of the sacrifice that is offered. When we accept the work of Christ by "believing in Him", we are eternally saved and at that time are entered into union with Him. For this we are unspeakably grateful. But here we are. Our sins are paid for, but our sins continue, because we have this nature within us that overpowers our wish to get closer to God and live in the light of His infinite power. Our eternal "position" is that we are credited with the "righteousness of Christ" forever. Our temporal "condition", however, is variable, sometimes righteous and sometimes evil. This means that, **as born-again children of God, we must still deal with sin, and how we do this will determine, more than anything else, our spiritual future while we are alive on this earth!**

Sin is a Universal Problem. Before we get deeper into the woods of what "forgiveness" means, and how it applies to us as believers, we must establish the importance of sin in the universe. Sin is the biggest problem God ever had to solve. It is the biggest issue in all of human history. The cross is the central event in all of eternity, and why was it necessary? Because of SIN! The *removal* of sin is the central theme for all of God's plan, and the hinge-pin for our relationship with Him. If we are stained with sin, we cannot relate to Him.

Keep it straight: *At* salvation, sin is removed in regard to eternal judgment; we will never be condemned to a lake of fire. *After* salvation, the presence of sin becomes a "family matter", which prevents us from peaceful relations with our Father. If we think that we, as believers, can deal with sin apart from God's "grace methods", we are arrogant, and will not find fellowship with the Father. Everything in the Old Testament and the New Testament is focused on disclosing God's methods for the removal

of sin. Since we WILL sin, we must find the way back to purity, so we can be restored to fellowship.

From one end of the Bible to the other, sin is the greatest impediment to our relationship with God, and the practice and/or condition that God has done more to remedy than any other. We cannot ignore sin and hope to live the Christian life. The sin problem goes all the way back to the garden, which continued through Noah and beyond. Sin was witnessed throughout the establishment of the Jewish race and their nation; it was prevalent during the life of Christ; it was a problem in the early church; and it continues today.

God Deals with Sin and Offers Forgiveness. A good illustration of the way God deals with sin is found in the structure of sacrifices and offerings that were required in the Old Testament. We will not attempt to do a treatise on Old Testament sacrifices and offerings, but we want to illustrate what takes place with sin, and the way God offers for us to deal with it. There are, as described in Leviticus, two kinds of offerings: 1) offerings that depict salvation, and 2) offerings that portray forgiveness of sins after salvation. In my view, the Burnt Offering deals with salvation, since it was done for *atonement* of sins. This shows how salvation removes the barrier between man and God. All the other offerings, as I see it, are connected with God's provision for sin after salvation. They show how forgiveness is obtained after salvation. *The Ryrie Study Bible* provides a chart delineating Old Testament offerings, from which we gleaned this summary:

1. Offering for Forgiveness at Salvation

- Burnt Offering: Depicts salvation, since this offering dealt with atonement.

2. Offerings for Forgiveness after Salvation

- Grain Offering: Expresses thanksgiving.
- Fellowship Offering: Connotes peace with God through reconciliation and restoration. Deals with fellowship.
- Sin Offering: Reflects atonement for unintentional sins.
- Guilt Offering (Trespass Offering): Deals with specific known sins. (Endnote 8)

God's numerous depictions of the need for forgiveness of sins and the extremes He went to in order to overcome it, show how important sin is. SIN MATTERS! If sin is not dealt with, we cannot be saved to begin with. And after we are believers, if we have the stain of sin upon us, we cannot DRAW NEAR to God! If we are not dealing with sin properly, any claims that we make about our being spiritual or maturing or servants of God are simply untrue.

Removal of Sin. There is an area of confusion about sin, derived from the belief that salvation itself is the victory over sin, and that sin is no longer a problem after that. It is true that victory is an accomplished fact of salvation as it relates to eternal condemnation, but sin must also be taken care of in the Christian life. Many scriptures that apply to both salvation AND post-salvation are taken to apply *only* to salvation. Some verses *do* refer to salvation only, such as John 3:18: "Whoever believes in him is not

condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." But many others have a dual application that we should watch for. Such verses apply equally well to salvation...or post salvation. An example of this is seen in Luke 24:46-47, which says the following:

He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

When we repent (change our mind about Christ) at salvation, we get forgiveness, but we also need to repent as part of our spiritual walk, only this time our repentance is about our SIN and not our belief in the gospel. Repentance and forgiveness are components of both salvation *and* our Christian experience, so the verse applies equally to both.

We change our minds about Christ as the Savior of all who believe, and at that time receive forgiveness for all eternity; we also repent as believers when we change our minds about the specific sins we have committed. As God's children, we can change our perception of these sins, so that our view of them agrees with His. At that time, the stain of sin is erased...until the next sin. Do you see the dual application of the same truth? It is almost as if there are two records of sin. When we are saved, our eternal sin record is forever erased. But when we sin as believers, our sins leave a stain, and that record sticks with us as long as we are alive, or until we confess. On the following page is a chart which reflects what I see in reference to the two records of sin. Distinctions between these two records have been separated into two columns. Items in the left column should be compared with items in the right column, one at a time. Here are the two records of sin:

Two Records of Sin

Eternal (permanent/positional)	Temporal (temporary/conditional)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a permanent record. • This record is cleared at salvation through forgiveness. • Permanent sin-record is obliterated forever, when we believe in Christ. • Righteousness of Christ is imputed at that time. • Sins of a believer will not be judged by God in the eternal state. • Conversely, unbelievers will be judged and condemned for unbelief, and will “die in their sins”. • The record will never change for believers, no matter what they do. • Relief from condemnation for sin is available to all mankind, though not all choose to accept it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a temporary record. • This record is stained when sins occur after salvation. These sins are unforgiven at that time. • Imputed righteousness, however, remains intact on the Eternal Record, never affected by sin after salvation. • Sins remain on the Temporary Record until confession brings forgiveness. • Believers will never be condemned by sin after salvation. • Believers will be disciplined in life for any unconfessed sin. • The Temporary Record is discarded at death or the rapture. • Relief from discipline is available to all believers.

What Sins Are Forgiven? We want to take time here to do a rationale check. This is in regard to the definition of forgiveness. The Bible says that Christ paid for sin in three ways: 1) He died for the whole world (2 Cor. 5:14); 2) He died so unbelievers can be saved (John 3:16); and 3) He died so that believers can find forgiveness for the sins they commit during their lives on earth (1 John 1:9). The question arises: If Christ died for the sins of the whole world, and if those in the world who *believe in Christ* are forgiven based on His work, does it make sense that sins after that time would be “unforgiven”? In other words, if ALL sins are forgiven at salvation...past, present, and future...how can we say that the sins of believers are not forgiven? What follows here is my position on the disposition of forgiveness.

It is easy to see that believers will not face their sins in eternity, because they have accepted the work of the cross and have obtained forgiveness. Unbelievers, however, do not avail themselves of this forgiveness, and—if they never believe—will die in their sins. *Unbelief*, however, and *not their sins*, is what condemns them. Their sins are not “forgiven” because they have rejected the work that brings forgiveness, but the sin that actually damns them is “unbelief”. Where confusion can occur is in the consideration of “forgiveness” as it applies to believers. Are the sins that believers commit “unforgiven”? My answer: Yes! At least, they are unforgiven while a believer is still alive. God makes forgiveness available to believers, but not all accept it. Looking at the sins a believer commits, we believe that these are unfor-

given at that time, until he uses God's grace method for getting forgiveness.

All believers sin, as per 1 John 1:8 and 10, and *sins require forgiveness*. Otherwise, why would 1 John 1:9, positioned between two verses that say we sin, call for us to SEEK FORGIVENESS for that sin, as follows: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Notice the word "forgive". If the sins a believer commits were forgiven prior to confession, there would be no need to confess them in order for them to be *forgiven*. But we *must* confess them, because they will NOT be forgiven, until confession takes place. Confession is the grace provision for the forgiveness of sins in the life of a believer. Otherwise, the sins remain as a blot on his record. This important truth is almost obliterated from the doctrines of most churches, which Satan appreciates.

The Need for Repentance of Sins by the Believer. God will not overlook a believer's sin record. If sin is recorded and is unconfessed, it is unforgiven! And this puts us in line for divine discipline, because God holds us accountable for sin. This is why we need to confess. We have said that sin in the believer is a family matter, but perhaps this inadequately frames the seriousness of sin. Believers who sin are stepping back from the cross, where forgiveness is obtained. They are offending a Holy God. And they are rejecting the work that redeemed us. They don't become "unsaved", but their record is blackened. The only thing that will expunge a record of sin is confession...that is, unless physical death or the rapture occurs, in which case sins are automatically eradicated. Forgiveness, then, occurs 1) for any human being who believes in Christ (eternal forgiveness), and 2) for any believer who confesses his sins (temporal cleansing).

God Loves to Show Mercy. The unforgiven sins of a believer draw God's discipline. This is done for our correction. So when we sin, we can know that God is not pleased with us. But we must see this in the perspective of God's character. Many times we view God as perpetually irritated or vexed with us. But God actually deals with us in patience...almost entirely in mercy. This is His grace at work. God is not like us. We are brittle and judgmental...unmerciful and unforgiving. But God DELIGHTS in showing us mercy. This is what we see in Micah 7:18-19, which gives us the following:

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot.

I believe that God LOVES to honor the treasured work of His Son, which is our basis for forgiveness. He really ENJOYS forgiving us! Eph. 2:4 says, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." Mercy deals with our mistakes, and God is RICH in mercy. Mercy precedes grace and enables it to operate...first at salvation...and then as spiritual and material provision in our lives. Ps. 103:10-14 tells us that God does not treat us as we deserve, but in grace. This passage says the following:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always

accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

It is God's goodness, and not His wrath, that makes us want to repent and return to Him. Rom. 2:4 confirms this, saying, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" Even in discipline, God is dealing with us in love, and that love draws us to repent for our sins. It is important to remember this as we probe further into His training methods.

As mercy precedes grace, so forgiveness precedes blessing. Forgiveness is always FIRST. Luke 23:34a tells us that even "knowing" must be preceded by forgiveness, as follows: "Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'." They must be forgiven, because they have a need to "know"; they need to *learn* what they are doing. Once forgiveness is obtained, then that learning can occur. But not until. A lack of forgiveness forestalls understanding. Get forgiveness first, and then life can continue with clarity, meaning, and purpose.

Forgiveness is open to all who are willing to receive it. It is free. Yet the human race goes out of its way to avoid it. Unbelievers scoff at the gospel...and believers ignore God's method for getting forgiveness. But without forgiveness, we would all be condemned. Ps. 130:3 asks, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" The implication is this: If God had not devised a plan for man to be saved—there would have been no one left standing. But He did make a way, as per verse 4, which gives the good news, saying, "But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." Because of forgiveness, we can have a great relationship with God.

And when God forgives, the sin is gone. He doesn't hold back a few infractions, so He can remind us later, "Do you remember when you did such and such...?" Heb. 8:12 confirms the thorough way in which forgiveness works, saying this: "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." With forgiveness, our sins are taken away. This is also stated in Heb. 9:28a, which says, "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people..." Heb. 10:17b adds, "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

Forgiveness is Perfect. The plan of God is perfect, and the work of Christ is perfect, and these are the basis for forgiveness...so forgiveness is also perfect and absolute. Ps. 103:12 caps it, as we saw above, by saying, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Just as important as knowing our nature is understanding what God has done to counter it. When we get forgiveness, we are PURE! When we confess, there is no excuse for guilt or self-flagellation. It is an insult to grace for us to ponder our sins after we have confessed them. We can count on God's grace and mercy! John 2:12 says it well in the following: "I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name."

Furthermore, Preoccupation with our sins *after our confession* will only *slow us down* and *impede our growth*. The burden of failure takes attention away from grace, mercy, and forgiveness, and causes us to depend on our own resources to get past our sin and guilt. God wants us to FORGET our sins when we confess them, and RETURN TO OUR GROWTH!! He wants us to think about GRACE, and not spend time trying to figure out how to solve, or do reparation of, our own sin problem. God alone can solve it...by grace. A sinful pattern *can* be improved, but not through self-effort.

Believers Must Confess their Sins. We have established that we, as believers, must confess our sins in order to be forgiven. We stated earlier that 1 John 1:8 and 10 tell us that we have sinful natures, and that we all sin. If we deny this, we are liars and God's truth is not in us. So we must first acknowledge that we do sin, and that we are responsible for dealing with it. The method for dealing with it is confession, as seen in 1 John 1:9, which says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." The word "confess" means a lot of things, but it is basically a catch-phrase for returning to God. When we return, this means we have "repented", or changed our mind about the sins we have committed. When we confront our sins, we will do one of several things: ignore them, make excuses for them, or own up to them. Any option other than facing the music for our sin will not bring forgiveness. We can't hide our sins from God, and we can't assume they won't be recognized, hoping that somehow God may be too busy to notice them.

Any time we want, we are free to return, which gives us a starting point for correcting our course. Is. 55:7 frames it well, saying, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." When we return, we find mercy; when we find mercy we are restored; and when we are restored, God will guide us onto the right path, as per Ps. 23:3, which says, "...he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." It is all about *admitting our wrongs to God*, as we see in James 4:7-10, which gives a full picture of confession and restoration, and tells us what happens afterward. Here is what this passage says:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

We submit to God, resist the devil, and come near to God, and at the heart of all this is the act which gives us the condition that makes everything else possible: "wash your hands...and purify your hearts". This is confession. If there is any question about that, look at what follows, which is clearly linked to confession: "grieve, mourn, wail, turn laughter to mourning, and joy to gloom". There could not be a better picture of someone burdened by his own sin, and the sorry state he is in when he confronts God with his failure. Confession is followed by a kind of joy and peace, but before and during cleansing, it can be agonizing. When it is done, however, God promises that He will lift us up. This is joy in the morning after a night of sadness. This is home-coming after being away. This is spiritual rejuvenation after a period of carnal dissipation. Prov. 1:23 tells us that, if we will pay attention to what God is do-

ing with us as He calls for us to return, He will pour out His Spirit to us. “If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart (Spirit) to you and made my thoughts known to you.” He will not only restore the leadership of His Spirit within us, He will teach us. Restoration gives us new opportunities to learn and grow.

Ways to Confess. As for confession itself, there are many ways to confess. The simplest way is simply to “name” or “cite” our sins. If this is sincere, and we are truly agreeing with God about the sin, it is all that is needed for forgiveness. Alternate ways to confess have been given in previous studies, such as the list offered in *Bible Basics for Living*, pp. 46-47, so we will reduce these to a summary here, as follows:

- Asking for forgiveness. Luke 11:4
- Making pleas for forgiveness. Ps. 25:17-18
- Being sorry for sins. Ps. 38:18
- Turning away from, or forsaking, evil. Is. 55:7
- Lifting up our souls to God. Ps 86:3-5a
- Showing humility. Luke 18:13-14
- Repenting. 1 Ki. 8:46a, 47a, 48a, and 49
- Self judgment. 1 Cor. 11:28-32
- Generic naming of sins (“I have sinned.”). 2 Sam. 12:13

Confession Takes Place in the Heart. The reason confession can take different forms is that it is a condition of the heart, and not just something we “say”. It is more than words, and—if it is not—it is not confession. For confession to “take”, it must be from the heart; otherwise, it will not count. It is possible to mouth the sins we know we’ve done, but if there is not a genuine attitude of antipathy toward the sin, then the confession will not get forgiveness. The problem is this: If our confession is not sincere...heart-felt...there will be behind our empty words a plan to commit the sin again, or other sins. This pattern abuses grace and will compound our sin problem. When we confess, we also decide to move forward into continued growth through consistent use of all the techniques we are, or will be, examining. Divine healing from the sickness of sin begins on the inside and works outward, and any shallowness or insincerity in the process will *prevent* true confession.

When we sin, we must understand that there is no “wiggle room”, no margin of error; NO SIN will be forgiven without genuine confession. Many believers are running around feeling comfortable and spiritual with unconfessed sin on their record. There is the issue of the Holy Spirit “convicting” us, or reminding us, of our sin, but with a sustained sin pattern, our sensitivity to His warnings and alerts will wane, as in the “hardening of our hearts”. Any believer who has not confessed his sins regularly will not be spiritual, even if external appearances do not disclose underlying carnality. At some point, a “day of reckoning” will occur, so it is important to keep the sin record clean by consistently confess-

ing.

For a good discussion on the importance of confession, please see my book, *Bible Basics on Sin and Mercy*, and particularly take note of the chapter titled, “Sanctification and Sanctified Behavior”, beginning on page 56. Sanctification is nothing more or less than “cleanliness”. If we are not clean, we are not only failing to “heed instruction”; we are actually “rejecting God”. We cannot be close to God or provide meaningful service, if we have not been cleansed by confessing our sins to God. It is the way for us to be pure, as we are called to be throughout Scripture. This is exactly what we see in 1 Thess. 4:7, which says, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”

Some believers avoid confession because they see it as a surrender or some kind of defeat, or they think that not admitting a wrong will make it disappear. But there is no failure in confession, and the only way to make sin disappear is to bring it into plain view. With confession comes victory and power. When we confess, we are purified, so that fellowship with God can be reactivated, thus releasing the power of the Holy Spirit within us. We not only have victory through confession, we also receive guaranteed provision of all we need. Ps. 103:1-5 describes this in a powerful promise, as follows:

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

“Youth” connotes strength and stamina, which is what we get when we are clean. God will then “satisfy our desires” by providing all we need. Many good things happen when we are restored to fellowship, and we will look at more of these later on. But we can know at this point that, when we are clean, we will be free to study and grow, to endure God’s training, to pray effectively, to exercise our gift (s), and to truly “praise the Lord”. 1 Cor. 12:13 says we can actually “drink the Spirit”, which refers to our receiving the filling and control of the Spirit when we are clean. We actually “take in” the power of the Divine Spirit by being cleansed, and this is where our “youth is renewed like the eagle’s”.

There is another major benefit to confessing and being forgiven of our sins, which is the protection God gives us. He guards us from evil forces and harm. In Job 36:5-12, Elihu gave the divine perspective by saying the following:

God is mighty, but despises no one; he is mighty, and firm in his purpose. He does not keep the wicked alive but gives the afflicted their rights. He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever. But if people are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, he tells them what they have done—that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge.

God does not take His eyes off the “righteous”, or the pure, which means he watches over them and protects them (also see Ps. 37:28 and Ps. 91). He also *bleses* those who have “repented of their evil”,

meaning they have changed their minds about their own sins, now agreeing with God about them. Put simply, when a believer is committed to growth and keeps short accounts with God on the sin ledger, God will provide prosperity and contentment. God blesses holiness (cleanliness).

No TIME or SIN Limits on Confession. Confession is always available to us, and we are invited to use it. We cannot go far enough away from God, or stay long enough in carnality, for confession not to work. If we are alive, we can confess. Solomon was in reversionism for 35 to 40 years. Hezekiah was out of fellowship for a long time, before he returned, nearing the point that God was about to remove him from the world (sin unto death). But he came back, and was given an extra 15 years to live. And how did Solomon and Hezekiah return? They confessed. Solomon gave the method he learned for dealing with sin, as we saw earlier, in Prov. 28:13: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” Reminder: Living a holy life is less about *not sinning*, and more about *confessing the sins we commit*. The story of David tells of various, sometimes repeated, sin patterns. Here is a rundown on some of David’s sins, taken from a study by Robert McLaughlin (Endnote 9), with my twist added. David did these things:

- Feigned madness. 1 Sam. 2:11-18
- Failed to lead his troops into battle. 2 Sam 11:1
- Took more than one wife. 2 Sam. 5:13 with Deut. 17:17
- Committed adultery and murder, and lied. 2 Sam. 11:2-27
- Questioned and disobeyed God by counting the soldiers. 1 Chron. 21:1

There were other sins that David committed...he was anything but perfect. In fact, there’s no such thing as sinless perfection in all of human history (except for Jesus Christ, of course). So states Rom. 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” So it was not David’s good behavior that made him great, since he was pretty rotten in that department. What was it, then, that qualified him to be referred to as a man “after God’s own heart”? And why was it said of Solomon, “...his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been,” (1 Ki. 11:4b); and, “...he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done” (1 Ki. 11:6)? David sinned repeatedly, so what was there about him that made him “devoted to the Lord” and warranted the conclusion that he “followed the Lord”? It certainly was not purity in his thoughts and behavior; these were lacking! So what was it? It was his *humility* before the Lord...the *confession* of his sins...this showed his devotion! Ps. 32 and 51 are two strong chapters recording David’s practice of confessing his sins. We will quote here verses 3-12 of chapter 51:

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and

gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

God was pleased with David, not because he was sinless, but because he came to Him in confession. God looks at our hearts. The mistake we make is to look at externals, even in our own lives, believing that if we “look good”, we “are good”. But God and the angels see what our motives are, and when we truly humble ourselves before God, and turn to Him in our heart, then true confession will be taking place, and we will experience God’s best. When we use God’s grace methods for getting clean, and not man’s self-styled schemes for *appearing* righteous, we will know what it means to walk in the “highway of holiness”, as per Is. 35:8, which says, “And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.” Do we want to get clean and walk the highway that God has paved, or will we just be fools?

So, how often do we confess? If we understand God’s standards, as described in the book, *Bible Basics on Living by God’s Standards: Pathway to Righteousness*, we will know that we violate God’s standards on a virtually CONTINUOUS basis. This means that we must confess our sins with the same frequency that we are told to pray, which is “without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). We must confess non-stop, not just at the end of the day, or in church on Sunday. We must constantly confess the sins we know, so that “all unrighteousness”, including *unknown* sins, can be forgiven (1 John 1:9).

Also, keep this in mind: Confession cannot be a pretext to sin, or a license to wander. For us to exploit grace in this way would be in itself a sin; this would bring serious consequences. If confession is used in a perfunctory or capricious way to escape accountability for wrongdoing, forgiveness will not be forthcoming, and sin-problems will be compounded exponentially.

Finally, we want to refer you to a collection of verses that illustrate or command confession. These are found on page 298 of my book, *Bible Basics for Living*. Forgiveness awaits your use of this central technique. OBSERVE: Our biggest problem is not sin; it is lack of confession. If you disregard it, your next step may take you over a cliff.

E. Consequences for Unforgiven Sin

Condemnation Began with Adam. Adam’s one sin condemns us. Christ’s death paid for that sin and all others that followed, so that condemnation could be removed. The only way to *stay* condemned is to refuse the condemnation-reversal offered by Christ. Rom. 5:16-17 sums this up, saying, “Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.”

By locking us into Adam’s sin, God set up a major courtroom demonstration to exhibit His grace toward despicable man. This grace, being shown to all the angels, offers release for man, based on God’s

Son “doing the time for our crime”. The culpability for all who are condemned because of the sin of Adam will never change until acceptance of release is accomplished through faith in Christ. The only hope or avenue of relief from our sentence comes through Him. Rom. 5:19 says, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus Christ] the many will be made righteous.” Condemnation, then, is the result of not accessing the righteousness of Christ.

Sin Still Exists, Even After Salvation. We inherit Adam’s sinful nature, so we sin, even after we are saved. Sin is not a problem for believers in *eternity*, since they have been justified and “made righteous”. Sin is only a problem in the world, in time, in the *life* of a believer. A believer is always spiritually alive *positionally*, but he can live in the realm of spiritual dormancy, sometimes called “death”, *conditionally*. This occurs when he sins, and sin he will. The question is not *whether* a believer will sin; the question is *when*. And that is today, tomorrow, and every day of his life. For those who believe they have reached some pinnacle of holiness that makes them invulnerable to sin, they simply do not understand the exactness and stringency of God’s standards, and the ease with which these can be violated. Others may believe that a form of “relative righteousness” is possible, whereby they can reach an “acceptable” level of good behavior that will keep them out of hot water. This, too, ignores God’s requirements. He does not want OUR righteousness, either in eternity or in this life; He accepts only HIS OWN righteousness.

James 2:10 suggests how strict God’s standards are, by saying, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” Break one law and you become a “lawbreaker” (verse 11). Envy, and you have committed murder. Lust and you have committed immorality. Covet and you have committed theft. Break one requirement and you break them all. And NO ONE can keep from breaking AT LEAST ONE! It is quite easy to sin, and the lists of possibilities for sinning are incredibly numerous. Conclusion: Not one person can avoid failing to meet God’s high standards. We will not belabor this point, but one example of this is that we are commanded to “love as God loves”. Really? How can we generate from our humanity a love that equals the love of an infinite God? The only way this can be fulfilled is for God to love *through* us. But we will fail to do this ONE thing most of the time. And what about all the other areas in which we fail? Do we really think we don’t sin...and often?

It is established: We are going to sin. So what happens when we do? What are the outcomes of sin? My favorite Bible teacher is the late J. Hampton Keathley, III, whom I discovered after most of my positions on spiritual operations in the Christian life had already been established. The doctrines he had gleaned from Scripture were almost identical to the conclusions I had derived from my own studies. I am in good company, I think, because Keathley’s scholarship has been highly regarded. Keathley’s major doctrines can be found in his book, *ABC’s for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*. What follows is a partial list of outcomes of sin in the life of a believer, as offered in Keathley’s book:

1. Loss of fellowship with the Lord. Hab. 1:13; Ps. 32:3-4; 1 John 1
2. Loss of the control of the Holy Spirit. 1 John 1:5-7; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19

3. Divine discipline. 1 Cor. 11:28-32
4. Loss of power and production. Gal. 3:1-5; 5:5-15, 19-21; Jer. 2:12-13; John 15:1-7
5. Loss of opportunities. John 4:34-35
6. Loss of desire and motivation for service. Gal. 5:16-17
7. Broken relationships and disharmony. Gal. 5:15
8. Loss of physical health and vitality. 1 Cor. 11:29-30; Prov. 14:30
9. Loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. 1 Cor. 13:13-15 (Endnote 10)

What Will Happen as a Result of Sin? Discipline. The things just listed will happen as consequences of sin. We want to focus at this point on the third outcome in the list just given, which is “divine discipline”. This comes as a result of our having unerased sins on our record, i.e., those that have not been confessed. God is compassionate and patient, but He cannot overlook sin. Ex. 34:6-7a describes this perfectly, as follows:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...”

God’s discipline of believers for their sins is found throughout the Bible. We will see many examples, such as Ps. 39:11a, which says, “You rebuke and discipline men for their sin.” If we do not follow God’s prescription for dealing with sin, we will be confronted with an unresolved dilemma, as expressed by God in Jer. 5:7a, which asks, “Why should I forgive you?” Discipline is for UNFORGIVEN sin, which means UNCONFESSED sin!

We want to comb the scriptures to pull out God’s truths in regard to discipline...to answer the question: How does He use it? Jer. 2:17-19 helps us with this, giving an excellent synopsis of divine discipline. This passage says this:

“Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the Lord your God when he led you in the way? Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Nile? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the Euphrates? Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me,” declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.

This is the outcome of sin. It leads to “evil and bitterness” (destruction and disappointment). Isaiah 1:4-6 gives a similar picture, part of which we have seen before, saying the following:

Woe to the sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged

or soothed with olive oil.

Rebellion against God brings discipline, as does refusal of grace. *Unbelievers* refuse grace through their disbelief in the gospel, whereas *believers* refuse grace when they do not accept the assets of grace...and do not use the techniques God has set up to enable us to live right. When we refuse grace, we invoke discipline. 1 Cor. 11:31-32 tells us that God judges us to correct us, so as not to condemn us; whereas the judgment of unbelievers leads to eternity in a lake of fire. Here is what this passage from Corinthians says: “But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.” Anyone who is not in fellowship will be judged (although not condemned). And notice the key to avoiding “judgment”, which is “self-judgment”, or confession. 1 Cor. 16:22 adds this: “If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!” Not “loving the Lord” is equivalent to being out of fellowship, as we have seen in previous writings. A “curse” is on anyone who is out of fellowship. (See *Bible Basics on Living by God’s Standards*, pp. 261-264, for a complete discussion on fellowship, including the topic of love as an indication of fellowship.)

So we are “judged” when we sin, but not “condemned”. Sin brings discipline, not relegation to a lake of fire. This does not mean that discipline will be a cakewalk. Discipline can be quite painful, so we must understand its purpose, which is correction. God is looking to prod us to get us back on track. He wants us to repent concerning our sins, and He will give us every opportunity to confess our wrongdoing. He is not trying to “get even” or “get back at us” or “catch us off guard”. God does not play games. He simply wants us to come back to Him, and for us to walk with Him through study and prayer and a growing faith. And it’s never too late for us to return.

Ps. 119:71 shows the good effects of discipline, saying, “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.” Ps. 119:67 is similar: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.” We will learn to be grateful for correction, because it brings us back to God. Many times, an “abiding” sin can only be broken by sustained discipline. But regardless of how poorly we’ve behaved, or for how long we’ve done it, He will forgive us if we genuinely confess; and when He forgives, it is over! God never throws us away, but seeks ways for us to live in harmony with Him. Heb. 12:5-11 shows that He is dealing with us as any good father would:

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it pro-

duces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

God's true children are disciplined. Those who are not "born again", and not part of His family, will NOT be disciplined, because they do not belong to Him. But believers will be. We repeat our main point: GOD CORRECTS US TO GET US TO CONFESS! Discipline brings us back into line, if we respond to it properly. If we *ignore* God's discipline, it will intensify, as we will see shortly. But we must also not be discouraged by it. So we must not *minimize* the discipline, nor should we become *disheartened* by it. It is for our good. The proper response to discipline is to refocus, recover, and resume our walk (acknowledge our sins, confess them, and MOVE ON!). That is the heart of the Christian life. Conversely, if we try to act as if our sin is not there, God will turn the heat up, until we realize that we cannot be cavalier about our sin. Rather than *repeat* the sin, we must *repent* the sin! (Fortunately, as we will see later, repenting leads to an actual reduction in sin).

Discipline Comes for Unconfessed Sin. God's hatred of rebellion is well-stated in Scripture, beginning with the first human rebellion, as seen in Gen. 3; all throughout Noah's time, as described in 2 Pet. 3:6; and during the life of Job (yes, he was mature, yet he exhibited some rebellion, so part of his suffering was "disciplinary"), as per Job 33:8-12a. There are numerous other illustrations of God's strong response to rebellion. Remember that God loves His children, but this does not mean His discipline is never harsh or painful, as per Ps. 6:1-4, which says this:

Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long? Turn, Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.

This is the result of "keeping silent", or not confessing and praying, as seen in Ps. 32:3a: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." When we refuse to confess, we will find the options in our lives closing down, and we will not prosper (Prov. 28:13). If you are in carnality and not confessing, yet you are prospering, please do not get too comfortable. The day of recompense is coming, and it is not far off. Eccl. 8:11-13 tells us that discipline will come, eventually but inevitably, as follows:

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

We cannot become complacent and lax, believing that God is going to be passive about our sins. If infractions are committed and not cleared through confession, there WILL be consequences.

For the most part, we can conclude that man's life is characterized by emptiness, instability, frustration, and disappointment, when he goes his own way. When we sin and do not confess, we should be prepared for sudden disaster...so says Eccl. 9:12: "Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall

unexpectedly [suddenly] upon them.” To bypass abrupt disaster, Prov. 3:25-26 suggests that we avoid the pattern of the “wicked”. This passage says, “Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.” Sudden disaster and ruin overtake the wicked! When we are into some form of “wickedness”, we should be looking over our shoulder, because disaster is gaining on us...or waiting in the shadows just around the corner. But if we have confessed, we can have confidence that God will protect us from the “snares”...that is, until we choose to go our own way again.

If we sustain a carnal or legalistic pattern, things are going to worsen over time. Discipline intensifies, the longer we delay our return to the Lord. Leviticus 26:14-39 describes this well. We quote here verses 14-17 from that passage:

But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.

Even though this is bad, this is just the beginning. Verses 18-39 describe a rapidly-deteriorating situation which graduates by a factor of seven each time confession is delayed, until the intensity of the discipline has reached a level 16,807 times that of the original correction measures. And this process applies just as much to those who have reached higher levels of maturity as it does to immature believers. In fact, even more so. It is worse for believers to resume carnality after a period of sustained growth than if they had never grown. Luke 12:47-48 makes this clear:

The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

More Knowledge Brings Greater Accountability. The more we know, the greater our responsibility for applying what we know. Another passage which establishes this is 2 Pet. 2:20-22, which says the following:

If they [believers] have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it [in sin] and are overcome [by sin], they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,”^g and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.”

When we have “known the way of righteousness”, meaning we have “matured by learning the tech-

niques that lead to righteousness”, but then stray, our troubles will be compounded. Greater maturity carries greater responsibility. All we can do is stay a step ahead of the game by FAITHFULLY confessing, praying, and studying as we grow. The alternative is to slip back into carnality and/or legalism, and suffer the consequences. The hammer falls harder on the mature believer than on the beginner...so once we start maturing, we must re-double our commitment to get ever-closer to God. Otherwise, we will see on the highway of holiness a sign from God that reads, “Fines Doubled for Mature Believers”. This is also suggested in Matt. 24:45-51, as follows:

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

With Maturity, Temptation and Testing Intensify. The more we move up in our acknowledgment of God and our surrender to Him, and the more faithfully we wait on Him and trust Him, the more likely it is that we will encounter enormous temptations and great pressures as part of our continued training (more on this coming up later); and the worse our discipline will be when we slip. This does not sound like an attractive invitation to the glorious spiritual life, but the right view of the Christian life is that it is a walk with God, even though the garden has been removed. Our walk with God is a spiritual one, and a spiritual walk in a physical world requires that we maintain a divine *spiritual* perspective.

If we progress forward and then fall back, we will experience difficult days of divine discipline like those described in Deut. 28:15-68, rather than the blessings of Deut 28:1-14. Here is a sample of the calamity that comes to a believer, especially a mature believer, when he walks away from God (verses 15-20):

However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.

This kind of punishment is especially targeted toward those who are moving along the track toward maturity. This is not a case against maturing; it is an argument for never letting up.

Whatever the level of growth, any believer who continually refuses correction will eventually reach a point of “hardness of the heart”, and will become calloused to God’s prompts to get him to confess. At some point he will be taken out of this life. This is called the “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16), which comes to believers who have become blinded to God and His truth, and who have surrendered to the kingdom of darkness. I am going to say something here that may be shocking, and perhaps controversial, but I believe this: The majority of believers die the “sin unto death”. Very few walk the highway of holiness and manage to persevere in their spiritual climb. Not many seek the core truths of God’s Word, or remain constant in their pursuit of that warm place of fellowship with the Father. Many will be cut short, and will be removed early, because God knows that they will never be productive. If they were left here on the earth, they might do great harm as unwitting allies of Satan. Psalm 91 promises “long life” (verse 16) for those who “love God” (verse 14). That would include, it would seem, a *minority* of believers, since “loving God” is the attitude of a believer who is mature and walking in the Spirit. And how many of these are there? Not very many.

Discipline can be Reversed. The fortunate thing about advanced maturity is that, even though accountability increases for aberrant behavior, correction of that behavior will tend to take effect more quickly. This means the pattern of *returning to the Lord* will be followed more consistently. Prov. 17:10 confirms this, saying, “A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool.” The more we learn God’s ways, the more likely we will be to follow them. And when this happens, we will more-consistently seek restoration from our forever-frequent sins, and will see God turning cursing (discipline) into blessing (fruits of fellowship). Deut. 23:5 confirms that God can change outcomes: “However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.” And who does God love in this verse? Believers! He loves all of mankind, but He can only associate Himself with those who have accepted the work of His Son. And among the believers, He will only be *pleased* with those who are in fellowship with Him (spiritual ones), and growing in their faith (maturing). These are the ones who respond favorably and swiftly to discipline, and the ones God blesses.

Cursing can be Turned to Blessing. For mature believers, any suffering that comes will probably be for training, because it is likely they will be faithfully confessing their sins and walking humbly before God. Any hardship will already be—or will become—something positive. What was described as “cursing” will be changed to “blessing”. Gen. 50:20 illustrates this principle, recounting the time Joseph said to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” God can switch disaster to prosperity instantly. Here is the key point: When we apply what He is teaching us, and accept His discipline and training, He will turn bad to good.

Other Positive Effects from Discipline. Ps. 94:12-13 adds more on the positive effects of discipline: “Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law; you grant him relief from days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked.” Notice that discipline is followed by teaching. When we respond to discipline by confessing, we will then be back in fellowship with the Teacher, and

will be able to *learn* and *grow*. If we do not respond to discipline, we will not grow, and things will just get worse. If we have the divine perspective of ourselves in this world, and our place in God's kingdom, we will welcome discipline as a measure to keep us on the right path. Being on the right path and moving the right direction is where true blessing takes place. Through our training, we will even learn at some point to "love" discipline. Prov. 12:1 says, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid."

We must embrace discipline and be thankful for it, because it is an expression of God's love. This is what we see in Rev. 3:19a: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent." If discipline leads to confession, it serves a great purpose in our lives. This is why we must not resist it or despise it. In Prov. 3:11-12 we are told not to despise discipline: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." Job 5:17 tells us *why* we should not despise discipline, saying, "Blessed is the man whom God corrects, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty."

Fellowship Follows Repentance. Finally, completing a passage we began above in Rev. 3, we quote the remainder of Christ's thoughts in regard to discipline. He had said in the first part of verse 19 that He "rebukes and disciplines those he loves", so they should "be earnest [honest] and repent [confess]". In the second part of that verse, He tells us what follows repentance, which is fellowship with Him: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." He invites us to dine with Him, or "fellowship", through the facile and convenient means of confessing our sins to Him. He actually goes *door to door* offering His gracious forgiveness for what we are doing behind closed doors. He is knocking, wanting to forgive our sins against Him, hoping we will invite Him in...wanting us to sit down and share a time of warm and pleasant companionship with Him. And there is no greater time in the world than the time we spend in communion with our God, even though our errant nature rails against it.

(For more on discipline as it relates to fellowship, see *Bible Basics on Living by God's Standards*, especially the chapter titled "Coming to Life from the Dead...or...Returning to Fellowship", beginning on page 17. Discussion of *discipline* and fellowship, *per se*, actually begins on page 21.)

F. Stop Trying

We Must Stop Trying to Follow the Rules. It will be easy for what I am about to say to be misunderstood...or to be understood very well, but not agreed with. I have come to see in Scripture a principle that is left out of all the studies that I have seen, heard, or read, yet it is clearly stated in the Bible. Here it is: We need to STOP TRYING! We have talked about doing things in the power of the Spirit, rather than our own. We have also said that we cannot satisfy God's standards through our own abilities, and that anything that an unbeliever can do is not the Christian way of life. This is dancing all around the issue, but now we must get down to the core truth. This is it: We not only have NO ABILITIES for performing spiritual acts, we also have NO PERMISSION to do them. There are many things we can't do: We can't stop sinning, we can't please God, we can't keep the Law, we can't fight Satan,

we can't slow down our own nature, and we can't resist the lure of the world. Truth is, we can't do ANYTHING worth a plug nickel, when it comes to our spiritual lives. But we have found something else: We must not even TRY to do them. We will explain.

In addressing born-again believers, Paul confronted the Galatians, saying, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." (Gal. 5:4) Highlight the word "trying". These were believers who were *trying* to be "justified", not in the sense of justification for salvation, but justified (made righteous) as born-again Christians. Attempting to be justified by keeping the law was not working for them. By TRYING TO BE GOOD, they were "being alienated from Christ", an obvious reference to losing fellowship. "Trying" causes a loss of fellowship! Isn't this interesting? Trying to do right is WRONG! So we should not only abandon a TRUST in law-keeping as a means to spiritual living, we must also abandon TRYING to keep the law. And the law includes all of God's standards, as spelled out in His Word.

We are not the Agents for Good. This does not mean that we can ignore our spiritual status before God and pursue a licentious or legalistic life. In Rom. 6:1-2 Paul asks, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!" We must not shun God's standards; we should learn about them. And there is a way to meet them, but we must come to see that we are not the agent for making this happen. We must not believe for one second that there is a single thought we can entertain, or a deed we can do, or a temptation that we can overcome that gets credit for us before God. Our efforts mean *nothing* to Him. Gal. 3:1-5 makes it very clear that we cannot reach any of our goals by DOING WELL, or by BEING GOOD!! Here is what this passage says:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now TRYING to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Emphasis mine)

Paul reminded them that they did not receive the Holy Spirit at salvation by being good enough to get it, and—now that they have the Spirit—they could not expect Him to "work" in their lives on the basis of their achieving a kind of righteous behavior. He clearly indicates that "human effort" has no place in the spiritual algorithm. He asked them, "Does God give you His Spirit [at salvation] and work miracles among you [makes provision for Christian living] because you observe the law [not sinning; doing good], or because you BELIEVE WHAT YOU HEARD?" (Emphasis mine) God works the miracles; we do not. And He does this when our faith is strong, not when we are whipping ourselves into conformity.

The Purpose for the Rules. God gave us the rules, so that we can SEE OUR INADEQUACY WITHOUT HIM! The law is designed to lead us to Christ, where salvation and fellowship reside (Gal. 5:24). We come to Him to allow Him to do what we can't. We can't save ourselves, and we can't gen-

erate good behavior. So how do we walk away from this endless and pointless quest for self-styled righteousness and sinlessness? We quit trying! As long as we are making efforts on our own, we will be blocking God from doing what He wants to do through us.

A Seemingly Upside-down Protocol. Trying to do right is *wrong*. This is law-keeping. On the other hand, trying to get closer to God is *right*, because that is where His power becomes ours, and DOING RIGHT BECOMES THE INEVITABLE OUTCOME. We don't stop sinning just because we know it is wrong, but because we get close enough to God that we learn to LOVE Him; and when we love Him enough, SIN WILL DISSIPATE! As we said, this does not mean that we don't notice sin...we should pay close attention to it SO WE CAN CONFESS IT. But our objective is not...I say NOT...to stop sinning! It is to get close to God! And the only way we can do this is by consistently following the grace plan and walking in the Spirit.

Conclusively, we must abandon self-effort to do right. "Trying" will only frustrate and disappoint us...and God. Gal. 4:9 says this:

But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles [of the Law]? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

When we try to do right, we become slaves to the law, and are therefore operating in a self-made Christianity that takes us AWAY from God. Our efforts will not please God and will only make us miserable. So what does that leave as an option for doing right, since we know "right" must be done for any fruit to be produced? Our only option is to GET IN FELLOWSHIP AND KEEP GROWING. That is the only way to do good. This will lead us closer to God, where all righteousness originates and flourishes.

The biggest mistake we can ever make is to believe for an instant that we contribute to God's program and plan, or that we ourselves achieve divine morality. We cannot resist sin and we cannot produce good. Furthermore, our efforts "alienate" us from Christ. So we must stop trying, learn to trust, and wait on His deliverance. We will see how this is done in the next chapter, which deals with our spiritual walk. In the meantime, stop trying so hard.

Chapter 8

Our Spiritual Walk

In This Chapter...

- A. Maturity and Spirituality*
- B. God's Provision*
- C. Jesus and the Holy Spirit*
- D. Christ our Example*
- E. Glorifying God*
- F. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*
- G. Functions of the Holy Spirit*
- H. The Word vs the Holy Spirit*
- I. Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit*

A. Maturity and Spirituality

Introduction to “Our Spiritual Walk”. If you have read any of my previous books, and are familiar with the key concepts offered in this chapter, including **fellowship** from confession of sins, **growth** by assimilation of truth, and **walking in the Spirit** through faith, then you may consider skipping to the next chapter. On the other hand, repetition is profitable, and the concepts presented here are not “exhaustible”; so it will easily be worth your time to review and firmly establish these doctrines. Each time these are discussed, some deeper truth seems to emerge, which you probably won’t want to miss.

Two Perspectives: With God...and Without God. All of us want to “count for something”. We want our lives to have meaning and purpose, and we want to spend our time in ways that bestow significance, credit, and worth upon us. We don’t want to “waste” our lives...or come to the end and realize that we have accomplished nothing. We have looked already at the two main perspectives of the Christian life: one worldly, fleshly, and egocentric; the other eternal, spiritual, and God-centered. We live in the world, so the amount of time we inevitably spend attending worldly affairs gives the world an edge in holding our attention on things attached to the world. We tend not to *see* the spiritual realm, which causes it to fall into the category of “out of sight, out of mind”. So we spend most of our time and attention dealing with the world and its pressures and prizes, rather than eternal life and its prospects. Eternity seems remote...something that comes “later”. Heaven can wait.

The counter-flow away from God is powerful and compelling, with the world, the sinful nature, and Satan all pulling us away from spiritual considerations. But we have no excuse for not spending time addressing spiritual, heavenly, and eternal concerns. We must spend our time “wisely”, which means to do what is required for us to increase our focus on God and to walk closer to Him. Rom. 14:7-8, and 12, says,

“For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die we belong to the Lord....So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

We are accountable for spending our time “living for the Lord”. 2 Cor. 5:9-10 tells us that the goal of our life is to “please God”, as we see in the following:

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

So much to do...so little time. Job 9:25-26 says, “My days are swifter than a runner; they fly away without a glimpse of joy. They skim past like boats of papyrus, like eagles swooping down on their prey.” Days come and days go, and—if we are not alert—they will count for nothing. It is so easy to fritter our time away and fill it with emptiness. 2 Pet. 3:10-14 tells us how our time should be spent, and why it should be spent that way, as follows:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

We are to live “holy and godly lives”. “Holy” means “clean”, so we must have all sins confessed and be in fellowship. “Living godly” means walking in the power of the Holy Spirit (a “form of godliness” that does *not* deny the power...taken from 2 Tim. 3:5). Godly living that embraces the power of God is based on strong faith, which is a sign of maturity. So there we have it: Our lives must be characterized by fellowship and maturity. Our command and proper goal is to be preoccupied with God...conscious of Him, focused on Him. We must *remember* God...never forgetting Him. Eccl. 12:1a admonishes, “Remember your Creator...” Deut. 8:11 echoes this command: “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God.” When we are in fellowship and maturing, we will be focused on God. This is the right use of our time.

Love God, or You will Forget Him. Eccl. 12:6-7 tells us what happens when we forget God, and live life with focus on self and the world, rather than God. This passage says the following:

Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God, who gave it.

Without trying to become erudite in regard to the meanings of each symbol in this passage, we can state generally that this verse has to do with old age, with the prospect that life will be ending soon. Certainly this is a good time to “remember Him”. We must get Him into our minds before it’s too late, and we run out of time. On the face of it, our analysis of this passage seems correct. But there is an application here that we must not miss. Remember my statement in the last chapter about the “sin unto death”? This *physical* death occurs when a believer remains in carnality, and at some point ends up being taken out of life early. I also said I believe most believers are removed early. That means they died the “sin unto death”, which is early departure. The application: For those who are withdrawn early, they are adopting the same schedule as an older person. They have very little time in which to accelerate their focus and growth, just like a person advanced in years. Both they and older people are on a short schedule. On the other hand, as per Ps. 91:16, an older person can add years to his life, by “loving God”, which means staying on the tasks of growing and staying in fellowship. So whether we are young or old, our first priority is to concentrate on maturing and walking by the Spirit.

Flesh vs Spirit. As believers we have the option of becoming spiritual, but we can remain totally carnal, fleshly, and “human”, instead. Even our view of people can be “spiritual” or “fleshly”. 2 Cor. 5:15 tells us believers no longer see people from a *fleshly* point of view. This verse says, “So from now on

we regard no one from a worldly [fleshly] point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.” If our view is proper, we will look at people as “souls” and see them through a spiritual prism. Verse 12 in this chapter (chapter 5 of 2 Cor.) shows the fleshly perspective, placing value on “what is seen, rather than what is in the heart”. Operating at the “human” level, we tend to honor the material world and those who traffic within it, and lose sight of the potential for every human being to have a believing heart. Our perspective will depend on our spiritual status, which is why we follow the sequence seen in the following to keep our status centered:

1. Believe in Christ for salvation.
2. Stay clean through confession.
3. Pray and study; live in *God-consciousness*.
4. Apply *all* the techniques to enable and enhance our growth.
5. Walk by means of the Spirit for divine perspective and production.

This is the Christian walk, and this is what we are trying to understand and follow. This is the process that Jesus framed for the church of Laodicea, as we see in the following passage:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Rev. 3:15-20)

Explanation of Hot, Cold, and Luke Warm. There has been a lot of confusion about the passage just given, and we want to clear it up. First of all, “cold” indicates the condition of an unbeliever, one who has never been saved. Secondly, “lukewarm” refers to a believer out of fellowship. And finally, “hot” refers to a believer who has confessed and therefore has been restored to fellowship. When we are out of fellowship, Jesus said he will spit us out, which means He will not fellowship with us when we have a blotch of unconfessed sin on our record. When we are out of fellowship, we may think we are okay and can count on the world’s resources, but we are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked”. This means we have no resources for spiritual (and perhaps material) survival. We are in spiritual poverty. This is why we need to buy “refined gold”, which means we need to believe and acquire God’s truths. Having “white clothes” alludes to our being cleansed through confession. Then the Holy Spirit will open our eyes through the Word and give us the divine view...we will “see” as God sees. All of this becomes possible because we have repented. This allows us to sit down at the dinner table for a good meal and a good time with our Savior.

Living in Fellowship. The topic of fellowship may seem a little repetitious, but it is crucial and worth repeating, because *everything* worthwhile comes from our being *in fellowship*. Col. 3:17 calls on us to do the following: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” We saw earlier that the “name” of Jesus implies His authority, His power, and His character. We cannot do things “in His name” if we are not pure. EVERYTHING is to be done “in His name”, even the most mundane, routine things we do. This simply means that our sin record should be clean, so we can operate in His power.

Fellowship is sometimes seen as “abiding”. Col. 2:6 says, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live [abide] in him...” We are saved and Jesus Christ is our Lord for all eternity, so how do we “live in Christ” in addition to that? To “live” is to “abide”. This term, more often than not, refers to our being in fellowship and being spiritually alive by the filling and control of the Holy Spirit. “Abiding in Him” means being pure and in constant communion with Him. Remember that there is no fulfillment or production apart from fellowship. We need fellowship with Him...His mind and His energy...to operate and do what He expects.

1 Cor. 13 is often seen as the “love” chapter. But it is more than that, because “love” is a symbol (and evidence) for fellowship. This is true, as well, of peace and joy...they are “indicators” for fellowship, as we have described in previous studies. (See *Bible Basics on Living by God’s Standards*, pp. 26-74 for a full discussion of fellowship, including “love, joy, and peace”, as *pointers* for fellowship.) Back to 1 Cor. 13...verse 7 says of love, “It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” This is what love does, because this is what fellowship does. It protects us from the evil one, increases our trust (or faith), gives us faith for the future (hope), and enables us to keep on walking the spiritual path, even though the powerful forces of the world and the devil blow against us with gale-force winds of resistance.

God is engaged in every aspect of our lives, and He is in control, despite the fact that the world is Satan’s kingdom, and regardless of the reality that our nature serves freely in this kingdom of darkness. God is always dealing with us, and will do what is BEST, whether we like it or not. When we are focused on Him and in fellowship, we will be in agreement with His will and His design for our lives. When we get closer to God, we learn to revere Him and trust Him. And God records our attention to Him, and the conversations we have about Him. He notices when we are “righteous”, meaning “in fellowship” and serving Him in His power. Mal. 3:16 describes this well, saying, “Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.”

God observes and approves our activities and thoughts and words when we are in fellowship...if only we could stay there. God keeps track of every hair on our heads; there is no aspect of our lives that He is not attending. He oversees it all. He WATCHES us...every fleeting thought and every movement, and if we are in fellowship with Him, He protects and guides us through every bit of it. And He wants us to succeed, which is why He provides discipline and training at all times...throughout every second of every day...to give us ample opportunity to get in good repair and stay in peak operating condition.

Please stay with us. This is perhaps laborious, but we want to turn over all the stones we can to grasp the nuances and subtleties of fellowship. Please continue. 1 Cor. 16:22a tells us, “If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him.” Not loving God makes us accursed, which means that we are viewed unfavorably by God when we are out of fellowship. He still loves us and we are still his children, but He sees that there is still more to be done for us to ever be fully trained and equipped for the brutal battle ahead.

New Believers and Carnal Believers. When we are first saved, we feel an enthusiasm about God, and we feel enormous love for Him and want to do right in His sight. But the rosy glow of that event will fade, if we are not sustained by fellowship and an intake of the Word of God. It is easy, and quite common, for new believers, or ANY believer, to lose that “spark” for God. The condition that sustains love is fellowship. (Carried further, the condition that sustains fellowship is greater faith...or maturity.) Once again, fellowship is the corner stone for all success in the Christian life. Rev. 2:4-6 tells us what happens when we do not confess and are out of fellowship:

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

The lampstand represents our personal lives, which will be disrupted and thrown out of place due to lack of “repentance”. Notice that this is addressed to believers in Ephesus, many of whom are mature, but who have “lost their first love”. So they are being invited to participate in God’s restoration, and coaxed to return to fellowship and their initial love affair with God.

Matt. 12:43-45a shows us how our spiritual condition can get exponentially worse when we are out of fellowship. This passage says the following:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, “I will return to the house I left.” When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the condition of that man is worse than the first.

When demons are hanging around, seemingly at-home somewhere within the chambers of our hearts, they may sometimes depart for a vacation. Arriving in the desert, they get a call from Satan saying they are needed for service back on the job-site. They return to the “house” that they left, which is the believer they left behind when they took their hiatus...and discover it (the believer) empty, clean, and in order. So what would a demon see as “clean”? A place where the Holy Spirit is not active, and no wisdom is at work, because the believer is out of fellowship. That means the demon will have unfettered access to the believer, and—what makes it worse—he is bringing with him seven new friends that are even worse than he is. The likely result is that the believer’s resolve to do anything good is quickly eroded...in fact, it is probably washed out. Do you see why it is so important for us to stay in fellowship? Without it, we are targets for the forces of evil.

Benefits for Spiritual Believers. Ps. 23 gives a good picture of conditions in fellowship. When the Lord is our Shepherd (v. 1), we are being led by Him. This is what takes place when we are controlled by the Spirit. (We will have much more to say about the filling and control of the Spirit later on.) When we sin and are out of fellowship, we will not be controlled by the Spirit, because a Holy God can have no communion with sin or someone who is harboring that sin. But when we are in fellowship, God is leading us. And He is doing much more. Look at the rest of Ps. 23. We see the following benefits of fellowship:

- We lack nothing. He will always meet our needs when we are in fellowship. (v. 1)
- He brings us to a place of peace and calmness. (v. 2)
- He restores our soul, meaning we are once again spiritually active and alive. (v. 3)
- He enables righteous behavior and acts that glorify Him. (v. 3)
- Even in dark and trying times, He will be working everything together for our good. (v. 4)
- He will give us courage in the war with Satan, and will protect us from this evil one. (v. 4)
- He provides blessing for us. (v. 5)
- He provides enablement and teaching through His Spirit (“anoints my head with oil”...oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit). (v. 5)
- He fills us with all good things. (v. 5)
- His righteousness and love (justice and mercy) will constantly chase us as He seeks to gather us to Himself and keep us close to Him. (v. 6)
- He gives us assurance that we will always be His children (even if we depart from fellowship). (v. 6)

Once we understand the issue of fellowship, so many passages in the Bible become clear, and this enhances our study of Scripture, not only because we understand it better, but because being in fellowship connects us with our Teacher, Who enlightens us.

Other Benefits of Fellowship. Continuing in the vein of Ps. 23, we look now to Prov. 21:21 for confirmation of the benefits of fellowship. This verse says, “He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.” We “pursue righteousness” by seeking God in His Word and using His techniques to enable us to grow and produce for Him. We also “love” by being in fellowship. When we want God and His righteousness, and seek His cleanliness and the filling of the Spirit, we will be staying in fellowship, and He will bless us. We will find *spiritual life*, *prosperity* (spiritual prosperity for sure, and perhaps material, as well), and *honor* (which likely refers to recognition before observing angels). In any case, blessings will come in a variety of ways when we are in fellowship.

God also imparts wisdom and personal satisfaction when we are in fellowship with Him. Eccl. 2:26a says, “To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness...” Fellowship and

walking in faith give us these things.

Good living is also promised, as per Is. 33:15-16, which assures us of the following:

He who walks righteously and speaks what is right [truth], who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil—this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress, His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.

To get this kind of protection and provision, fellowship will be required.

God will provide a “wall of fire” around the future Jerusalem. This wall of fire illustrates the protection He provides around believers in fellowship. The only thing that removes this protection is an act of sin, rebellion, or self-righteousness. Remember, our bodies are “temples” of the Holy Spirit, and a wall protects this temple.

Here are some more benefits of fellowship, as seen in Ps. 103:1-5 (seen before) which gives us this:

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

So here is what we get for fellowship, according to this passage:

1. Forgiveness of sins.
2. Healing of physical and psychological maladies.
3. Ability to stay alive.
4. Elicitation of love and compassion from us.
5. Satisfaction of desires.
6. Renewal of one’s youth.

When we don’t forget God’s benefits, but access them by using the grace techniques we are learning, these will belong to us.

Loss of Benefits in Carnality. On the other hand, the absence of fellowship does the opposite. There is NO benefit to being out of fellowship. A life of sin and self-service will NEVER please us or satisfy us in the end. If our relationship with God is not functioning as He intends, we will not find contentment. What is more, God will not be pleased.

Eccl. 9:2-10 discusses the pointlessness of life in the world (life under the sun), and points out that all of us exit at some point through physical death...and then we are soon forgotten. But Solomon inserted two verses in this passage that don’t fit the rest, and then he drew a circle around them, because these two verses give the essence of life close to God. Verses 7 and 8 represent a break from the thoughts expressed in surrounding verses. They present a new view, as follows: “Go, eat your food

with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.” Verse 7 tells us to *enjoy life*, and then v. 8 tells us *how* this is done. To enjoy life, we must 1) be “clothed in white”, an indication of cleansing, and 2) “anoint our heads with oil”, a symbol for being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Living Well. We “live well” by living a spiritual life. Believers in fellowship (marked by the time of the last confession) can know they are spiritual. On the other hand, even positive occasions, like promotions, new relationships, entertainment events, holidays, vacations, reunions, concerts, weddings, and the acquisition of new things (car, house, etc.) can be spoiled when we are out of fellowship. We are told in the passage above to “enjoy” our lives, but if we look to the flesh or the world as our SOURCE for enjoyment, we will be disappointed. Our challenge is to *stay in fellowship*, especially when we are out to have a good time.

To use the grace assets God makes available, such as confession for fellowship, and faith for walking by the Spirit, we must make decisions to access them and live by them. Bad decisions would include such things as refusing to confess, not praying, not learning, not trusting, not persevering in God’s training, and so on (not giving thanks, not having our minds on God and heavenly things, not seeking God’s will, not waiting on the Lord, etc.). If we persist in applying the techniques that enable spirituality and promote maturity, we can grow and improve our performance and live in God’s power and by His grace. This is an uphill climb and an upstream swim, and there will be cliffs and rapids along the way to make progress more difficult. But with these demanding circumstances will come greater resources for enduring the rigors and tests of the Christian life. We have help, but we must do our part. (NOTE: This is not *works*, or self-trust...this is ACCESSING GRACE! Performance is based on the RELINQUISHMENT of our efforts to the Great Performer, and allowing Him to do HIS work!) We *do* have a role in our own growth, beginning with a decision to use grace assets, after which we seek knowledge of how these assets are acquired and utilized.

Choose it or Lose It. Gal. 6:5 says, “...for each one should carry his own load.” Each believer must bear his own trials and take personal responsibility for using the grace techniques. An example of a grace technique that will help us “bear our own trials” is accessing the gifts of others who can contribute to our growth and provide support in hard times. But we can choose to use *any* of God’s methods for accessing grace, or we can reject all of them and depend on ourselves. Even when we are in fellowship and walking by the Spirit, we are *still at choice*. The idea of being in fellowship is to keep the Holy Spirit in control, but we can walk away at any time.

Our being “controlled by the Spirit” and “filled with the Spirit” (outcomes of fellowship), does not mean Satan and our sinful nature are not looking for a way to get us to turn away from God and give up direct divine control. This process can take place in seconds. We can go from being controlled by the Spirit, to loss of control through sin, and back to control through confession, all within a single minute. And observe: There are NO one-shot decisions in the Christian life! We must CONTINUALLY DECIDE to confess and use grace techniques, IN ORDER to stay in fellowship...as we build a faith that will keep us spiritually connected more and more. It is so easy to abandon this pattern and

choose independence and self-trust. The choice is ours.

Using Prayer as a Crucial Part of Our Spiritual Walk. An example of not choosing well is the choice to ignore prayer, and focus on other resources that seem to offer what we need. We must understand that the promises of Satan and the world, and even our own sinful nature, are not reliable! We must go to God for supplies and comfort. And to access these, we must PRAY! Prayer is so important that God has made the lack of it a matter of discipline. If we do not pray, pressures increase. When this happens, if we have not been praying in times of ease, we may not pray in times of difficulty. We must pray often and with devotion and faith, and—when we pray—it is totally appropriate that we should ask for the things of greatest concern to us. When we commit our burdens and wishes to God, we are not being selfish and self-seeking, we are glorifying Him by accessing His grace!

The entire 39th chapter of Psalms is a prayer for relief from discipline and intense training. It is okay to ask for release from pressure, and anyone that says otherwise does not understand grace. Verses 7-11 encapsulate the purpose of Ps. 39, which is to explore avenues for relief from suffering (note the implication of confession in these verses, as well). Here is what these verses say:

But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. Save me from all my transgressions [plea for forgiveness]; do not make me the scorn of fools. I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this. Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blows of your hand. When you rebuke and discipline anyone for their sin, you consume their wealth like a moth—surely everyone is but a breath.

A prayer asking God to ease up on the suffering is legitimate, assuming that it is prayed by a believer who is in fellowship, and who is thus praying with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:6 tells us not to worry, but to pray instead, saying, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” There is no limit, I believe, to the things we can ask for. The key to prayer is fellowship, so that our prayer will be a “prayer of faith” (James 5:15), one prayed “in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18) and “according to God’s will” (1 John 5:14-15). (Please read the book, *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer*, for a complete study on the place and practice of prayer.) When we are in fellowship and our prayer is directed by the One to whom we are praying, we will be asking for God’s will to be done. If we ask for what God already wants us to get, it is certain we will get it. Through the use of the prayer technique, in conjunction with all other grace assets, we will learn to adjust our prayers to match what God wants us to ask for. The ultimate prayer comes from the mature believer, because of his enormous understanding and faith. His prayer will get amazing results!

What follows are some biblical references that are linked to various types of prayers that can be recalled or given when we are seeking God’s provision:

- Draw near to God for grace and mercy. Heb. 4:16
- Cast your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 1 Pet. 5:7

- God gives us good things when we ask for them. Matt. 7:7-11
- We get what we ask for, when we pray according to His will. 1 John 5:14-15
- Instead of feeling anxious, PRAY. Phil. 4:6-7
- The prayer of a believer in fellowship...works. James 5:16
- Prayer provides relief. Ps. 3:1-8; Ps. 5:1-12; Ps 6:1-10
- If we ask and do not receive, we must check our motive. James 4:3

Prayer is an example of the techniques God provides to enable us to access His grace. There are many techniques, and they are covered in this book or in previous books. It is absolutely crucial that we master these techniques, since our Christian walk depends on them. Col. 3:16-17 admonishes us to attend to our learning of these techniques, and their application, as follows:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Relying on the Word Enables us to “Do Everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus”. Letting the “Word of Christ dwell in us richly” exhorts us to learn all the ways of God, so we will know what He has done for us, and understand what He makes available to facilitate our lives as believers. Doing everything in “the name of the Lord Jesus” means that everything we do must be done in fellowship. This is the gate to understanding and using all other techniques. If we are not in fellowship, we will not apply a single technique. The only technique available to us when we are under the control of the sinful nature is confession. After confession the other techniques will be open to us, and we can search and study and pray, etc., as we grow.

If we will keep our focus on God, and build a strong faith, we will “walk by the Spirit” and display God’s love and grace in our lives. But we have to *want* it. We have to *seek* it. Seek, confess, and seek some more. And then trust...walk by faith (see 2 Cor. 5:7). Get clean, learn, and direct our confidence toward God. That seems to be the essence of all we are doing. This is what we see in Deut. 4:29-31, which says the following:

But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will RETURN TO THE LORD YOUR GOD and obey him. For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath. (Emphasis mine)

“Return to the Lord” equals confession, which opens God’s mercy, as per Heb. 4:16, which tells us that we can “approach the throne of grace with confidence, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” We “find” grace, because we want it and because we are *seeking* forgive-

ness and fellowship with God. If we want Him, we will confess, and then we will continue *seeking* by being devoted to an intense, concentrated search for Him IN HIS WORD! We will be listening for His truth, and His ways for living. In Mark 12:28, Jesus is asked which commandment is the most important. In verses 29-30, we see His reply: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love God with all your heart...” Our point in citing this passage is to highlight Jesus’ command for us to *love God*, and acknowledge His indication that this is the most important command of all. And notice the first step in obeying this command, which is given in the first word in verse 29: “Hear”. We are to hear God’s truths and live by them (or “obey” them, as Deut. 4:30 above calls for us to do).

When we *know* God’s Word...which tells us what His will is...we can master the means by which we are to live the Christian life. We can go from milk to meat, and learn to distinguish root from plant and foundation from building, as we grow our faith and build our maturity. This means that we will move on from elementary and foundational teachings, such as the truth of the cross and its purpose, to an understanding of God’s methods for accessing His grace and power, which will enable us to do great things. Heb. 5:13-14 tells us that “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have been trained to distinguish good from evil.” This is why we must move on past foundational truths to TRUTHS FOR LIVING! This is exactly what is called for in the next verse, Heb. 6:1, which says, “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation...”, which consists of basic doctrines, such as the gospel, which we are to “leave” and move up to teachings that instruct us on methods for living in God’s strength and ways that we can please Him.

As we learn new truths which are moving us along toward maturity, we will increasingly apply them to our lives. For the sake of simplicity, we will outline the processes of learning and application, as follows:

1. Learning.

- A. Preparation for learning. Confession of sins engages the power of the Holy Spirit.
- B. Power for learning. The power of the Holy Spirit changes human IQ to spiritual IQ.
- C. Perception of the learning. By believing the learning, it becomes understanding.
- D. Processing the learning. By embracing understanding, it becomes wisdom.

2. Application.

- A. Practicing the techniques. Grace assets enable God’s power to flow through us.
- B. Production. Fruit of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) are produced through us.

Walking in the Truth and in the Spirit. When we confess our sins and STUDY THE WORD FAITHFULLY, we will grow and become consistent in our application of the other techniques, so that we can see divine good produced in our lives. Using the techniques will result in our “walking by the

Spirit”, as per Gal. 5:25, which says, “Since we live [have life] by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [walk by] the Spirit.” The NIV translation of “keep in step with” is insufficient, because it implies self-effort. A better translation from the Greek is either “walk in” or “walk by” (Endnote 11), both of which will work. “Walk in” would indicate that we are operating in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, which implies that we are functioning in His power. “Walk by” would reflect the generation of a power from outside ourselves that is energizing us for walking, which means we would literally be “walking in the strength of” the Holy Spirit.

When we are led by the Spirit, we will be close to God and living by His standards. There is no other way; we *can't duplicate what He is and does*. So, by applying God's Word, we will learn how to “walk by the Spirit”, and will come to know the meaning of John 10:10, which says, “The thief [Satan] comes only to kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

James 1:21-22 echoes the call for us, not only to hear the Word, but to apply it, as we see in the following:

Therefore get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save [deliver] you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

We get rid of “moral filth” and “evil” by confessing them and operating in the power of the Spirit. Then we must ACCEPT or RECEIVE the Word, which goes beyond listening, adding the requirements of faith and a genuine desire for truth for it to process. When we believe, learning becomes understanding; and when we embrace what we have understood, wisdom evolves. With wisdom, we can APPLY what we have learned. The process begins with humility (a form of confession), and is followed by acceptance of the truth (processing it into the heart by believing and enthusiastically receiving it). The learning can then be recalled and used in our experience. This is application. James 1:25 tells us what happens next: “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in all he does.” This is the ticket to true success: *Learning* how to live to please God and *following* what we have learned.

Knowledge is not an end in itself. The things we learn point to *spirituality*. Even maturity is about developing faith, so that we can use the power and influence of the Holy Spirit to give us meaningful lives. The end product of learning is greater connection with the power of the Spirit. The goal, the point, the objective, and the outcome of *wisdom* is for us to follow the directions it gives regarding our connection and relationship with the Holy Spirit. Power comes from the Spirit, but our relationship with that power will not be sustained unless we go by the instructions that tell us how to perpetuate it.

To operate in God's strength, we must first acknowledge our weakness. 2 Cor. 12:1-10 gives a complete picture of this. Paul talks about his having some cause to boast, because he had been given experiences and knowledge that were so profound that “no man would be permitted to tell” about them (v. 4). Then he tells us that God gave him a condition which kept him humble and caused him to con-

stantly rely on God's grace to sustain him. Here is how he described this in 1 Cor. 12:6-10:

Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

God teaches us through His training to see our weaknesses, so we will be encouraged to operate in His strength. This kind of humility is a form of confession, which directly looks to God to provide forgiveness and to work His works using our bodies. We admit and expose our weaknesses to God so we can then operate in His strength. He does not need our strength; we need His!! We are helpless to make it on our own. When we try to do His works by our own initiative and design, God will strip us of our resources. Helplessness, on the other hand, makes us a candidate for divine help, and humility gives us the opportunity to receive it. Once the helpless are helped, they will accomplish profound things, achievements well beyond their power alone. And they will work to exhaustion by being carried through every task. But the load is light, according to Matt. 11:28-30, which says this:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Submission to Grace Methods for Spirituality. When we submit to Him through the methods we are learning, we will find "rest" in Him, because He does the heavy lifting. Our souls will be resting in Him, as He uses our bodies and minds to accomplish His purposes. This comes when we accept His invitation: "learn from me". By learning, we are "coming to Him", and by learning, we will find the way to work ourselves until we drop...by resting in Him. But whose production will be forthcoming? His. Christ's power is brought out when we realize and function in our weakness, and surrender to His strength. His strength is perfected in our weakness. Recall 1 Cor. 12:8 above, which says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Or we can do things our own way, and scurry about working for God, which accomplishes no real good.

We are establishing the fact that accessing the power of the Spirit, or "spirituality" is the ONLY way we can live the Christian life. And the only way to become or remain spiritual is to be clean and operate in a strong faith. As we mature through spiritual means, we draw nearer to God, where the good life awaits. Ps. 145:18-20 tells us this:

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him,

but all the wicked he will destroy.

Ps. 37:4 confirms this promise, saying, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your hearts.” Notice that getting our “desires” is contingent on our “calling on Him in truth” (which is praying according to His Word), “fearing Him”, “loving Him”, and “delighting ourselves in Him”. These are CONDITIONS that must be met. These come from building on the two major pillars of the Christian life: spirituality and maturity (staying clean and building faith through study and training). That is the point of all we are saying. We must make sure that we are looking at our lives from God’s perspective, so that we will see each day as a time for getting closer to Him. Every day we are alive is a day to grow and glorify God.

To glorify God, we must walk by His Spirit (we repeat). Gal. 5:16 is a good source for this, as it says, “So I say, live by [means of] the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Walking by the Spirit curtails sin and promotes production. We walk by the Spirit by walking in faith. The power of the Spirit is *restored* by confession; the power of the Spirit is *sustained* by faith. The more often we confess, the more time we will spend in fellowship, and the stronger our faith will become. And when faith is stronger, we stay in fellowship *longer*, giving greater opportunity to develop more faith. God’s power works when we **DEPEND ON IT!** This is why the strengthening of our faith is so crucial. It is the means for walking in the Spirit. Summary: We *regain* the Spirit’s power by confessing; we *keep* it by believing Him and His Word (i.e., by having faith). We are physical beings, but *real* life is spiritual, which means our **WALK IN THE SPIRIT** is the central feature and activity of our lives.

Confession restores our temporal righteousness, and faith keeps it going. Heb. 10:39 says, “...the righteous will live by faith”. This is parroted in Rom. 1:17, which says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.” The “righteous” are 1) those who have been saved and have eternal righteousness in their *position*, and 2) those who are in fellowship and are thus filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18b) as their *condition*. Believers who are filled with and led by the Spirit will be living by faith, however short-lived that condition may be, since sin will try to truncate it. But, for the duration of fellowship, the control of the Spirit will continue. The idea is to get wisdom, apply it, and enjoy the fruits of mature spirituality, so that fellowship will be constant and righteousness can become continuous. Remember: All “pluses” (good) will come from God’s grace, and not from us, because we are “zeroes”.

B. God’s Provision

The Provider. When we begin a discussion on God’s provision, we must look at the character of the One Who does the providing. We emphasize one quality or another of God’s, depending on the topic. Here we are talking about the provisions he makes to keep us going and give us every chance to make things right with Him and to keep them that way. We make things so hard, and He makes them easy, because He has agreed to do all the work. He provides **EVERYTHING WE NEED!** The wonderful things He provides come from His love, i.e., the love He has for His children. Love is key. To help us

frame the place and importance of God's love, we provide the following references and comments:

- Eph. 2:4-10—God's love is seen in His perfect plan of salvation.
- Jn. 3:16—He loved the world, and gave His Son to save those who believe.
- 1 Jn. 4:10—He loved us and sent His Son.
- 1 Jn. 4:19—We love because He first loved us.
- Jn. 13:34-35—We are to love, because He first loved us.
- 1 Jn. 4:8-16—If we abide in love, it is because we are in touch with His love.
- Jer. 31:3—God loves us with an everlasting love.
- 1 Tim. 2:3-4—God's love is translated as His wanting all to be saved.
- Matt. 10:29-31—We are worth more than many sparrows to God.
- Rom. 8:38-39—Nothing separates us from God's love.
- Ex. 34:6—God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and loving.
- Ps. 36:5—He is loving and faithful.
- Jn. 13:1—Jesus loves His own.

God's Loving Provision for Believers. The main reason for staying in fellowship is so the Holy Spirit can bear fruit through us. The main fruit that He brings forth is love. When we are asked to love, we are being asked to stay in fellowship, because the kind of love expected *of* us cannot be produced *by* us. This love translates primarily as the operation of God's gift to each of us, whereby the gift *given* by the Holy Spirit can then *operate* by His power so that fruit can be borne.

When we are in fellowship, we will be loving and experientially righteous, and God will bless us. The blessings He provides will be exactly what we need, whether we recognize it or not. His blessings are perfect, as per James 1:17, which says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Notice this: The gifts that God gives are "good" and "perfect". The world and Satan can give gifts, and so can the people that serve them, but the gifts they give are not "good", no matter what they cost. The provisions we receive from God are GOOD! They may be spiritual, and they may be material. But whatever we get from God will be the best available or possible.

God not only provides for us, He "pre-provides". Eph. 1:3 says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." This applies to God's plan of salvation, but it also refers to God's provisions for living. These provisions are scheduled in heaven and dispensed on earth within the realm of our own experience. Observe that these blessings are "spiritual" in nature. Many times, we think of blessings as something with monetary value. But the purpose of our receiving blessings from God is to facilitate our glorify-

ing Him. Spiritual blessings enrich us, so that we can live righteous lives that honor Him. I also believe that God is glorified by meeting ALL the needs of believers in fellowship, including material ones. We must understand grace: *Any time* God's grace operates, it brings glory to Him. God doesn't care what we *do for Him* as much as He wants our acceptance of what He *does for us*! The question is, "Will we receive God's blessings, or will we seek to acquire our own?"

One of His greatest gifts is His power for living. This is what we see in Eph. 3:17b-19, which says the following:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Being established in love is, of course, an outcropping of being in fellowship, and the result of this is that we are given power. This power helps us see God's love, not only as part of His character, but within ourselves, as the Holy Spirit shares His enormous love with us. The volume of this love is not limited by the Spirit, but by us. We refuse to embrace the "fullness of God", because of our own love for the world, our openness to the deceits of Satan, and our susceptibility to the whims of our own nature. The only way to overpower this refusal is to outgrow it.

God Provides Equipment. To do the things we must do to accomplish God's will, we must be equipped. We need to experience the following:

- Be equipped to stay in fellowship.
- Be equipped to understand Scripture.
- Be equipped to pray.
- Be equipped to resist Satan and the world.
- Be equipped to trust God.
- Be equipped to endure God's training.
- Be equipped to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to bear His fruit.

These are products of maturity, which means that these will be seen in greater size and volume as we grow. These are things God gives to us, as we shall see. And we NEED these.

God never forgets us, and is always standing by, waiting to provide whatever we need. We must be careful, though, that we don't slip into an impression that God's equipment or weapons or armor is given to us and after that WE are prepared to go out and do battle on our own. Our equipment is always **God**; not some quality that we acquire that magically makes our humanity divine. We are always human, and God is always God. It is when we have more of Him that we are equipped and prepared, because HE IS OUR EQUIPMENT!

Recognizing God's Provision. God cares for us in every area of our lives. He ALWAYS provides...the contest is for us to SEE that what He is providing is, indeed, *provision*. God defines what provision is, and when we are carnal or walking backwards in our Christian lives, we may not see His dealing with us or what He brings to us as provision. But we are in His heart, and His plan is to give us His very best. In Is. 49:15-16, we see how much He cares for us, and how much He protects us. This passage says the following:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

Our “walls” are our protection...everything we need to guard our hearts. And He never looks away from us. Couple this passage with Luke 12:27-31, to merge His constant oversight with His desire to provide for us. This passage in Luke says this:

Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

God oversees, and promises to meet our needs. He is engaged in every aspect of our lives, and nothing that comes to us is by coincidence or accident. It is all part of His plan. And His plan is designed to bring His “good” to us.

God is Faithful. We get nothing that we do not receive. We are no different from each other. All we have comes from God, so we cannot brag about anything we are or have. 1 Cor. 4:7 says, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” This includes our achievement, as well as our acquisitions. We are nothing and He is everything. We bring nothing to the table that God needs, and everything we have is from HIS table.

Even when we turn our backs on God, He remains faithful to us. He is faithful, even when He is disciplining us. 2 Tim. 2:13 tells us how faithful He is, by saying, “...if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” Since we are part of Him, He cannot throw us away, and even when we sin, He will deal with us in a way to move us forward, not in a manner to halt us. 2 Thess. 3:3 also reminds us of God's faithfulness. This verse promises, “But the Lord is faithful, and he will protect you from the evil one.” Even 1 Jn. 1:9, which we refer to so often because it calls for us to confess our sins, highlights God's faithfulness: “he is faithful and just and will forgive us...” This is one of His attributes that enables forgiveness through confession. We must remember God's faithfulness and His compassionate nature, whenever suffering is brought into our lives. If we see Him as vengeful or cruel, we will miss any lesson He is trying to teach us as part of His training program. The correct view of God

is as a faithful provider.

God's Kingdom Cannot be Shaken. Things rattle and shake and change constantly, and there seems to be nothing that is permanent or reliable. But God's character and kingdom are unshakable. Everything else can be "shaken", as per Heb. 12:27-29, which tells us this:

The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

When God is through, all that is left is that which is unshakable. If we don't want to be shaken, we must hang on to the unshakable. When we seek the kingdom of God, which cannot be shaken, we will receive "unshakable things". Matt. 6:33 tells us what we get when we seek the kingdom of God first. This verse says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." The "things" that we will receive when we seek His kingdom represent His provision. Heb. 13:5b says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." This is why the first part of the verse tells us, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have..." (Heb. 13:5a) We should be content, because what we receive from God is the very thing we need, whether it is material, such as a certain amount of money; or spiritual, such as a good Bible teacher.

Conclusion. God knows our condition and our greatest needs, and He will supply us with provisions that are 100% appropriate, at the exact time they are needed most. Neither Satan nor the world nor our very selves can provide what God gives.

C. Jesus and the Holy Spirit

Changing of the Guard. Technically, it is the Holy Spirit and not Christ that forms the character of Christ within us. In Jn. 16:14, speaking of the promised Spirit, Jesus said, "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." John 16:7-8 makes it clear that a changing of the guard took place soon after Christ left the earth. These verses say the following:

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes he will expose the guilt of the world...

From Scripture we know that the Holy Spirit was sent to be our Reminder, Comforter, Helper, Teacher, and Motivator. The plan for Him in this Age is to enable salvation for unbelievers and provide assistance for believers.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ. Take time to read Gal. 5:16-25, which, along with many other passages in Scripture, make it clear that the Holy Spirit is the One Who gives life to our spirits, is our primary contact with God, and is the One Who is working in us. Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the

Father, interceding for us in the form of the God-man, the Savior of the world. His role is now primarily in heaven. The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Christ”, or God’s Spirit, and His role is focused here on earth. He is a distinct personality of God, the aspect of the divine Trinity who is resident within all believers. He is active in portraying, revealing, and glorifying another part of the Trinity...Jesus Christ...and He is our direct agent for change, growth, and production.

In many churches, there is an emphasis on Jesus as the dynamic member of the Trinity with whom we interact. These churches often talk about what we can do for Him, and how we should follow His example. This easily lapses into a “works” mentality which cultivates legalistic behavior conducted in the name of “serving” Him. But that is not how God’s plan works, because, first of all, our works are worthless; and secondly, any legitimate “work” in the Church Age depends on God the Holy Spirit. By operating within us, the Holy Spirit can finish His divine mission and produce super-righteousness through us. Jesus, on the other hand, is in heaven, because His work on earth was finished at the cross. He sent His Spirit to take the next shift. So—during the Church Age—the Spirit is the member of the Trinity Who is most-directly engaged with believers. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is through His Spirit, and when the Bible talks about “Christ in us”, it is speaking of the Spirit of Christ, and not the God-man Jesus.

Christ finished the work that formed the basis for salvation, referring to the cross. Then the Spirit took over to enact our eternal union with Christ at salvation, and to restore believers to fellowship when they confess. Christ and His Spirit are one, but they have different functions. The function of Jesus Christ is to intercede for us; the function of the Spirit is to “help” us. Gal. 4:6 says, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’.” Our hearts are in contact with (actually indwelt by) the Holy Spirit; thus we are enabled to “live by the Spirit”, as stated in Gal. 5:25.

The Spirit is Here. The Holy Spirit binds our salvation, activates our fellowship, and sustains our spiritual lives. He is certainly IMPORTANT TO US! It seems, then, that more emphasis would be given to the role and place of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is downplayed in most churches, except for some who see the Spirit as a way to excite a congregation during worship, yet even these churches neglect His place in the day-to-day grind of Christian living. When we talk about “spirituality”, there is no consideration needed beyond the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. He is not only central to spirituality; He IS spirituality. We want to be “spiritual”, because this means that the Holy Spirit will be leading us and empowering us to do His work.

Eph. 1:17-20 frames the place of the Holy Spirit in helping us understand God and move closer to Him. This passage says the following:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the

dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...

The Spirit of wisdom is the Holy Spirit, Who teaches and enlightens us, gives us hope, and shares His power with us. He is our resource for full-on, God-centered lives, and this is why we must spend time learning how He works. In Jesus Christ, we find salvation (Eph. 1:4-7); after salvation, we are able to live as believers...through the medium of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14; Eph. 3:20; Jn. 16:5-15; Rom. 8:4-16).

D. Christ our Example

Looking at the Right Example. Christ is our example, not because He was loving and kind, or wise and pure, which He was, but because of the way He exercised His faith in His Father. It is the dependency and submission He maintained toward His Father that gives us our model. His *spiritual* condition is what we want to emulate, because it was His faith and rest in the Divine Spirit that sustained His humanity. He was not exercising His own power, as we shall see, but demoted Himself to the human level so He would be qualified to become our sacrifice. This left Him as helpless as we are against Satan, and required His complete surrender to the Holy Spirit...His complete devotion to study and growth to keep from slipping. If He had depended on His humanity to do what He did, He would have failed, just as Adam did! This is our example. If we depend on our own humanity for service, we will only get *humanity*, and not spirituality. We must depend on God.

The Example is Given. It was the will of God the Father to sacrifice His Son for mankind. This is the solution God chose, so it satisfied Him. Is. 53:10 says this:

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his day, and the will of the Word will prosper in his hand.

God had to solve the sin problem, and—even more than that—had to demonstrate to the angels His love and grace and justice in dealing with low-life man. Rom. 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We are getting something we do not deserve, because of the superior nature and plan of God. And it was Jesus Christ, not as God, but as a human surrendered to God, that made the sacrifice for us. He divested Himself of all divine privileges, and invested Himself in all the divine provisions of His Father. Anything He had, we have. The only difference between Him and us is the presence of our sinful nature, which He did not have, because He did not have a human father (the sinful nature being transmitted through the father). But He was tempted as we are in every way, and HE WAS HUMAN!

Jesus had learned everything about His mission, and knew well what He had to do...and why. He knew the outcome of what He was about to do when He told His disciples, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (Rom. 4:8) We can take heart because, even though we will suffer in the world, we can follow His lead and participate in His victory. But we have to do this HIS WAY, and not ours.

We have to spend time in His Word, and pray, and endure intensive training, to share in His victory over the world. We can't just step out of the line we're in and cut to the front of the maturity queue. We have to do what Jesus did, which is "grow in knowledge and grace". There are no short-cuts.

The Example Simplified...Submission to the Father's Will. Christ's purpose was to fulfill His Father's plan and to glorify Him, as per Jn. 12:27, which says, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name?" Notice that even Jesus Christ did not presume to have the resources to do God's will and glorify Him. He "came" to the hour, but He knew He could not proceed without the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not say, "I glorify your name", but asked the Father to "glorify His own name". And notice the Father's reply to this in verse 28: "Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'" This is routine for God. He glorifies His own name...He does NOT depend on us to achieve this. We *participate* in the process of glorifying God by walking in His Spirit, but it is the Spirit Who does it.

Phil. 2:6-8 tells us of Christ's humility and surrender, as follows:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus Christ became "nothing", so that His Father could be "everything". He trusted His Father, rather than Himself, to accomplish His Father's will and bring glory to Himself. If the divine Son of God bowed His head as an humble servant, and cast His fate at the feet of His heavenly Father, how much more should we surrender to God's will and allow Him to be God...just as Jesus did.

Because Jesus Christ gave Himself up to His Father's will, we are able to participate in God's plan as He did. We have the privilege to "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb. 4:16) We also have the privilege to live a life of dependency on God, because we are in union with His Son. We are His brothers and sisters, and He is our advocate with the Father (1 Jn. 2:1). As our defense attorney, Jesus Christ gives us this: We never have to deal with our past. It is covered. And we have salvation, as per Heb. 7:25, which says, "Therefore he is able to save completely [forever] those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Because of His advocacy, we have absolute protection from condemnation.

Here's the point: The benefits we have from Christ are the result of His submission to His Father; these show the grand results that take place when God's will is understood and followed. When we learn to rely on God, rather than ourselves, amazing things will happen. What would Jesus do? He would step back and trust...and He is our example.

E. Glorifying God

God Comes First. God will not take a back seat to anyone or anything. As our devotion grows through hearts that are maturing and increasing in faith, we will come to love God more. At some point in our maturation, we will love God more than anything. Matt. 10:37-39 confirms this as a desirable outcome, giving us the following:

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Our objective, and hopefully our outlook, is to love God and value Him above everything else. Our true lives are about *God only!* Everything depends on Him, and every day exists to glorify God. Rom. 14:5-8 shows us the focal point of our lives, as follows:

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Our Purpose: Bringing Glory to God. Our business is God; God is our business. That's life in the righteous lane on the holy highway. We were created to be conscious of God, and to give glory to Him. Glorifying God is our main reason for being here. We do this by featuring Him and drawing favorable attention to Him. Is. 43:7 and 21 says, "...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made....the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise." Our purpose is not to enhance or maximize our lives, but to *bring glory to God* before man and before angels. The reasons for our creation, then, are to glorify God and to demonstrate the function of God's grace to an audience of angels. These are inextricably tied together, and both bring glory to God. How to do this is another question, one we hope to answer thoroughly in these studies.

We suggested in the last section that God glorifies Himself much better than we do. It is *God's* work that brings glory to Him, and not *our* work. We tend to think that good performance will bring God's blessing. This can only be true if what we do is done in the power of the Holy Spirit, but then it is God doing good things, and not us. God is not impressed with what we do. The only thing outside Himself that is impressive to God is the work of His Son. This work is magnified when we believe in Christ at salvation, and again when the Holy Spirit controls us and magnifies the name of Christ through us after we are saved.

Like all other operations and conditions in the Christian life, glorifying God does not depend on us. Loving God and glorifying Him involves more than emotion and proclamation, and it is more than

serving; it is about relinquishing our will to God, because it is the *fulfillment of His will* that brings glory to Him. And remember this: The only force in all of creation that can do God's will in our lives...is God the Holy Spirit. So we must continue to see how He fits into our spiritual stand and walk, so WE can know and honor God's will, and thus glorify Him.

F. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit related differently with believers in the Old Testament than He does now. This is the Church Age, when new privileges abound, meaning that we have more resources and assets than were available in the Old Testament. We have said enough about the function of the Holy Spirit to give us some idea of His indwelling, cleansing, and sustaining roles during this Age. As for the indwelling of the Spirit in the Old Testament, this did not happen except for certain believers, or on special occasions. He was sometimes "given", as we see in Ps. 51:11, where David prayed, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." For Him to be *taken away*, the Spirit would need to have been *given* previously. In Ps. 139:7, David asked, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence.?" The Spirit may have been "closer" at some times than at others...but He was never "gone".

The Holy Spirit "filled" certain leaders, as we see in the following:

- The Spirit was in Joshua. Num. 27:18
- The Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel. Jud. 3:10
- Saul and David were filled with the Spirit. 1 Sam. 10:9-10, 16:13
- Daniel was filled with the Spirit. Dan. 4:8, 5:11-14, 6:3

The Holy Spirit was said to be "with" Old Testament believers, or "among" them, to some greater or lesser degree, based apparently on their compliance with God's requirements. Haggai 2:4-5 says the following:

'...But now be strong, O Zerubbabel', declares the Lord. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'

He was in the "middle" of the Israelites, but did not indwell many of them. He "led" them, but did not control them, as we see in Ps. 143:10: "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground." He provided direction for them, but did not ordinarily do this from "within" individual believers. On another occasion the Spirit was seen as a "teacher": Neh. 9:20, with 9:30, says this:

You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst...For many years you were patient with them.

By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.

Other Things the Holy Spirit did in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit also did the following in the Old Testament:

- Guided national alliances. Is. 30:1-2
- Set His Spirit among them and performed spectacular feats. Is. 63:10-14
- Gave them words. Zech. 7:11-12
- Empowered men. Ex. 31:3, 35:30-36, 36:1
- Established plans.
 - o David. 1 Chron. 28:12
 - o Moses and his elders. Num. 11:17, 25-29
 - o Joshua. Num. 27:18
 - o Isaiah. Is 48:16-17
 - o Daniel. 4:8-9, 4:18, 5:11

There are a number of scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments which refer to the Holy Spirit's "presence" in the Old Testament. Here are a few, for reference purposes: 2 Ki. 2:9-15; Num. 11:17-29; Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16, 4:25, 7:51; Heb. 3:7; 2 Pet. 1:21. God did most of His work in the times of the Old Testament through the Holy Spirit, as we see in the following references: Neh. 9:20, 30; Ps. 106:33; Is. 30:1-2; Zech. 7:11-12, Acts 7:51.

Conditions for the Filling of the Spirit. The *conditions* for the filling of the Holy Spirit are less clearly delineated in the Old Testament than they are in the New, but some differences are distinct, as follows:

- 1) The Spirit worked around and through representatives, who were filled for specific tasks, rather than through individual believers.
- 2) He seemed to *inform*, but not *empower*, believers in the Old Testament.
- 3) Fellowship seemed to be more externalized as physical/material blessings and protection, rather than personal enablement emanating from within.
- 4) A lack of fellowship resulted in discipline, as it does now.
- 5) A volition of interest in God brought these:
 - A) the "salvation" message leading to conversion
 - B) after salvation, a "walk in the way of God".

The Importance of Knowledge in the Old Testament. An important conundrum which arises

around the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is this: What part of man in the Old Testament was capable of “doing good” or of “obeying”. In the Church Age, we have the Holy Spirit to *help us* do good. What did the Old Testament saints have to help them in their spiritual walk? The answer is this: *knowledge* of God and His laws. This is still important in the New Testament, but we have added “help” from the Holy Spirit. In the OT, by learning and applying Scripture, which implies FAITH in God and His Word, they were able to address God’s standards. But this means they had to super-know the Scripture. When they mastered and followed the Scripture, God helped them in various ways: He guided them, supplied their needs, and gave them great leaders and teachers.

Any “good” the Old Testament saints did came from His Word. We still have this, but—as stated—we have something more: the indwelling Holy Spirit. The behavior of Old Testament believers was stringently enforced by leaders in the Old Testament, as well as God’s direct discipline. Today, our enforcement comes almost altogether through God’s oversight, and each believer answers directly to God for his performance. But note: Neither in the Old Testament nor the New can man get credit for the “good” that he does. Only God does good; any good we do comes from Him.

The Place of Faith in the Old Testament. Heb. 11 gives us a closer look at the production of divine good in OT believers. The entire chapter provides information on the performance of believers in the Old Testament, but we will focus on verse 2a, which says, “By faith we understand...” In our day, faith is the key component of salvation *and* our walk in the Spirit. We believe God and we believe His Word. Faith is central to all of it. The same was true of Old Testament saints. Their performance was measured by their “faith”, even though externals were a greater part of its expression than ours (as seen in sacrifices, offerings, customs, etc.). Rom. 4:3 says, “What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’.” Righteousness, in both the Old and New Testaments, is a matter of what *God* does, not what we generate ourselves. And our *understanding* of our connection with His righteousness comes through His Word.

Living by the Spirit. We said above that there is nothing good about us. This sets the stage for a position we will reflect from time to time in these studies, and that is this: The only “nature” we will ever have is one that deviates from God’s guidelines and standards. We do not receive at salvation a fully-grown “new man”, or a new “spirit” that somehow gives us new capabilities for bearing spiritual fruit. It is ludicrous to think that we somehow become inherently good, because there is no part of us, as natural beings, and even as born-again believers, that brings merit to us. In and of ourselves we are hopeless and wretched, which means that we can never rely on ourselves in this Age to produce righteousness, or “obey” God, apart from the function of the Holy Spirit.

Divine energy for good can operate within Church Age believers, but it is God Who is operating, and not some “new man”. The “new man” is new and good to the extent that we are yielding to God and using His divine methods for accessing His strength. As we mature and walk in the Spirit, the “new man” will evolve, not as part of human nature, but as part of the divine Nature that is being shared with us through fellowship. The conflict for “good” and “evil” that goes on within us is not between the “new man” and the “old man” (the sinful nature), but between the Holy Spirit and the old man. Gal.

5:16-17 spells this out clearly, as follows:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Old Testament believers were not able, ordinarily, to “live by the Spirit”. We have extra help during this Age, because our spiritual pressures are more intense now than they were in Old Testament times.

The two warring entities within Church Age believers are the Holy Spirit and the sinful nature. Any other parts of ourselves will fit into one of these camps or the other. This is where we need to focus our intentions and objectives. We must grow and find the way to walk perpetually in the Spirit to quell the onslaughts of our nature and his cohorts. Once again, Old Testament believers did not have the opportunity to do this.

Many of the references and concepts we have given regarding the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, as discussed in this section, were provided by Bob Deffinbaugh, whose article, “Holy Spirit in the Old Testament”, was quite helpful. (Endnote 12)

Salvation in the Old Testament. Another issue that is closely linked to the Holy Spirit’s operation in the Old Testament, is that of salvation. Hank Hanegraaff, the Bible Answer Man, gave a reasonable answer to questions on this issue in an online session titled, “Salvation in the Old Testament”. The following discussion draws heavily from his comments. He states the following:

Many people falsely assume that only New Testament believers are saved by grace whereas Old Testament believers were saved by their obedience to the law of Moses and not by grace. The truth is that both the Old and New Testaments clearly teach that everyone who is saved, throughout history, is saved the same way: by grace, through faith, on account of Christ alone. (Endnote 13)

Hanegraaff goes on to point out that Paul cited man’s failure in the first three chapters of Romans, and concludes that no one will be declared righteous by observing the Law. (Rom. 3:20) Then Paul cited Abraham’s faith as the way Abraham acquired righteousness, something he was not able to do by works. Paul said, in Rom. 4:2, “If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.” We saw earlier that he received righteousness because he “believed God”. (Rom. 4:3)

Hanegraaff also cites Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of everything anticipated in the Old Testament. All the sacrifices and prophecies point to Christ. He is the center of eternal history, and His sacrifice is the focal point of God’s plan. As believers today, we look back at the cross, whereas Old Testament believers looked forward to the cross. The work on the cross works both directions.

In our view, it seems that faith was expressed toward Christ indirectly in the Old Testament, in that they did not have the completed act to refer to. Their faith was directed at God the Father, knowing that His plan would lead to salvation. They depicted the future Christ, but they did not fully grasp all

the details of His work. Their faith was accepted by God, because they believed what they had been promised, even though they did not fully comprehend it. Many things about Christ were mysterious and unclear, but they believed in God and His promises, and that was enough.

We know just enough about God's plan of salvation in the Old Testament to know that faith was the key, grace was the agent, and Jesus Christ was the ultimate object.

G. Functions of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is Anticipated. Before we get into the thick of what our spiritual walk really is, and how it is maintained, we want to add some details about the Holy Spirit that we have not covered yet. These are additional functions that need to be described, or some that were mentioned earlier, but still need further treatment. First of all, as we have stated before, the Holy Spirit was anticipated. We see this in the following verses:

Ez. 36:25-27—"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." This is promised for the Jews after the Church Age, but it certainly depicts as well the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age.

Ez. 44:3—"For I will pour 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 offspring."

Joel 2:28-29—"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." Once again, the Jews will experience this at the Second Advent of Christ, but this passage was cited specifically by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was "poured out". This promise has a dual application.

Jn. 7:37-39—"On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given [to *all* believers; only to some], since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

Jesus said He would send the "Enabler" (Helper) in His absence, and He would carry power equal to His own. He told His disciples that it was to their advantage for Him to leave, so the Spirit could come in His place. He would indwell and be a constant companion and helper to them. So states Jn. 16:7, which says, "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [Enabler, Helper] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

Some of the Roles of the Holy Spirit. Now that the Holy Spirit is here, as promised, He has a role to play in our lives, and if we choose to “try” to live the Christian life without engaging His services, we are doing ourselves no favors. He is here FOR US, so why wouldn’t we search in any way we can for understanding of what He offers? Our question: What does He offer? What can He do?

First of all, the Holy Spirit prays in our place and on our behalf. This is shown in Rom. 8:26-27, which gives us the following:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches out hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.

When we come to God in reverence and faith, even if we don’t have the words to form our prayer, the Holy Spirit knows what we need, and will articulate our prayer to the Father in a way that fits the Father’s will exactly. He knows exactly what to pray, and His prayers will accomplish much more than we ever imagined.

We have mentioned before that the Holy Spirit teaches us. Job 32:8 confirms this, as follows: “But it is the Spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.” This is verified in 1 Cor. 2:14, which says this:

The [natural] man without [the filling of] the Spirit does not accept [or learn] the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

We cannot understand the Scripture without the teaching of the Holy Spirit, which does not come to “carnal” believers, but only to those who are “spiritual”. He teaches us, because He wants us to participate in His mission to glorify Jesus Christ. When He commands us to glorify Christ in our bodies, He is urging us to stay in fellowship, so that He can accomplish this humanly-impossible task.

The Spirit indwells us, occupying our bodies as His temple. He is at home in our hearts, where He is inviting us to pay attention to Him, the source of our spiritual lives, and to learn about Him and trust Him to perform great things. (See 1 Cor. 6:19) When the One Who indwells us also controls us, He can produce His fruit, as seen in the following: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22-23) Notice that even our control of ourselves is something produced by the Holy Spirit. Everything we are expected to exhibit is included in the fruit of the Spirit. We must remember whose fruit it is, and move ourselves into a position to receive this fruit from the One Who produces it.

We are about ready to get into the heart of “spiritual walking”, so it is appropriate that we should be reminded one last time where the spiritual life is found. This is what we get from Rom. 8:4, which says, “...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.” Every requirement or standard that God has commanded can only be met if our lives are conducted “by the Spirit”. There is no life or production

or fruit or righteousness or growth or hope without Him.

We must take a closer look at ways to ensure that we are not frustrating and curtailing the life of the Holy Spirit within us. But before we do, there is a footnote that needs to be entered regarding the place of the Word vs that of the Holy Spirit.

H. The Word vs the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is Essential. Once again, I am taking a position that may not be popular, and may not even be right, but it is what I see in Scripture. The argument that the Holy Spirit is everything in our lives has a gravitational pull on me that I cannot resist. My belief is that God is infinitely larger than we are, and that we are nothing without Him. My stance on the centrality of God is firm, and I believe it is well-based. The Holy Spirit is singularly vital to us...nothing is more important! This includes the truth, or the Word, which is the Spirit's sword. We may be tempted to place the Word above the Spirit. The reason I am writing this is that there are some who advance the notion that all *power* for living the Christian life comes from knowledge of the Word. The Word is our source for understanding, and it draws our passion and attention. But I believe that when the Word overshadows, rather than features, the Holy Spirit, it is being misused. Let me explain.

The Power Behind the Word. God *upholds* everything by His speech, as per Heb. 1:3a, which says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. His "word" is contained in His "Word". God uses His Word to sustain, but the power comes from God Himself, and not "the word". Repeat: The Word derives its power from God. Col. 1:17 shows where the power is, saying, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." It is God's power that holds all things together, and it is the Word that points to His power. The Word expresses, defines, and directs us toward God's power. But God's power is *a priori* (pre-existent), and the Word follows. Once again, the Word draws its power from the Spirit, which means the Spirit does not draw His power from the Word. The transforming effects of the Word and its influence on the minds of believers is undeniable, but the RESULTS of acquiring and applying Scripture come from the power BEHIND the Word. The strength of God's Word is found in the One to whom it points. It is powerful because of the One who uttered the words, and because it lights the path to His power.

Application of the Word. Prov. 5:7-14 is part of a lesson Solomon learned from his father David. Here is what he was taught:

Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her [the adulteress], do not go near the door of her house, lest you lose your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich the house of another. At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or turn my ear to my instructors. And I was soon in serious trouble in the assembly of

God's people."

The latter end of someone who will not listen to the voice of his teacher is bad. But we must understand this: Knowledge for its own sake is useless. Unless Scripture is *applied*, there will be no value in what is learned. That is why it is so important to believe and receive what we learn, so that it will process into the heart as wisdom; then we can APPLY what we KNOW! "Doctrine" means nothing unless it is applied to our experience. And if we apply what we are learning in this book, we will know that we are letting go of our own ways and giving in to God's ways, which will give meaning to our experience. The value of learning is in *using what we learn*, ACCESSING THE GRACE TECHNIQUES AND ASSETS THAT ACTIVATE GOD'S POWER! He is *within* us, and *around* us, but we need Him to come *through* us.

The Word Points to the Spirit. The Bible is just words. The worth of the words is based on what they lead us to; not what they are by themselves in a book. To claim that the Book itself has power independent of the God Who authored its contents is—to me—a "form of godliness" that denies the real power of its author. We love God's Word because it is HIS Word. We gain faith and perseverance from the Word, because we see in the Word a God we can believe in. We get strength through the Word, because it shows us exactly how God shares His power. And we get life from the Word, because it tells us how to live in Him. We must be careful to give thanks to the One Who provided the words, and realize that the greatest value in the words lies in their ability to train our thoughts on the Speaker.

Throughout history, there have been many monarchs and kingdoms. When a king spoke, his words had power. But the power of the message existed, not in the words themselves, but in the one who spoke them. It was the king's power that made the words meaningful. The same words spoken by someone without the power would carry no weight. The words used in the Bible are pretty much ordinary words, but these words carry great influence and must be heard and learned, because they come from our Creator God, and because they are connected with His infinite power. We BELIEVE the Word, but we DEPEND ON the Holy Spirit.

I. Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit

God's Power is Everything. The most thrilling discovery I ever made, and the most exciting subject to me in all of Christianity, is this: God is big and we are small. Sounds obvious, perhaps even trite, but when I understood HOW BIG God is, and how incapable we are to "do" things that are "godlike", I was struck immediately that we can do nothing that gets the favor of an infinite God. 2 Tim. 3:5 illustrates this, saying, "...having a form of godliness, but denying the power in it..." It is possible to display all kinds of "godly" behavior and generate all manner of perfunctory obedience, and there not be a single watt of divine power behind it. It is the premise of this study that all good comes from God's power, and that no good can be done without it. Anything done in the power of God represents "divine good"; anything done outside this power ranges from "relative good", to downright "evil".

In Acts 1:4-8, Jesus instructed the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to come and baptize them before they began their ministry. This is seen in the following:

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with^a water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Why did Jesus tell them not to make a move without the Holy Spirit? Because any move they made...any ministry or service they performed without Him...would have been useless, perhaps even counter-productive. Keep in mind that “production” is not always *seen*, since “invisible” spiritual acts glorify God just as much as those that are well-publicized. Sometimes great numbers and large facilities and massive humanitarian outreaches mask a spiritual emptiness, because the Holy Spirit is not the real energy behind them. Christ wanted the disciples to depend on the Holy Spirit and not themselves.

When we start to dig into God’s standards and requirements, we realize how endless and “undoable” they are. The Old Testament Law alone is impossible to keep, even though the Pharisees and others labored night and day to master all the rules and requirements, and ended up with only partial compliance of all that was commanded. God’s standards are out of our reach. This is why God has to step in to help us. It is interesting how much God requires, yet how much assistance He offers to help us. In most cases where requirements are stated in Scripture, there will be nearby declarations of God’s provision for meeting those requirements. There are plenty around who pound the pulpits with what we are SUPPOSED to do, but precious few who will tell us HOW. Or if they tell how, they leave out the most important component in spiritual achievement: the power of the Holy Spirit.

Everything depends on the Holy Spirit. Keathley talks about this in his book, *ABC’s for Christian Growth*, as follows:

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. Though God gives us spiritual gifts and a new capacity for life and truth 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. (Endnote 14)

God’s magnificent power is available to all believers to assist them in finding and executing the will and plan of God. This power was evident in the resurrection of Christ, and is now manifest in the lives of spiritual and maturing believers. 2 Pet. 1:3-4 tells us God’s power gives us all we need, saying this:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very

great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

By the time we finish this section, which I anticipate to be somewhat lengthy, I suspect that readers may become a little seat-weary, and may tire of the repetition of the same thing over and over. But THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR ACCESSING, RECEIVING, AND USING GOD'S POWER. We must understand it completely. Peter told us that this power gives us everything we need for "life and godliness". What could be more essential?

Grace Offers Power. God's power is GIVEN, which is a matter of grace. Grace is God's power expressed in a benevolent way, and *grace* has all the dynamic potency inherent in His *power*. In 1 Cor. 15:10, Paul said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No. I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." So where does the work originate, and what is the sustaining energy to complete it? It is the power and grace of God. Whatever we become or do is by God's grace. If we do a lot, that means we accessed God's power a lot. If we accomplish very little (from the divine perspective), this means we did things our way.

Titus 2:11-12 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age..." What is the backdrop for resisting Satan and the world, and for self-control in our lives? It is the grace of God...or the power of God. Grace teaches us and empowers us, and marks for us the difference between the performance of the Creator and the created. And why are we able to access this power? Because we are redeemed. Look at verse 14 in this same chapter (Titus 2), which says, "...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Because we are God's children, He wants us to become pure, not just through confession, but in all our thoughts and behavior. A "spiritual" man is "eager" to do good, which means that he is "energized" by the Holy Spirit, and is thereby empowered for divine good.

In Titus 3:1b, in the chapter following the one just cited, we are told "to be ready to do whatever is good." To get ready to do good, we must be in fellowship and walking in the Spirit. It is important to see that the good we are asked to do is not our own "good deeds". Grace doesn't depend on our having "worked" as a prerequisite to grace working. When our hearts are right with God, and we have attended our growth, GRACE goes to work. The work of grace is the work of God, and not the result of our abilities and effort. 2 Thess. 1:11-12 confirms what we saw in Titus, as follows:

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace provides the power for good works. We don't fulfill our purpose; the power of God does! We

can take credit for nothing. Our tendency is to believe that , when good things come to us, they come as a result of something we “did”. But James 1:16-18 suggests that good things come from *outside* of us. This passage says the following:

Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

What we have is what God gives us. Ability and beauty do not qualify us for His gifts. Our spiritual status does. This is why the passage above says that we should “not be deceived”, or buy the illusion that good things come to us because we are special. The truth is that all good things come from God because of His grace, which give us much more that we deserve.

We Have Help. If we were the center of life and got gifts because we are great, and achieved big things for God because we are capable, why would the Holy Spirit need to reside within us? He wouldn’t. But we aren’t “great”, or “capable”, so it is a good thing He *is* in us. From a passage we saw earlier, Jn. 14:17, it is clear that He lives within us, as follows: “...the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you [after the ascension of Christ].” He lives within us to HELP us. He has to help us because we are HELPLESS. If He is sent to help us, why would we attempt to live the Christian life without His resources? But we do...virtually all the time. Gal. 2:20 shows that the life that is potential for us is the very “life of Christ”, meaning the Spirit of Christ. This verse says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in [through] me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Our *real* life is not our own, but that which is lived out in us by the Holy Spirit. Any other life is mere “humanity”...a far inferior way to live.

There is a passage in Ephesians that is long, but no reference describes our being strengthened by His power more clearly, so I will quote it in its entirety:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family^a in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:14-21)

The power of the Holy Spirit is within us, representing “glorious riches” from which He “strengthens us with power through His Spirit” so that we can grasp His love, which will “do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”. All of this is done through His power. 2 Cor. 4:7 sizes it up this way, “But

we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” The treasure is the Holy Spirit, and the jars of clay are our bodies. God’s immense power resides within us, to show that any good that is done in our lives will come FROM GOD and NOT FROM US! Phil. 2:13 adds, “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Who is working? God! But sometimes we look at what is required and not the resources we have to meet them.

We will not let up showing you that the power of God is our source for living the life of Christ. 1 Cor. 1:18 says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Follow this with 1 Cor. 2:4-5, which says, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” Without faith in this power we can do nothing. This is stated succinctly in Jn. 15:5, which shows what Jesus said: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me [meaning *in fellowship* with me] and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” We are dealing with an absolute here: Nothing is nothing! We can do, not a few things, or things once in a while...we can do NOTHING without the Spirit of Christ!

Strength Comes Through Faith. OUR strength means nothing. The strong will not prevail. A good example of this is seen in 1 Sam. 17, where we find the notorious Goliath defying Saul’s army. David was a puny little shepherd boy, but he had faith, which enabled him to challenge Goliath, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Sam. 17:26b). David had the courage of faith because he had been in God’s training program (just as we are). David said this to Saul:

Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. (1 Sam. 17:36-37)

David had paid attention to his training. David went down to face Goliath, and at the outset of the showdown, he said to Goliath: “I come against you in the name [power] of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” (1 Sam. 17:45b). He then followed by saying, “...the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves, for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hands.” (1 Sam. 17:46b-47) There was nothing more needed...not horses or weapons or massive ranks of soldiers; God alone was...and is...sufficient.

Ps. 33:16-22 tells us that greatness comes from God alone:

No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from

death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

When we are walking in faith, trusting Him for provision and protection, He will help us. Remember that cleansing restores fellowship, and a growing faith helps us stay there. We are *filled* by the Spirit through confession; we *walk* in the Spirit through ongoing faith. When the Spirit controls us, we can pray with confidence that His love will rest over us as a shelter of safety. His power can shield us from the evil one. Prov. 21:31 lets us know where strength lies: “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” God’s ability, not ours, brings safety and success. Prov. 21:30 confirms this, saying, “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.” Any plan that is not initiated, sponsored, and executed by the Lord is a plan that is “against” Him...because He did not make it. Our wisdom, and insight, and plans, will not yield success without Him, because He is the ONLY ONE who knows how to do it right, and HE ALONE has the power to carry it out.

We are Strong in Him. The Church Age is the age of invisible heroes. Remember: When we speak of “success”, we are looking at it from God’s view-point, and not that of human beings. We are in union with Christ, positionally seated with Him at the right hand of the Father. Our view from this seat gives us a perspective of success that has eternal implications, and not just how much money we will make this year. The true spiritual outlook is not earthly...not limited to our brief moment on this earth, but looks into reaches beyond the universe, into the heavens that supersede what science can measure. All the vastness that stretches out far beyond our imagination came from our Creator, Who easily exceeds all He has created. This is why NOTHING depends on our worth or strength or ability, and why we must trust and yield to the power that gave us our union with Christ...the dynamic force that will give us a resurrection body, as it did to Jesus Christ. God’s power is overflowing into this Age, and we must intercept it to allow it to channel through our lives.

Eph. 6:10 tells us to “be strong”, but then it adds, “in the Lord and in his mighty power”. We have to dress ourselves in His strength; which is not something we can generate within ourselves. He GIVES us His strength, if we RECEIVE it, by following His directions for claiming it. Verses 11-18 in this chapter (Eph. 6) gives us all the clothing we are to don to be engaged in His power. This outfit is called “the armor of God” in verse 11. And this armor consists of the following: the truth of His Word, the righteousness that comes from fellowship with Him, the readiness that exists when we walk in His Spirit, the faith in Him that grows with maturity, the helmet of His divine protection, the “sword of His Spirit” (seen as the Holy Spirit engaging the Scripture WE know), and the prayer of faith. In short, we see our clothes as these: cleanliness, study, prayer, and growth, which we must “put on” by enduring God’s training program. These are the techniques that form the frame for our faith structure, which will be built on by many other methods that will facilitate our maturity; such methods as giving thanks, yielding, acknowledging God, and drawing strength from the gifts of others. (All these are covered in previous books.)

Arrogance Negates God’s Power. When we are absorbed with ourselves...our pleasure, our pros-

perity, our achievement, our worries...we will be depending on ourselves. 2 Cor. 10:4-5 warns against such a mindset, saying this:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

When we are focused on the world, with its lures and problems, we will be choosing to fight the battle ourselves. The weapons God offers have “divine power”, which we will need in order to fight against the “devils schemes” (Eph. 6:11). It seems foolish to attempt our own solutions and to choose weapons of our own limited reason and ability. Why, then, do we count on our own personal ingenuity to live the Christian life? It is because of ARROGANCE! The question boils down to this: Who will we trust? Do we trust God, or do we trust ourselves? Don’t rush your answer to this question, because 99% of the time, we are trusting ourselves. God asks so little of us...just a little faith. We have so far to go.

We cannot boast about anything we have or anything we are. Jer. 9:23-24 sums up the correct position we should have, as follows:

This is what the Lord says: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.

Arrogance has no place in our Christian walk. We can boast only that we know and understand God, through His Word, which reveals to us how great He is and what scumbags we are. When we know God, we understand His power, and we see the need for operating in His grace. That’s the point of everything: knowing God well enough that we operate entirely in the sphere of His grace, where we enjoy his protection from evil and destruction.

References to God’s Power in the Word. The Bible is replete with references to God’s power. Look at the Word; it begins with “God”, followed by the word “created” (Gen. 1:1). His power is evident in the first verse. And the Book ends with “the grace [power] of the Lord Jesus”. (Rev. 22:21a) In between, evidence of God’s power is on every page. Here are some examples of this, some of which we have seen before:

- Eph. 1:16-19—I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.

- Eph. 3:16-19—I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
- Acts 1:8a—But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.
- 1 Cor. 2:4-5—My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.
- Eph. 6:10-11—Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.
- 1 Thess. 1:5a—...because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy spirit and with deep conviction.
- Rom. 4:20-21—Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.
- 2 Pet. 1:3-4—His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
- Col. 1:29—To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Many other verses extol God’s power as the center of all that we have and are. We are dependent on God; He is not dependent on us.

Conclusion. J. Hampton Keathley, in his inimitable style, said the following about God’s power:

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). (Endnote 15)

It is God’s strength, not ours, that “works mightily”.

Chapter 9

Position and Condition

In This Chapter...

A. Distinguishing Position and Condition

B. The New Man

A. Distinguishing Position and Condition

The Paradox of “Position” and “Condition”. We have discussed position and condition so much that more information is hardly needed. But here is a bit more: When we are saved, we are placed into union with Christ, credited with His righteousness, and seated with Him at the right hand of the Father. But look around. See a throne? No. You see, perhaps, an open window and a couple of trees nearby and a highway in the distance. But no throne. So where we? Where we are NOT. This is a paradox, which can be confusing. The distinction between where we are physically and where we are in our eternal placement is a little hard to keep track of. We ARE on the earth, and yet we ARE with Jesus. Our existence is a dichotomy, with a “position” in heaven, and a “condition” here on the ground.

Our “position” is like a new home. The home is finished and waiting to be occupied, but we have not moved in yet. There are things to do first, such as picking out the furniture, setting up movers, and so on. Our name is already on the deed and our address already shows as the new residence. But we are still located elsewhere physically. We anticipate that when we move into the new home, it will be a place where we will have conveniences and privileges unique to us personally: a place to rest, eat, sleep, fellowship, and so on. Until we move into the home, however, we are without its conveniences. It has been constructed, but we have not occupied it yet, and we are looking forward to the move.

“Condition” can be illustrated as our status while we are still *outside* our home, waiting to move in. Temporary shelter may be offered, but we may not choose to stay there, because we have a better idea where to spend our time. And we may not be willing to meet the conditions for staying in the sheltered place, because a bath may be required and we may not be inclined to clean up. So our place of existence as we await the big move is either sheltered and cared for inside, or exposed to the elements on the outside without the protection of the shelter.

Recap: Our “home” is our unchangeable position in heaven, which has been staked out by our saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This position is characterized by our union in Him. The “shelter” is the place we are either in, or out of, depending on our spiritual condition. We are in the shelter if we are in fellowship, and out of the shelter if we are out of fellowship. Being in the shelter hinges on our “cleanliness”, which correlates with having our sins confessed. We must be clean to enter the shelter.

Distinguishing Position and Condition in Scripture. When we look at a passage in the Bible, we must decide whether it is dealing with position, or condition, or both. For example, Heb. 10:10 talks about sanctification, also known as “spiritual cleanliness”. This verse says, “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Being “made holy” means that we have been cleansed of our sins. Verse 14 follows this up by saying, “...because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy”. So we have been “made perfect forever” (or cleansed and declared righteous FOR ALL TIME AND ETERNITY), yet we are “being made holy”, a process that is ongoing. Here’s the explanation: We are “completely cleansed” forever, yet we are “being cleansed”. This shows that cleansing takes place in two genres: one is eternal; the other is temporal. We are eternally cleansed through salvation; we are temporally cleansed through

confession and restoration to fellowship. This is an example of a scriptural distinction between *position* and *condition*.

We want to mention, parenthetically, that the sins that are not cleansed during our lives here on earth are automatically expunged at our departure, since our sins will not be judged. Our “condition” will never transfer to our “position”. This includes any sin involving legalism, or rule-keeping. The removal of our sin/legalism record is like a person who is attending school. His record reflects behavior problems until he graduates, at which time the “discipline file” is emptied. So it is with our sins. When we graduate from earth to heaven, the behavior file is discarded.

Jn. 10:10b tells us why Jesus came, and illustrates the dual application that we see in many scriptures. This verse says, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. Notice that there are two things Jesus came to provide: 1) life, and 2) life “to the full”. We are given (eternal) life when we accept the gospel message; we get the “full” (temporal) life when we advance in faith, and walk in the Spirit. We can have “life” (position), but not have a “full life” (condition). It is the Savior’s intent that we should have the most phenomenal life imaginable!

Final Notes on Position and Condition. There is a financial analogy that we can use to elucidate the ideas of position and condition. When a person has a million dollars in a trust fund, he or she will already be a millionaire ON RECORD, though they won’t be able to touch the money until the fund has matured and conditions for its release have been met. The money is his or hers alone, awaiting for a time of “fulfillment” when he or she can claim it. As believers, we have a trust fund of eternal life. It is ours, though we can’t access it until our time on earth is finished. Then we will enjoy the full benefits of the life that already belongs to us. In the meantime, we can draw on the trust fund for essential expenses, meaning that we can pull from God’s provisions, while we are waiting to occupy our place in heaven.

When we look at a trust fund waiting to be claimed, we see a picture of our position, the benefits of which await the completion of our lives. When we look at occasional withdrawals from the fund, we see an illustration of the way grace is dispensed into our experience when we follow the proper steps for getting it. There is nothing more to be done regarding position; it is ours. But there is much to do concerning our condition, which is why we are being trained.

As you read Scripture or hear lessons on the Bible, take time to evaluate the passage you are studying to determine whether it deals with position...or condition. This will help you know how to apply what you learn. Remember, position is immutable and will never be taken away, while condition is fluctuating, existing as either a state of “spirituality” or “carnality”. In our “condition”, either the Holy Spirit will control our hearts, or the sinful nature will. There is no gray area of being “sort-of” spiritual or “somewhat” carnal. These conditions are mutually exclusive and absolute.

In the next section, we want to see two states of our *condition* in the form of the “new man” and the “old man”, and cite the differences between these two.

B. The New Man

Defining the “New Man”. The general view of the new man is that he is static and permanent, and that he is the “good” part of us that abides after salvation. This view sees the “new man” as a spiritual apparatus that we receive when we become believers, which enables us to do right things. Another way commonly used to describe the new man is that he is a new “spirit” within us that has a propensity for good. BUT...I believe this: The only thing NEW about us at salvation, apart from eternal realities (e.g., union with Christ), is the presence of the Holy Spirit within us; there is no change about US beyond this. We are *not new in ourselves*; we just have a new Resident, Who is the Spirit. He will always indwell us, even though, as we have seen before, He may not always control us.

Qualifying the New Man. The “new man” is not a make-over that gives us residual power to combat the sinful nature, the world, and Satan. We NEVER have power to combat sin apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. And the only way His power will work in us is through fellowship. If we are controlled by the Spirit, we WILL NOT SIN! (See 1 Jn. 3:9 and read *Bible Basics on Living by God’s Standards*, “Fellowship in John’s First Epistle”, p. 59.) But we are still FREE to sin, and we will; therefore, we must keep on “rebounding” back into fellowship to keep the Spirit in control. He alone, not the new man, can help us control sin. Don’t forget that faith is in the mix, allowing us to *keep* the Spirit in control.

It is not as though the “new man” does not exist. It does exist, but NOT as many believe, as a brilliant, internal star of righteousness that is part of our internal make-up. The new man is found in our hearts, yes, but HE IS THE PART OF THE HEART THAT IS OCCUPIED AND CONTROLLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT! Apart from the control of the Spirit, the new man is dormant and useless, and is virtually non-existent. This is because—if the Spirit is not controlling our hearts—our sinful nature is. And if the sinful nature is in charge, the “new man”, as it were, goes dark. *The life of the new man is the Holy Spirit*, and the new man’s spiritual potential and potency relies completely on God. I am trying to cut off those who say that we acquire inherent goodness at some point, independent of the One Who is good. We cannot allow ourselves to have the most fleeting thought that we are somehow *meritorious* of God’s grace and favor, apart from our use of what He alone gives.

The “new man” is powerless by himself. He needs the power of the Holy Spirit to be improved and built up. And never can he operate independently of the Spirit to accomplish good things. We live as “new men” only by using techniques for spirituality and maturity, which increase the power of God in our lives. And this is what God wants. As “new men”, or believers led by the Spirit, we will *be* righteous and *behave* righteously. 1 Jn. 3:7 confirms this, saying, “Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.” To the degree that we engage His righteousness, we are righteous. Otherwise, there would be no righteousness. Paul said, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (Rom. 7:18) We cannot do good, because “sin” (a sinful nature) lives within us. (See Rom. 7:20.) Rom. 7:22-24 verifies this notion, saying the following:

For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

No "new man" can help us fight the evil within us. Only the Spirit of Christ can help, as we see in the next verse in Rom. 7 (verse 25): "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Col. 3:9-11 gives us a picture of the workings of the new man. This passage says this:

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

When the old self (sinful nature) is taken out of the driver's seat and the new self (heart controlled by the Spirit) is placed in command, growth and maturity can take place. This is what we see in the phrase, "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator". Notice the word "here" in verse 11. Here means "in this place of fellowship", where "Christ is all". When He is "all", we will go on to produce the fruit that we see in verse 12 (still in Col. 3), which says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." This is obviously the fruit of the Spirit...the product of our fellowship with Him. As we continue to grow, the Holy Spirit will use His truth to renew our minds (as in verse 10 above) and give us correct thinking and perspective.

Paul said, in 1 Cor. 15:10b, "...yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." He knew that goodness did not come from him, but from God's power and grace. This rules out any operation of the new man as a self-sustaining force for good. You see, the new man is not a "man" at all, but a (Holy) Spirit, and it His presence that is the new part of our inner self. Without Him, we are inept and bound for failure, because supernatural evil can only be resisted and defeated with "supernatural" force, and the most we can generate within ourselves...is "natural" force. This is true of "goodness", as well. Supernatural good cannot come from a "natural" man.

Conclusion. We have supernatural divinity within us, and if we learn to confess faithfully, and follow this with prayer, study, and endurance, we will acquire the skills that come with HIS assets. These will enable us to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, and will empower us for divine good. When the Holy Spirit is in charge, the "new man" can go to work.

Chapter 10

Outcomes of Spirituality and Maturity

In This Chapter...

- A. Exaltation of God*
- B. Changes in the Heart*
- C. Operation of Spiritual Gifts*
- D. Benefits of Spirituality and Maturity*

A. Exaltation of God

Outcome of Faith. There are many outcomes that are derived from a burgeoning faith and a walk in the Spirit. One important outcome has to do with God being reverently recognized by us, resulting in His being glorified. We have much yet to say about God's being glorified through our faith in Him. Here is a start: God is glorified, not by what we accomplish for Him, nor in any formal compliance with His standards, but in our trusting Him and His Word by faithfully using His grace systems. He is glorified by the results of His Son's work, which is witnessed initially when we believe in Christ, and after that when we exercise faith in His work by absorbing and relying on grace provisions.

So we begin this chapter with the exaltation of God, which takes place primarily by our receiving His gifts and assets of grace. Looking forward to the rest of this chapter, we will be looking at the actual site of change within us as we mature and rely increasingly on His strength to sustain us. Then we will look at positive outcomes that are derived when we fulfill our purpose through the operation of our spiritual gifts. And finally we will provide a discussion of the benefits of life close to God.

Exalting God's Name and His Word. We will take our view of God's being exalted from a single verse, which shows what God wants to elevate more than anything else. This verse is Ps. 138:2, which says, "I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." Exalting God's name and His Word is "above all things"; this encapsulates our greatest mission and purpose. To fulfill our purpose, we will "bow down", meaning we will submit to His superior will and strength (also known as walking by faith); and we will "praise His name", meaning we will bring glory to Him (an outcome of walking in the Spirit).

There are two terms used in this verse, each of them encasing a primary area of God's exaltation of Himself. The terms are these: 1) His name, and 2) His Word. Each of these has implications for us. First of all, God's "name" is His essence, or the expression of His power and grace. He wants His power to be recognized, and His grace to be accepted. This honors Him and pleases Him, and fulfills His purpose for mankind, which is to demonstrate His character before the angels. Any time we see God's "name" being used, we know we are close to the topic of fellowship and spirituality, because it is *in His name* that we are to walk...or in His power. To verify that "in His name" is connected with God's power, see the following verses: Lk. 24:47; Acts 3:16; Jn. 20:31; Matt. 12:21; Jn 1:12; Rom. 10:12-13. The point we want to make about God exalting His name is that our fellowship with Him allows Him to bring about in us and through us those conditions which glorify Him. This is more than an outcome; it is God's will, and our reason for existing.

The second area of God's exalting Himself is His "word". When Ps. 138:2 uses the term, "your word", it implies more than a Book. It is surrounded by a larger concept of the *power* behind the Word, and it points to the *impact* of God's message about this power on those who absorb it and follow it. The power of the Word is found in its Author, the Holy Spirit, Who takes the truth that the Word presents, implants it within seeking believers, and then empowers its implementation. As the Word is assim-

lated and applied, it has the effect of CHANGING the one who is taking it in. The change takes place in the heart, where new ways of looking at life are developed, and new divine connections become strengthened through greater faith. In short, the effects of proper inculcation of the Word result in an advancing maturity. When we absorb and apply truth, we become more convinced than ever that God is Who He says He is, that we are made for Him, and that He is the source for everything in life that is worthwhile. In short, our faith gets stronger, and He is glorified...or exalted.

Exalting God in our Walk. Getting stronger in our faith, and walking out our lives in His strength, is not a part-time job. If we are going to glorify God, we cannot attend to our spiritual walk only occasionally, or casually, or as a side-interest...it is our LIFE! Our spiritual call will not be satisfied by slices of time given to God, or fleeting thoughts of God; our commitment to God goes on every day, all day long. We can look forward to the time when we reach a higher level of maturity. Then we will be able to conduct the pragmatic affairs of our lives with great efficiency, and still maintain our preoccupation with the Holy Spirit of Christ. A mature believer can attend to his spiritual life full-time, and never miss a beat in the material world. But we cannot balance these two worlds without reaching a level of *faith* that allows us to sustain spirituality, while functioning in a practical world. When our faith is strong, we will maintain our focus on God, regardless of the demands of our lives. But that takes training.

Heb. 3:13 calls for us to “encourage one another DAILY, as long as it is called Today,” (emphasis mine) and this is done so that “none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (also verse 13). Every day, as long as it is “today”, we are to conduct our spiritual operations with focus and singleness of purpose. There is no time off and no occasion for letting up. Our schedule for living the Christian life is every day, all day long. Christ said the believer must “take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk. 9:23) The Christian walk is “daily”. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to be responsible for themselves, “so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders.” (1 Thess. 4:12) Once again...”daily”. Deut. 17:18b-19 called upon a king to do the following:

...write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life [daily] so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.

Once more...daily! Deut. 19:9 adds this: “I command you TODAY—to love the Lord your God and to walk ALWAYS in his ways...” (Emphasis mine) He is not just issuing a command pertinent only to the day He spoke it, but setting a decree that we are to love God and walk in His ways *today*. Our walk is a constant requirement, with no time when it is okay to walk in the flesh. This is our job. It is also our privilege, and an outcome of attention to growth and fellowship. So being spiritual and maturing are each a means to an end, and—indeed—they are the “end” itself. The “goal” is also the way to reach the goal. The outcome is the same as the condition that brings it. Spirituality and maturity result in spirituality and maturity. The more we learn and grow and walk in the Spirit, the more we believe and the more our walk is ordered by the Spirit.

B. Changes in the Heart

The Make-up of the Heart. One of the outcomes of spirituality and maturity is a change in our own hearts. The “heart” is headquarters for all we are internally. It consists of the mind, the soul, the spirit, the “heart” itself, the Holy Spirit, and our sinful nature. The exact lines of demarcation from each of these to the next is hard to distinguish, but we have shown what the Scripture says about each of them in our book, *Bible Basics on Walking in the Spirit*. See the chapter, “The Internal Make-up of Man”, on page 3, and the chart on pages 16-17. The heart is shown there as an entity separate from the mind, soul and spirit, even though it is mentioned as the central component of our internal make-up. It is better, I have realized, for the heart to be understood as an incorporated unit which enfolds *all* of our non-material parts.

The Prospect for Change. For our lives to change, our hearts must change. The contents of our minds, souls, spirits, and “hearts” must be filled with divine content, and stripped, by degrees, of a worldly perspective. The good thing is, we are not alone in this quest to purify our hearts and replace our view with God’s. In Ps. 139:23-24, David prayed this: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” He wanted God to look into his heart and evaluate its content. He wanted impurities to be removed, so that He could have the leading of the Holy Spirit in his life. A seeking believer will pray this prayer. He will ask God to purify his heart through forgiveness, so that the Holy Spirit can direct his path. This is what we are told in Prov. 3:5, which says the following: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” When our faith is strengthened, we will lean on Him and acknowledge Him. Our hearts will be gaining a new perspective of clarity and certainty; our hearts will be changing.

As we concluded in our study on the heart from the book cited above, the spirit within the heart is the point of contact, or the residential address, for the Holy Spirit. The effects of the Spirit’s presence are felt in the soul and the mind, because they are in direct line with the spirit. In my view, the spirit leans toward the Holy Spirit, whereas the soul and the mind lean toward the sinful nature. (Proof of this will have to be developed in a separate study.) My view runs something like this: As the mind takes in the doctrines of Scripture, it becomes renewed. This influences the soul toward greater focus on spiritual matters, allowing the spirit to relax and enjoy its relationship with the Holy Spirit. Conversely, when the mind and the soul are pulled into the grip of the sinful nature, the spirit is influenced negatively, and the power of the Holy Spirit is cut off. The objective is to keep the mind focused on the Word, to enable transformation through the teaching and enabling work of the Spirit.

Forces That Cause Change, or Resist Change. When the mind, the soul, and the spirit are purified (cleansed), they can occupy a peaceful relationship with the Holy Spirit, and spiritual progress can be made. If they continue in an impure state, progress is halted or reversed, and the entire heart is sullied and dark. The Holy Spirit is there within us, and the sinful nature is also there. These are mutu-

ally exclusive forces, and one or the other will be in control of our minds, souls, and spirits. In essence, our hearts will be dominated either by *our* nature...or *God's*. When the Spirit dominates, we move forward; when our nature is in charge, we move backward. This is suggested in 1 Cor. 2:12-14, which says the following:

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Moving Toward the Light. The difference between *light* and *darkness* in the heart is the Holy Spirit. He lives within us, yet He is thwarted from controlling us most of the time. We are still *creatures* of darkness, living in a *kingdom* of darkness. But we have believed in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and we are seeking with all our being the pathway to the light. Our hearts want to be changed; we want to get closer to God. But it is not easy. Does this mean we can give up? No! We must look again and again to the Word, and to the techniques it gives, and keep getting back up when we fail or get discouraged. We must *endure* for our hearts to change, and the road that leads to newness is narrow and bumpy and crooked.

Here are some references that confirm the things we have said so far in this section regarding the immaterial parts of man: 1 Cor. 14:14-15; Eph. 4:23; 1 Th. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; Rom. 2:29, 6:16, 1 Cor. 2:11; Gal. 6:18, Phil. 3:3. These are informative passages and should be included as part of a study on our inner make-up.

As changes take place in the heart through growth, we move from darkness toward the light. The darkness represents carnality and ignorance; the light represents purity and enlightenment. These are two entirely different worlds, yet their difference boils down to a fine line, and that line is drawn right down the middle of our hearts. On one side we have sin and self-reliance; on the other we have righteousness and faith in God. By flooding the mind with truth, and applying it, we enter the *good* side and leave the *bad* side behind. We step across the line from darkness to the light. This is where we trust and live free under God's protective and loving care, and where we shine as beacons of His grace.

The two worlds can be seen as positive (light)...and negative (darkness). We separate these into two categories of descriptors that show the differences between them, as follows:

Light	Darkness
Spiritual/in fellowship with Holy Spirit	Carnal/controlled by the flesh
Study of the word	The Word ignored
Growth/faith in God	Stagnation/reversionism/self-trust
Divine Power	Human power
Resistance of Satan	Servant of Satan
Trials/testing	Discipline
Divine view-point	Human/worldly view-point
Love for God	Love for self and the world

When we walk in the light, and operate in God's kingdom of spirituality and fellowship, we will have a spirit of love for God and an attitude of faith in His Word. These are the perspectives of a changed heart. In the darkness, there is no help, only a hopeless, endless, fruitless chasing after the wind. This is all we get from a heart that remains dark. In the light, there is all the help that heaven can give.

C. Operation of Spiritual Gifts

Our Spiritual Gifts are Chosen by God. You will benefit more from this section if you take time to read a chapter entitled "Gifts", found on p. 53 in the book, *Bible Basics on Maturity*. A thorough discussion of gifts and their operation is provided there. In this current study, we want to look at gifts, not so much in regard to what they are and how they work, but at "why" they are given, and "when" they are supposed to work. The gifts we are given are chosen by God, but—like any gift—the receiver can make specific requests of the giver. Then it is up to the giver to decide what will be given. We have a choice about most things in regard to our Christian lives, but gifts are determined completely by God for His sovereign purposes.

The Purpose and Function of Gifts. 1 Pet. 4:10 says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." The purpose of gifts is to strengthen fellow believers. We "edify" or "build up" one another through the operation of our gifts. We talk a lot about our purpose and our walk in the Spirit and maturity and so on, but the *target* of all we do spiritually is the development and implementation of our gifts. These are our functional specialties, ordained by God and directed by the Holy Spirit, so that the church organism, the *body*, can complete its mission of evangelism and glorifying God. By using our gifts, we contribute to the working of the body.

That is the *purpose* for gifts. But there is another aspect of divine justification for gifts, and it is this: The function of *different* gifts for each one of us prevents believers from tripping over each other trying to get the job done. I believe that God gives us gifts to distinguish our roles. On any team there are positions, and each player plays his own position, and NOT that of the other players. If all players try to

play the same position, or if positions are randomly and whimsically chosen, the team will never get organized, and it will never win.

Each of us cannot do *everything*, and *all* of us cannot do the *same thing*, though that is what pastors often seem to encourage. They want everyone to perform all available gifts. For example, everyone is supposed to be a prayer warrior, an evangelist, a church leader, a gifted “giver”, and a ready volunteer for any church job that needs to get done. Very little attention is given to the operation of specific gifts operated by maturing, individual believers. The general practice is to get someone to do something because it needs to get done and because they are willing to do it. The result is either a church full of babies running around trying to do things for which they are not equipped, or a crowd of partially-mature believers trying to do jobs that are assigned randomly, leaving the Holy Spirit out altogether.

Training Precedes the Operation of Gifts. When it comes to the operation of gifts, a new believer can’t be expected to function right away without training and growth. It is foolish to expect baby believers...or worse, carnal believers...to complete meaningful, God-directed work. The work must be completed by divinely-competent, God-appointed, Spirit-filled believers, who operate within the scope of differentiated spiritual gifts. The assumption is that training has preceded the actuation and function of each gift. Some say we receive our gifts at salvation, but I have found basis for believing that—even if this is true—gifts *do not operate* until maturity is sufficient to enable their operation. (See *Bible Basics on Maturity*, cited above.)

Lk. 6:40 lets us know that training will take place first, followed by the operation of our gifts. This verse says, “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” When we are fully trained, we can function in our gifts, but not before. We can only be still and learn; then we will be qualified to exercise our gifts.

Our job is to GROW before we GO...or prepare before we report for duty. To serve, we need to acquire spiritual wisdom and power, but until that time we must wait on God’s promotion to place us into service. Preparation is not an instantaneous process, but it will come, *if we will grow!* Remember also that the exercise of our gifts may be *visible* or *invisible*. It is not our concern whether our gifts are highly-recognized by other believers, or whether our deeds are spoken of in admiration. We will probably be surprised at the Bema seat of Christ, how many believers who were quiet and hardly noticed will be the ones who get the biggest rewards, because they consistently grew and then faithfully served in the role God chose for them.

Those who are trained have been guided by the words of Scripture that tell us how to live. They have allowed the Word to prod them along the path of maturity, and have accepted the urging of God’s truths. Therefore, their minds have been renewed, and unfruitful thinking has been washed away by the teachings of the Word. Eccl. 12:11 says, “The words of the wise are like goads [prods], their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd.” When the sayings are “collected”, they will provide clear and certain direction. The problem is not that correct information is not available; it is that there is insufficient interest in accessing it. Therefore, very few believers mature and function as God intends in the operation of their gifts. This reduces the number of believers who are

maturing, because no one is being properly “built up” by gifted brothers and sisters.

Peter understood the importance of commitment, preparation, and maturity in the operation of gifts. In a message to pastors and elders regarding the exercise of their gifts, he admonished the following:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve... (1 Pet. 5:1-2)

Peter is speaking, not only to church leaders, but to all mature believers...those who are prepared to use their gifts. They are already scheduled to “share in the glory to be revealed”, alluding to the rewards they will receive when their works are evaluated. They are “willing” to serve, because their hearts are in the right place, and because they are fulfilling the requirement to be as “God wants them to be”. And they are “eager to serve”. All of us can reach this place of service, if we will remain committed to our growth regimen. And notice the ones that God will promote: the humble! This is what is seen in 1 Pet. 5:6, which follows the verses just quoted above: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand [training program] that he may lift you up in due time.” The humble ones are the ones who are given “grace” (v. 5); not so the ones who preen and peacock around their spiritual (or other) kingdom to receive the approval and approbation of man. These may appear to be successful, but they are not serving God.

The Timing for the Operation of our Gifts. The timing of the exercise of our gifts will await our maturity and “willingness” to serve. We must be willing to occupy the role God has chosen for us, disregarding the prideful prompts that make us think we are all leaders and that we should all clamor for high-profile roles in the church. We don’t even have to decide our roles until God directs them. And we will know what they are in due time, if we will keep moving toward greater understanding and maturity. The exact timing of our launch into service is based on our thirst and volition for God, not on what we want, or on some specific event that we think should take place. We can ask for this gift or that, but it is always the one who trusts all outcomes to God that will see the benefits and rewards of the gift or gifts that God has chosen to give.

The Condition Required for the Operation of our Gifts. Finally, it is good to know that your place in the church and your role in the kingdom of light will not be occupied or fulfilled by following a list of do’s and don’ts. These will get you *nothing*. The operation of our gifts will not be aided or strengthened by satisfying some external row of hoops that have to be jumped through, but—pay attention to this—the operation of our gifts will be enabled and enhanced **ONLY BY OUR GROWING IN GOD’S KNOWLEDGE AND GRACE!!** God Himself may require hoops, such as seminary training, but **HE WILL DETERMINE** when and where the hoops will need to be jumped through. We must **FOLLOW HIM**, not lead. He will direct our paths, if we will keep on searching. What will follow automatically, if we choose His path and use His methods, is the proper generation and profitable operation of our gifts. And God will be glorified thereby.

D. Benefits of Spirituality and Maturity

Waiting on the Benefits. The benefits of spirituality and maturity are endless, so we will feature only some of the most important ones in this discussion. We could present these in list form, but some of them require more-extensive examination than others, which would not fit a list format. So we will take these up in a less-pithy form, and include details on each benefit as the Spirit leads.

Our benefits are embedded in God's plan. He will prosper us to the degree that our pattern fits His will. Once that is accomplished, which is always a work in progress, we must wait on God's timing for the benefits to come. More now than ever in history, *waiting* is a skill that is absent. In this high-speed generation, little patience is shown to allow events to unfold, either naturally...or supernaturally. Even when it comes to our spiritual lives...and events related to our spiritual walk...if we don't see *results* NOW, we assume that nothing is happening. This is why we are told to *wait* on the Lord. Ironically, it is when we are waiting that things happen. I believe that many times God is waiting on us to *wait on Him* before He moves.

The Timing of Blessings. The timing of blessings in our lives...indeed, the timing for all events...is determined by God as part of His plan. For us to get into God's rhythm is a part of His will for us, but this will not happen without cleanliness and trust...fellowship and faith. When we reach maturity, we will know that good things come to those who wait. Patience, then, is an outcome of growth. When we have learned enough about God's ways to perceive what He is doing, and are close enough to Him to be a part of it, we will be at peace with our lives, because we will have come to know that everything is in God's hands, and that He will order events in ways that fit His plan. Things will happen at times that are best suited to His purpose. Eccl. 1:1-8 lets us know that timing is a component in everything that happens, as follows:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

God knows the best time for every event and outcome, and He causes things to occur when the time is right. Eccl. 3:11a says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time." Everything will be beautiful when the timing is right. If the timing is off, or if we rush God, the beauty will not be there. This means that everything in our lives will be beautiful if we are maturing and walking in the Spirit, thus allowing God to honor our faith by *timing the outcomes* in ways that benefit us. Rom. 8:28 says, "But we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose." (Endnote 16) When we (the "called") *love* God, meaning we are mature and spiritual, we can rest assured that God will be working all things together for our benefit. This promise is not for

carnal believers, but for those who are spiritual. We can have confidence in every circumstance of life...if we are following the highway to holiness.

The Benefit of a “Hot Line”. One of the benefits of growth and fellowship is that we can call on God when we are in trouble. Whatever is going on, we can appeal to God for respite and relief. Ps. 50:15 assures us of this: “...and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” When we are absorbing and applying God’s Word, we can expect Him to deliver us. This will come at a time that is exactly right and will produce the greatest benefit for us. We cannot, however, expect such a rescue if we have not been committed to study and growth. Without such commitment, our hearts will not persevere in a search for a closer walk with God, and our walk will be sodden and laborious.

Prosperity is a Benefit of Service and Following the Word. Job 36:11-12 gives us a desirable outcome of spirituality and maturity (and the undesirable outcome of the alternative), saying this:

If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword, and die without knowledge.

“Prosperity and contentment” are what we get when we “obey” (study and apply) and “serve” (live and function in the power of the Spirit). As long as we are alive, God has a job for us to do, and we are all capable of doing great things. But this will take *preparation* and *power*. If we refuse to listen, however, we will not have “knowledge”, and will die sooner than we had to.

Help with Sin is a Benefit. Another benefit: A mature believer will be enabled to deal with sin. We see an example of this in James 3:2, which says, “We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says [for example], he is a perfect [mature] man, able to keep his whole body in check.” Get this: A MATURE believer is the ONLY one who has the advantage of controlling sin, even to the point that he avoids sins of the tongue, which are almost impossible to stop. Dominion over sin is not for the immature or carnal; it is for the mature and spiritual. Some believe we get this dominion at salvation, but this is not so. We can never assume that we have everything we need right at the beginning of our Christian lives, or that there is nothing more to be done, just because we are saved. There is much to do before we reach a level of faith that enables us to rely completely on God to help us win our battle over the forces of evil. We must *keep moving* toward maturity, even when we stumble. We must confess and continue on, regardless of our failure. We must never stop.

Wisdom is a Benefit. Prov. 3:18 cites wisdom as an outcome that can be traced directly to a mature stature. This verse says, “She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.” With wisdom we get understanding that leads us to the good life, a life filled with blessings. This kind of wisdom comes through concentrated study, prayer, trust, and endurance, all taking place within a context of cleanliness. These are the effects...and outcomes...of wisdom derived from growth.

The acquisition of wisdom is both a cause and a benefit of spirituality and advancing maturity. 1 Cor.

2:13 tells us, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” The Holy Spirit has been given to us so that we can learn His ways, and KNOW WHAT GOD GIVES TO US. Through the Spirit we learn about the *grace that gives*; and the resultant knowledge of grace that we acquire is *wisdom*. Wisdom then points back to the Spirit, Who is the source and energy for all good things. This is what we see in Prov. 8:10-21, which is worth quoting in its entirety, as follows:

Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. “I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power. By me kings reign and rulers issue decrees that are just; by me princes govern, and nobles—all who rule on earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me and making their treasuries full.

Wisdom is a treasure that we can acquire that will make us rich. But this wealth does not represent material or monetary assets, but divine assets of grace, whereby our thought-life and spiritual outlook are enriched. From wisdom we get knowledge more valuable than gold (v. 10), good judgment concerning sin (vv. 12-13), power (v. 14), justice (v. 15), God’s love (v. 17), wealth of knowledge (v. 18), productivity (v. 19), righteousness (v. 20), and other kinds of wealth (v. 21). This is what the acquisition of wisdom will do for us. With maturity and its partner spirituality, we will reach heights of living that can be attained in no other way.

The Benefit of Directions from God. Another benefit for the believer who is maturing and spiritual is that he will get directions for His life from the Lord. Eccl. 9:1 says, “So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands...” The “righteous” are those whose sins are forgiven through confession and the “wise” are the ones who have matured. What better hands could our lives be in than God’s. And if our lives are in God’s hands, He will guide us in what we do. Clear direction comes from fellowship (righteousness), and maturity (wisdom), which lead to divine production (what we do in God’s hands).

Displaying the Character of Christ is a Benefit. One of the benefits of maturity and the leading of the Holy Spirit is that we acquire the character of Christ, with its prevailing quality being that of “love”. The love that comes through us is expressed toward all believers, but I believe it is *concentrated* in the exercise of our gifts. When we love, we share our best, and our best is found in the distinct gifts God has given us for serving others. The spirit of love comes from the control of the Spirit and the application of Scripture, which gives us a divine compassion that we cannot explain and that we cannot manufacture on our own. Even if we “like” and “enjoy” people, this is no substitute for the Spirit-driven and purposeful engagement of love in the form of our gifts, as we use them to edify others and

encourage them toward maturity. It is important not to become “scattered” or confused in our purpose. When we are operating within our gifts, we can be sure we are centered in God’s will for us.

Love is a Benefit. Col. 3:12-14 gives us the following about love:

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

As suggested in the previous section, love is “Spirit-driven”. I am convinced that the overriding purpose of love is the operation of our gifts. Our gifts will not be effective, if love is not behind them. (This has all kinds of fellowship implications, as we have seen previously.) How can we teach or encourage or help or serve if we behave in ways that are uncaring, unkind, haughty, rough, and impatient? There is an incongruity between exercising our gifts and displaying any attitude besides love. Notice the last verse in the passage we just quoted. It says, “love binds them all together.” Love, which comes from our fellowship with the Spirit, is the glue that binds all our gifts together in a meaningful and efficient whole, whereby each of us is helping others to move toward maturity. In so doing, we build an organic mechanism that Satan is helpless to stop, and that the world cannot overcome. This is how “church” works...all of us coming together, sharing the assets of our gifts...building each other up for the mission we have been given. This is why we train...so that each of us can make our contribution to God’s army as we march forward together...into the fray.

Lk. 6:27-38 gives us some good information on love, calling on us to do the hardest thing of all: love our enemies. This is given to show the lengths we must go to in order for the church to function smoothly and productively. Competition and greed and pride and all the rest are prominent in ANY church, and enmity can be formed quickly behind all the smiling facades and flattering words. The heart of this passage, in my judgment, is found in verse 37, which says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure [measurer] you use, it will be measured to you.” This means that the same measuring device used to give out whatever it is we’re giving will be used to measure what we get back. Many preachers use this verse to shake the branches for contributions to the church, but this verse is not talking about money; it is talking about *love*. (Check the context. At the time these words were spoken—the church did not even exist, so the point of this verse cannot be about giving money. The topic is LOVE.) When we give love away, mostly in the form of edification of other believers, we get it back, meaning we are edified as well. And when we “love our enemies”, that is our best chance for getting them to come to, or to return to, the Lord. The kind of love alluded to in Luke 6 is the attitude of only the most mature believers.

Grace for Death is a Benefit. Another surprising benefit from spirituality and maturity is the grace and peace that enshrouds us at the time of our death. Regardless of our external conditions at the time of death, if we are walking in the Spirit and continuing to trust in God and His Word, we will experience a concentrated form of grace that will turn the cursing of death into a blessing. This is a special

time, when grace is poured out in exceptional measure as we transition from this world to the next. Many examples of this can be seen in Scripture. Here are a few:

- David. 1 Chron. 29:26-28—“David son of Jesse was king over all Israel. He ruled over Israel forty years—seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. He died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth and honor. His son Solomon succeeded him as king.”
- Job. Job 42:16-17—“After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so he died, old and full of years.”
- Others. Hebrews 11 gives several examples, as seen here:
 - o Abel. Heb. 11:4.
 - o Enoch. Heb. 11:5-6.
 - o Noah. Heb. 11:7.
 - o Abraham. Heb. 11:8-12.
 - o Isaac. Heb. 11:20.
 - o Jacob. Heb. 11:21.
 - o Joseph. Heb. 11:22.
 - o Moses. Heb. 11:24-28.
 - o Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel, and the prophets. Heb. 11:32-38.

Heb. 11:13a pretty well sums up the lives and deaths of these spiritual giants, saying, “All these people were still living by faith when they died.” God watches over us in life, as per Ps. 33:18a: “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous.” And He will love us through our deaths, as is beautifully described in Ps. 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints [also translated “godly ones”, meaning mature believers].” The death of a mature believer is a wonderful experience, regardless of how it looks to the outside world. Grace operates on the *inside*, and that is where death can be horrible...or fantastic.

Strength is a Benefit. From maturity and spirituality we also get *strength*. 1 Cor. 1:4-9 assures us of this:

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

When we are living righteously (e.g., in our “speaking”) and acquiring wisdom leading to maturity (as

seen in “all our knowledge”), we will be “strong”.

Endurance is a Benefit. Spirituality and maturity give us the endurance we need to bear any suffering that is brought to us as part of our training. We will cover this in detail in the next chapter. Training brings suffering, and by suffering we are trained. But suffering is sugar-coated for the maturing and spiritual believer, however bitter the pill, as God turns cursing to blessing. Conversely, for the carnal believer, suffering is just pain and agony. Better, by far, to suffer as a mature Christian. 1 Pet. 2:18-21 describes the attitude toward suffering that is maintained by a mature, spiritual believer:

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

The example of Christ in His suffering is not that He grimly reconciled Himself to the pain of the cross, but that He had absolute faith in His Father through every step and every second of it, which gave Him the perspective of purpose and joy, even in His most agonizing moments of excruciating pain. (Incidentally, this does not apply to the three hours of His *spiritual* death, when he suffered beyond description, because He was *separated* from His Father. And since He suffered this pain for us—believers will NEVER have to experience it.) When we mature, thus becoming more “Christ-like”, we will be able to patiently endure suffering as He did—in faith—and we will be commended by God.

We have seen other benefits of spirituality and maturity, and we will see others before we are through. There is no way to sufficiently express and exclaim the magnitude of benefits provided along this path that leads to fellowship and growth. This is the road to the abundant life, and the way to honor our great and gracious God.

Chapter 11

The Training Program

In This Chapter...

A. Prosperity and Suffering for the Righteous and the Wicked

B. Do Miracles Strengthen Us?

C. Responses to Suffering

D. Grace before Judgment

E. Temptation

F. The Gifts and the Giver

G. The Lessons of Life

H. Revisiting Discipline

I. Perfection through Suffering

J. Scriptures on Training

A. Prosperity and Suffering for the Righteous and the Wicked

Framing Prosperity and Suffering. We have looked at the issue of material prosperity for unbelievers and even carnal believers, and we have seen what “prosperity” means to a mature believer. For believers, we have seen that prosperity relates more to spiritual blessings than tangible benefits. In this section we are dealing with prosperity again, with a presumption that its absence represents some kind of loss or suffering.

Our state is not determined by the conditions or circumstances that come to us, but by the volition we bring to these. In our volition as born-again believers, we must choose whether we will live for God...or reject Him in favor of our own way. If we want God, we will take the time to dig out the truths of His Word that teach us how to live, and we will move constantly toward His light. If we do not want God, even though He is within us, He will allow us to wander off into the desert until we change our mind and return to Him. For believers who choose each day to go God’s way, prosperity vs suffering is not the point of their lives. They want only God.

Rescue of the “Righteous”. For maturing believers, there is hope and rescue, even in suffering. 2 Peter 2 gives the examples of Noah and Lot, who were rescued even though they were surrounded by wholesale rejection of God. This passage also brings into view the *outlook* of those who reject God, which for unbelievers evolves as eternal condemnation, and for wayward believers as some form of discipline. For unbelievers the judgment day will be when they are forever sentenced to hell. For believers there are virtually two judgment days: One is now, when we are “judged” for sin and punished through corrective measures (discipline); the other is when our works are evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ, at which time unworthy deeds will be burned up. In the meantime, we are assured that, when hardships come *and we are growing*, relief is available. 2 Peter 2:7-10 frames this for us, as follows:

...and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

Notice the phrase, “he rescued Lot, a righteous man”. And then observe the statement, “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials”. The whole chapter of 2 Peter 2 illustrates the difference between what happens to maturing and sanctified (cleansed) believers vs unbelievers/carnal believers. Rescue comes for those who are “righteous”, but not for those who are “unrighteousness”. Whatever trials we encounter, if we are growing and staying in fellowship, we will be rescued from them... according to God’s will and commensurate with our faith.

The Wicked Face a Day of Reckoning. Job complained about the “unfair” prosperity and promotion of the wicked. This is what we see in Job 4:4-13, quoted here:

“Is my complaint directed to a human being? Why should I not be impatient? Look at me and be appalled; clap your hand over your mouth. When I think about this, I am terrified; trembling seizes my body. Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not on them. Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry. They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about. They sing to the music of tambourine and harp; they make merry to the sound of the pipe. They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace.”

A *day of reckoning* is coming for the wicked, however, as we see in Job 21:17, which says, “Yet how often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? How often does calamity come upon them, the fate God allots in his anger?”

In Jer. 12:1-2, Jeremiah gives a complaint that sounds a lot like Job’s, as follows:

You are always righteous, Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts.

But then Jeremiah’s prayer continues with a reflection of the final outcome of the wicked, saying, “Yet you know me, O Lord; you see me and test my thoughts about you. Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter!” (Jer. 12:3). The time of accounting will come quickly for the wicked. The wicked may prosper, but it will not last forever.

Paradox: The Righteous Suffer and the Wicked Prosper. Matt. 5:45b tells us that God “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”. In Eccl. 7:15, Solomon reports that he has seen the paradox of the righteous suffering and the wicked prospering, saying this: “In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.” We saw this verse earlier, when we talked about the “righteous” man being down, and the “sinful man” being up. This happens all the time, yet we know that the “righteous” are promised blessings and prosperity. How can we reconcile the promise of blessings with the presence of suffering? We can only conclude that the value of what we see in the lives of maturing believers cannot be measured by external standards. In that sense, believers are not always “blessed”, but many times “cursed”, sometimes much greater than unbelievers. But we must understand that the scales on which our prosperity and suffering are weighed are those that give greater weight to *spiritual* riches than to *material* ones. As we mature, we will see with greater clarity what the definition of “prosperity” and “suffering” are, and we will become aware that we do not see these as the world sees them, but as God does.

Prosperity and suffering are not gauges for our spiritual state, nor will they predict which way we will

head spiritually. Even absolute miracles will not hold our faith in place, if we are not using the steps for growth and the filling of the Spirit. Conversely, great disaster will not shake our faith, if we have followed God's roadmap to maturity.

B. Do Miracles Strengthen Us?

Miracles are Quickly Forgotten. After all the plagues had been brought upon Egypt, Pharaoh finally gave in and ordered the Israelites out of Egypt. This, in itself, was a miracle. But there were more to come...an almost endless array of miraculous events that showed the direct hand of God as He provided for the liberated Jews. The plagues themselves were miracles, as shown both in Scripture and in the practice of the Passover Feast, which was instituted to commemorate the delivery of the Jews from Egypt. The Jews were to remember their delivery, as we see in Ex. 13:9:

This observance [Passover Feast] will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand.

Notice that the Passover was to direct their attention to the Word and God's mighty hand; the focus was *not* on the miracle itself.

Another reminder of the miracle of the Passover was the consecration of all firstborn males, including humans and animals. Israelite fathers were told to explain to their sons the purpose for this consecration, as described in Ex. 13:15b-16, which says this:

This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons." And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.

The Passover had resulted in the release of the Jews. (This miracle was designed, once again, to direct their attention to God's Word.) But notice what happened shortly after their release. They came to the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit, and they FORGOT the miracle. They complained and fretted and wanted to go back to Egypt, because the miracle of a *previous* time was not sustaining them for the *present* time. But God was faithful in honoring the promise He had made with the forefathers of these Israelites (Ex. 13:11), so He opened up the Red Sea to allow them to cross over on dry land. This was a spectacular miracle. How could they be in any state but one of awe, as they had received such convincing confirmation of God's mighty power? They were greatly relieved, so they sang happy songs in praise of the God Who had delivered them. They sang, "The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him." And then they promptly forgot the miracle. Look at what happened next.

Three days after they had crossed the Red Sea, the Jews found themselves in the desert with no drinkable water. Ex. 15:24 describes their response to the "no-water" situation: "So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?' They were thinking about their *situation*, and not about the God who had miraculously delivered them just days before. So God reminded them with these

words:

He said, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.”

Spirituality Does What Miracles Cannot Do. Notice that God requires that we “do what is right” (stay clean) and “listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God” (feed on the Word for growth). Fellowship and maturity are, once again, in view. These, more than miracles, will keep us on track and focused on God and in tune with His power to provide everything we need to survive and serve. OBSERVE: Emotional highs of seeing God work will not suffice to keep us spiritually strong, because the growth of faith is not based on experience, but on absorbing and believing God’s Word. The power that sustains us is the power WITHIN US in the form of the Holy Spirit, and not the power witnessed in circumstances. If we do not believe *without* miracles, we will not believe *with* them. If we rely on miracles and emotions to sustain us, we will constantly look for the next high, and we will be asking God: “What have you done for me lately?” On the other hand, if we are moving toward maturity, we will come to understand that it is not what God does FOR us that counts, but what He does THROUGH us.

Another Forgotten Miracle. Another example of a forgotten miracle is seen in 1 Kings 18 and 19. In chapter 18, Elijah saw his faith honored when God sent fire to consume an offering that Elijah had placed on an altar on Mount Carmel. Elijah had soaked the offering and the altar with water, and filled the trench around it, yet the fire that God sent quickly consumed the offering *and* the water. This was a miraculous event that vindicated Elijah’s faith and discredited the prophets of Baal, ending in their being slaughtered. This was a victory for faith and a clear expression of God’s power! But look at Elijah soon after the time of this miracle. Chapter 19 opens with Jezebel threatening Elijah for killing the prophets of Baal. Elijah responded with a trembling, quaking fear that rocked him to his core. 1 Kings 19:3a says that “Elijah was afraid and ran for his life”. When someone “runs for his life”, he has lost control and is scrambling madly toward safety. The miracle God had just completed did not sustain Elijah’s faith. I believe, however, that Elijah repented his faithless actions, as evidenced by his prayer in 1 Ki. 19:4b, in which he said, “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” This humble prayer was a form of confession, as Elijah was acknowledging his flagging faith.

After Elijah’s repentance, we see in 1 Ki. 19:9b that God spoke to Him: “And the word of the Lord came to him...” When we are in fellowship with God and attend to His Word, these will sustain us...while something we have witnessed in our daily experience will have no lasting impact. Miracles, emotions, and excitement at seeing God work can be rich and satisfying, but these will not cause our faith to grow, nor will these enable us to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe that Satan uses miracles, just like he does everything else, to pull us away from our pathway of growth and spirituality. Miracles will not strengthen us. Only God’s Word and God’s Spirit can do that.

Conclusion. We should *remember* what God has done...recall the miracles...BUT we cannot count on

these to strengthen us and prompt our growth. Remember that faith is directed toward that which is NOT seen, not toward that which is visible. Our faith is exercised in the direction of the Provider, not His provision. We honor the Giver more than the gift.

C. Responses to Suffering

Suffering is an Opportunity to Demonstrate Trust. Suffering tends to make us anxious and worried, which hinders spirituality. We have a tendency to look for immediate solutions to our difficulties and quick ways to assuage our anxiety. When we find ourselves resorting to our own methods for resolving calamity and quelling the upswell of fear, it is time to step back and re-examine our faith in God. Remember this: He plans and controls the outcomes of all events in our lives, and we can trust in His perfect wisdom, timing, and—above all—His love for us. The first objective of suffering is to engender our trust under all conditions.

Suffering may confuse us, and cause us to question God's love, or even His existence. This is why a time of suffering is so crucial in the development of our faith. The question is often asked: "Why does God allow suffering?" We have mentioned that it gives us opportunity to advance our faith, but we should also remember our discussion on the war against God, where we talked about Him demonstrating His grace and justice to the angels. We stated that operations of grace give opportunities for faith, and the emergence of faith glorifies God before the angels. To give occasion for the demonstration of *faith* in the presence of *grace*, God allows suffering in the lives of believers. Suffering gives believers the chance to *show their faith* in God, His Word, and His grace assets, which convinces the angels of the reality of God's grace. (For other implications surrounding the great war which Satan wages against God, re-read "The War Against God", beginning on page 52, especially the section titled, "The Angels are Watching", on page 60.)

The Example of Job. Job fits into this grace/faith/suffering/more-faith configuration, and shows a picture of God's use of suffering to test and build faith. Job lasted awhile during his time of suffering, but then he finally caved in and ended up cursing his own life and claiming that God was unjust. Job complained that his suffering was undeserved, and he was partially right. Job was experiencing undeserved suffering, but this was alternating with disciplinary suffering because of Job's sins. Discipline prompts us to get back on track after a derailment, and undeserved suffering helps us to move along the track, once we are back on it. God's reception of Job, even after His failures, showed GRACE and exemplified God's character in His dealings with man, especially believers. God turned Job over to Satan, so Job could ultimately express greater faith toward God. That was the plan, and the plan worked. (See *Bible Basics on Living in God's Plan*, "Is God Good: The Story of Job", beginning on p. 22.) Suffering can have positive results in our lives, the same way it did in Job's.

The Outcomes of Suffering. There are two basic outcomes of suffering: 1) We will receive motivation for greater spirituality and growth, or 2) we will move away from God, and be worse than we were before. Some believers move forward through suffering; others fall back and become bitter, blaming God for pain or scarcity. When we show disapproval of God's plan, as it is operating in our

lives, it is because we think we deserve “better”. This is the result of arrogance, and the product of a view-point of events that is worldly and “natural”. The view of a maturing believer is that God is dealing with us in grace, and that His plan is best...for us, for Him, and for all onlooking angels.

When we trust God, we accept events, even if we do not understand them. It is important to remember that God does not make mistakes! If we have confessed our sins, and are using the techniques of prayer and study, we can be sure that any suffering we do is for our growth. If we are spiritual, we will be able to have confidence that we can depend on God’s power and grace to sustain us and/or deliver us from suffering. We learn, so that we will grow, and as we grow, suffering will provide the maximum opportunity to apply what we have learned. We will then consider suffering as a “work of God”, and we will use grace assets to get us through it. Buried in the middle of Rom. 12:12 is a phrase that tells us to be “patient in affliction”. Patience is not grim toleration of undesirable conditions, but rather an ABIDING TRUST that the affliction has a purpose, and that the outcome will be good. Faith must endure throughout our training, and then our training will enhance our faith...for further training. It is a cycle of GROWTH.

Support Through the Gifts of Other Believers. God designed the operation of the church so that the growth of its members depends on the contributions that each believer makes to the progress of others. We help each other grow. Eph. 4:29 says that our gifts must always be operating to build each other up. This verse says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” When we are in the Spirit and our gifts are functioning, we are feeding each other. The MOST IMPORTANT thing we can do, outside of being in fellowship and continuing our own growth, is to edify each other through the workings of our personalized gifts. These will be exchanged in a collective matrix of gifts that flows from us toward others, and from others back toward us...for the edification of us all.

Praying When Suffering Occurs. One of the ways we can benefit most through testing, is to pray our way through it. As we encounter suffering, we can resort to our own resources to resolve it, or we can look to God to fix it, and/or to make it work for our good. Suffering helps us grow. The time of suffering must not be an occasion to abandon our faith, but a claimed opportunity to embrace it. Meanwhile, Satan uses our time of testing to exploit our weaknesses and drag us into faithlessness and self-dependence. This is why we need the full armor of God, as we have discussed before, and why we pray, as Jesus did, that God will “deliver us from the evil one”. It is also why we pray that we not be led into “temptation”, which means “testing”.

Study Prepares us for Suffering. When we are tested, we grow, but this is the HARD WAY to learn. It has often been said that experience is the *best* teacher, and this is generally accepted as true, but—at the same time—experience can be the *worst* teacher. Why? Because it is painful. If we can learn *without* the experience, we have saved ourselves a lot of pain. The BEST way to learn is actually through continual study. When we pray not to be tested, we are essentially praying that God will teach us the “easy” way, and that is through our assimilation of His truths...our mastery of His techniques for

living and His promises for provision.

When we are not suffering, we should STUDY. And, as we saw above, when we are suffering, we should PRAY. Study helps us *prepare* for suffering, while prayer is our key resource for *getting through it*. In capping the armor that God offers to protect us from Satan, Eph. 6:18a tells us to *keep on praying*. This verse says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” The “occasion” we have in mind is one of suffering; this is the time to pray. And if we have *prepared*, prayer will come more readily.

The Greatest Example for Handling Suffering. Our best example for the correct response to suffering is seen in Jesus Christ. Heb. 12:3 describes His response to suffering, as follows: “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary.” We are strengthened when we “Consider Him”, which means to “think about Him”, or to “think LIKE Him”. The *content* of our thoughts will align with the “mind of Christ” to the degree that we have absorbed and believed His Word. When we think about the things we are learning, we will have His thoughts, which result in greater “endurance”, or “perseverance” or “patience”, all of which indicate a FAITH that is growing. When faith is growing, the right perspective of our suffering will dominate, and that faith will surmount misfortune and mistreatment. Christ lived in dependence on His Father, and so should we. This will bring strength and courage to us. With faith, we will not allow our suffering to pull us away from God. We can be sure that He will not separate from us, if we do not separate from Him. Rom. 8:35-39 tells us that He does not leave us, regardless of the intensity of our suffering. This passage says this:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword**? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Emphasis mine)

When we endure suffering in faith and decide to continue getting closer to God, we will be basking in the love of His Son, Who is our example. So the problems that occur in the lives of believers need not separate us from God, because He loves us and is always acting toward us as a concerned Father, the same way He did with His Son. So, with our training, He offers *relief* and/or *support*.

Suffering Builds Faith. Since we know that suffering is building our faith, we can (learn to) be glad that God is bringing it to us. This seems like a stretch, perhaps, but the Word is clear that when we reach a sufficient level of *belief* in God, we will understand what it means to welcome suffering. Our goal is to reach such a high level of maturity that we will be thankful and feel content, whether we are living in suffering or prosperity. 1 Pet. 1:6-8 informs mature believers that they will rejoice, even in suffering, as we see in the following:

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...

The joy of fellowship with our Savior overshadows any pain or difficulty that we may experience, IF our faith is “genuine”, meaning our faith is mature. Genuine faith is faith that has been “refined by fire”, which pretty well describes our training program. Training is difficult, and it will always stretch us, but the end result is phenomenal. Even though adversity can be intense and seemingly endless, we can pray for relief, as we suggested earlier. And we can be assured that God will not place more on us that we can bear. 1 Cor. 10:13 says this about testing:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Whatever the test, if we “bear it” by using His resources for endurance, we will come through it stronger, and our faith will grow.

“Temptation” can mean “Testing”. “Temptation” does not always mean temptation to sin, though that application is commonly made in studies of the verse quoted above (1 Cor. 10:13). I believe “temptation” in this verse means “testing”, which is *training* through specific pressures to squeeze, evaluate, and strengthen our faith. God will not “test” us, or put us through training that we can’t endure, but “will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”. This gets a little tricky, but I believe that what God provides are His techniques, especially the main ones we have seen, including confessing our sins, praying, and studying the Word. These are our WAY OUT of conditions that we can’t stand, even if the conditions themselves do not change. I DO believe that God provides prayer as a means of RELIEF from the intensity of suffering, and meaningful study as a means to PREPARE for it. In short, I believe we should use ALL the techniques that He makes available, BEFORE the suffering arrives, and CONTINUE them when it comes. If we do not use God’s grace assets, we will NOT be able to “stand” the suffering that comes. One thing is sure: carnality and immaturity will exacerbate the way suffering “feels” to us. The best way to handle suffering is to STAY SPIRITUAL AND KEEP GROWING!

Streams in the Desert. When we are under discomfort, and we pray the *prayer of faith* for relief, God will provide respite and relief. Is. 43:19-21 describes God’s activity in providing relief:

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

God gives us streams in the desert as relief from our suffering. He does this so we will recognize, in the middle of trials and training, that God loves us; and when we *accept* what He is doing *in faith*, this glorifies Him. We saw Eccl. 3:11a earlier, and it is fitting here to see this verse again: “He has made everything beautiful in its time.” When we pray and surrender and trust, we will in time see a beautiful end to our suffering, and this will praise and honor God.

Other Positive Outcomes of Tests and Trials. The growth of our faith is the first objective and outcome of testing, trials, suffering, problems, hardships, difficulties, and set-backs. But there are other outcomes of training that should be mentioned. Here are some of them:

1. God is glorified before men. 2 Tim. 2:8-10; 2 Cor. 4:12-13; 1 Pet. 3:13-17
2. God is glorified before angels. Job 1-2; 1 Pet. 4:16-19
3. God’s power is manifested. 2 Cor. 12:9-10; John 9:3
4. The character of Christ is displayed. 2 Cor. 4:8-12; 1 Pet. 3:14-17
5. Pride is reduced. 2 Cor. 12:7
6. Training is enhanced. Heb. 12:5-11; 1 Pet. 1:6; James 1:2-4
7. The believer is disciplined. Ps. 32:3-5; Ps. 119:67
8. The believer is purified. Ps. 16:7; 119:67
9. Prayers can be given for relief from suffering. Ps. 4:1
10. Believer turns to God as his primary resource for living. 2 Cor. 11:24-32, 12:7-10; Eph. 6:10-18; Ex. 17:8-15
11. Believers can exercise their gifts effectively. Phil. 1:12-14, with 4:5-9 (Endnote 17)

Isaiah 26:3 provides a good summary of the life of a believer in training, saying this: “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” The key to the endurance of training, as with all of the Christian life, is trust.

D. Grace Before Judgment

Grace in the Form of Disasters and Warnings. When we think of grace, we usually think of provision and prosperity. But God’s grace is also seen in tragedy. This may be surprising, but disaster can be an act of grace. Even in death, we do not know whether a person’s continued life would have brought unbearable suffering to them. For example, when young children die (and go directly to heaven), who knows what greater tragedy and pain would have come to them, if they had lived longer on this earth? Satan actually brings such disaster, but it is God that allows it, and He weaves all events into His plan as a part of His operation of grace.

Grace can also be seen in *misfortune* that is brought to warn us before *disaster* comes. When believers are operating in carnality and faithlessness, it may be necessary for God to warn them in stages and

provide opportunities for repentance along the way, before progressively-harsher discipline is implemented. God's discipline graduates from undesirable to difficult to disastrous to cataclysmic. At each stage, opportunity for correction is given, so that confession and correction can take place. If the opportunity is refused, and warnings are ignored, then disaster can be forthcoming...with ever-increasing intensity.

Grace is Extended Before Major Judgment. God is patient as He trains us to keep on trusting in Him, and He doesn't seem to mind repeating Himself. But He knows when his prompts are being ignored, and that is when our *suffering for training* becomes *suffering for discipline*. The process of warnings before punishment applies both to individual believers and to groups, such as churches or nations. A good example of God extending grace before judgment was seen in the life of Noah. He lived in a day when things had gotten completely out of hand. Demons had intermarried with human females and a "super-race" had been born. With this mixture of the human and demonic seed, there was a breakdown in the spiritual make-up of the world. Gen. 6:5 describes the conditions at that time: "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." But there was one "righteous man", who was "blameless" and "found favor in the eyes of the Lord"...and who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:8-9). His name was Noah.

Verses 11-12 in Gen. 6 report that "all the people on earth" had become corrupt and violent. They were useless and hopeless, without God and without any conscience. God gave them a warning, because judgment was imminent. God told Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people" (Gen. 6:13a); then he told Noah how he and his family could avoid destruction by building a ship. He was to take his family, animals, birds, and food onto the ship. But notice this: there was a delay between the time of the judgment being announced and the judgment itself. The time of warning for all human beings in Noah's day, which is the length of time they were given to repent, was one hundred and twenty years. This is what we are told in Gen. 6:5: "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." This meant that, for over a century, Noah preached to the people and warned them about the upcoming flood, but they would not listen. Grace was manifested right before their eyes in the form of an ark, and Noah was giving them a clear message of deliverance, a *warning*, but they refused to believe and continued on their way without God.

2 Pet. 3:20 tells us that these people "disobeyed", saying, "...who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water." The point we are gleaning from this passage is that they had received instructions from Noah, who preached to them all those decades, yet they persistently refused the message. Since they rejected the warning, judgment came. 2 Pet. 2:4-5 describes it this way:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others...

The passage goes on to describe Sodom and Gomorrah, where the message given by Lot was refused,

just as Noah's was. There have been countless others who offered the message of grace before judgment, both in the Bible and in history. For example, any time a "client" nation turns its back on God through unbelief and apostasy, grace will bring warnings, and then disaster will come. (I will not mention 9-11, or Katrina, or the countless other warnings that have been given to the United States. It is certain that the current trend cannot go on forever...and I am not speaking of a need for greater "morality"; I mean that the people in this country must hear the message of GRACE and FAITH, and RETURN TO GOD, or judgment will come.)

Embrace Grace...Now. Our purpose in presenting this principle...that God warns and then offers a chance to make correction before He pronounces judgment...is to get individual believers to understand their need to embrace God's grace in *forgiveness*, to avoid God's grace in *judgment*. The principle we want to imprint is this: We will be given a chance to confess our sins and get back on track with God, and if we will take advantage of this, we will be spared the "judgment" (discipline) that is pending. 2 Pet. 2:9a confirms that a "righteous" man, or one who is cleansed and walking in fellowship, will not suffer punishment. This verse says, "If this is so [if it is true that Lot was rescued], then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials..." This is contrasted with those who reject God's message in the latter part of verse 9; their end will be "judgment"...meaning eternal condemnation for *unbelievers*, and discipline (which extends even to disastrous levels) for *carnal believers*.

This message should prompt us, not to make a "behavior" change, but to change our attitude from one of rejection of the warnings and messages of grace to one that embraces and welcomes the opportunities that grace offers, which include these: We are offered forgiveness for our multiple sins; we are offered strength for our appointed tasks; we are offered mercy for our weak and doubting hearts; we are offered knowledge to fill our dark minds; and we are offered grace to live in the power of God. We can receive these or we can refuse them.

We have God's patience and His encouragement, and—if that is not enough to keep us moving in the right direction—we have His judgment. The advice we can take from this section is that we must follow Noah's example, as seen in Gen. 6:22: "Noah did everything just as God commanded him."

E. Temptation

Temptation and Testing Alike Bring Greater Faith. Whether the term "temptation" refers to enticement into evil, or a trial to teach us to trust God, it represents a *test* of our spiritual status and faith. In any case, we must be "clean" and we must be "growing", to deal with everything this term implies. The result of cleanliness and maturation is *stronger faith*, and faith is the key to managing our tests. First of all, faith in God's promises and plan enables us to view negative events (times of suffering) as opportunities to grow and glorify God; secondly, with greater faith we have additional resources for resisting sin, because through faith we engage the power of the Holy Spirit. So what brings greater faith? Basically two things, as we have shown before: 1) wisdom, which is acquired through intensive study, and 2) passing the tests that God designs for our growth. If our faith is strong, suffering will be seen as a privilege that leads to promotion. And faith will build on faith.

Expanding our View of Prayer in Regard to Suffering. When we pass a test because we have sufficient faith to *endure* it, that faith grows ever stronger. Faith does not act alone, however; it has two companions. One of these is *wisdom*, and the other is *prayer*. We saw earlier in this chapter that wisdom prepares us for a test, and prayer helps us get through it (even though both wisdom and prayer have roles *before* and *during* the tests). These lead to greater endurance and an ever-stronger faith, IF we *keep moving forward*; otherwise, the effects of wisdom and the strength of faith...will fade.

As we have said repeatedly, wisdom feeds faith, and this helps us get through tests. (For a much greater discussion on “wisdom”, take time to read *Bible Basics on Living in the Power of God’s Word*, Vols. 1 and 2.) The other “life vest” for difficult times is prayer, as we have also mentioned. We want to expand our view of the ways prayer is used to ameliorate trials. *Before* suffering comes, we should pray to be spared from it; but *when* it comes, a plea for relief is the most legitimate and effective way to mitigate it. Of course, the tests may continue unabated, as per God’s will and plan; so there is no guarantee that suffering will disappear, even though we earnestly pray. But this does not mean that we should stop praying in faith, or that grace is not working; it just means that God has a better idea of what is needed to facilitate our advancement. Plus, prayer helps us endure suffering and invites God’s comfort during hard times. Whatever the outcome, prayer is an *essential* implement in dealing with tests.

In 2 Cor. 12:7-10, seen earlier, Paul described his own encounter with a test that God allowed, and cited his use of prayer in regard to it. Even though his prayer did not bring relief from this particular test, the very fact that he prayed shows that prayer is a valid method for seeking relief. Here is how Paul framed his test:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul prayed for relief from suffering, the nature of which he did not specify, but his request was denied to *prevent his pride* from disrupting his ministry. God gave Paul an understanding of one real value of testing, which is the granting of “more grace”. As Paul prayed, he submitted to God’s response to the petition, and he was given *extra grace* to endure the “thorn in the flesh”. The thorn was apparently some condition in Paul’s sinful nature that he wanted to get rid of. (Perhaps each of us has conditions in our own sinful natures that simply will not go away.) But Paul trusted God to bring *strength* to his *weakness*, which is a clear indication that God does not rely on our weak natures to accomplish things, but wants us to rely on His grace to get things done.

We believe that Paul’s use of prayer was a big part of his dealing with his tests. He undoubtedly responded to David’s declaration in Ps. 34:4, which says, “I sought the Lord [prayed] and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.” This enabled Paul to testify this:

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. (2 Tim. 3:10-11)

Paul relied on God to get Him through his trials; he knew that delivery came from God and not the world. He prayed in faith, even if the trials continued, and he endured suffering that we cannot imagine. We get an idea of the intensity of his tests from 2 Cor. 11:23b-29, which we quote here without omission:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

The tests Paul faced were diverse and extreme, so the relief of grace must have been extraordinary, to match them. This would seem to reflect that Paul's prayers for relief were honored with either grace to bear them, or actual relief from them.

Further Explanation of “Temptation” as “Testing”. In Matt. 6:13, as we saw earlier, our example for prayer concerning testing is this: “...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”. In effect, this verse can be translated, “Lead us not into adversity or suffering due to testing, but deliver us from the evil one.” This translation is based on the Greek word for “temptation”, which is *peirasmos*. This word means to “test” or to “prove the substance” of something. It is used to show the nature of trials that come to prove and test our faith. To better understand the use of the term “temptation” or “testing”, as it appears in the original language, we offer several verses in which some form of the word *peirasmos* is seen:

- Matt. 26:41—Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.
- Luke 4:13—When the devil had finished all his tempting, he left him until an opportune time.
- Luke 8:13—Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.
- Luke 22:28—You are those who have stood by me in my trials.

- Luke 22:40—On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.”
- Luke 22:46—“Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”
- Acts 20:19—I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.
- 1 Cor. 10:13—No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
- Gal. 4:14a—Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn.
- 1 Tim. 6:9—People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.
- Heb. 3:8—...do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert...
- James 1:2—Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Conclusion. To avoid temptation, or the tests of suffering and the lure of sin, we must build wisdom, or increase maturity. We must also remember to pray consistently (1 Thess. 5:16b) to avoid the trials. And when tests come, we must pray even more, so that we can endure them, avoid falling, and continue to grow. The best way to deal with temptation is to prepare for it by building our faith beforehand, using every means and mechanism that God makes available.

F. The Gifts and the Giver

God Deserves Glory. God is greater than His gifts. We were created, not to seek prosperity and ease, but to glorify God before men and angels, as per Isaiah 43:21, which says, “...the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.” This is backed up by Rev. 4:11, which adds, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.” We are here, not to aggrandize ourselves and elevate our positions and increase our possessions, but to recognize, trust, and glorify our Creator.

Everything God does with and for us is designed to lead us toward glorification of Him. One of the things He does is test our faith to refine it. He allows suffering of various kinds, as we saw in the last section, to strengthen us and encourage our spirituality. He does this FOR HIS SAKE to get us to turn our attention TOWARD HIM and to increase our consciousness of His grace. He wants us to confess our sins, pray, study, grow, endure, and exercise our gifts, so we can access the power of His Spirit and

live in a manner that glorifies Him.

God Refines Us, so that We can Glorify Him. Is. 48:8-11 makes it clear that he refines us for His own purposes, whether it is through discipline or testing, as follows:

You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ears have not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth. For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to destroy you completely. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

God is the reason we exist and the purpose for our being alive. Anything He does points us back to Him, and any refusal of His invitation to join Him will not end well. He will not share His glory with Satan, the world, or us. It is His, and if we believe He exists, we must acknowledge and honor His place in His own creation.

Preparing for Service. Our understanding of God's gifts must begin with an acknowledgment that attentiveness to God comes through the refinement that He brings. Transformation itself is a gift of God...we are the ones who need to change, not God. He is perfect, and He wants to pull us toward His perfection, but we must cooperate with His program for changing us, if we are going to improve. Performance of any kind that is worthwhile assumes extensive preparation. God is trying to prepare our hearts for satisfying lives and productive service. He is trying to *refine* our hearts. Prov. 17:3 speaks of this refinement, saying, "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests [refines] the heart."

The Rod Guides; the Staff Comforts. God uses a rod to train us, because He wants us to become more like Him...to live up to our reputation of existing "in His own image". But God's training is not all nails and hot coals. He will also prosper His children. We simply do not need to worry that somehow God's provision will run out. His supply is endless. Luke 12:22-34 gives a good description of God's gifts for our survival in the world, giving examples of ravens and flowers, and showing how their needs are met. And if these are taken care of, how much more will His *children* receive His care?

The focus of our efforts and energies is not to be concentrated on the practical world, though we must keep a job to keep dinner on the table. Our primary preoccupation is to be centered on God, and then HE WILL PROVIDE...even the job we need, or a place to live, or transportation, or clothes, or medical care, or friends, or rest from the rigors of hard work. He *will* provide! Our "treasure" should be God, and not earthly things (Luke 12:34); we are to "seek first the kingdom of God", knowing that all "these things" (necessary supplies for survival) will be provided (Luke 12:31).

God Determines What is Good. We must not be confused by messages from Satan about what is "good", and we cannot let the term "blessing" be defined by the world. God determines what is good, and the more our perspective aligns with His, the better we will understand and appreciate His gifts. We must remember that everything God gives us or that He allows to happen in our lives, is to cause

us to LOOK AT HIM, and TRUST HIM in every circumstance of life. James 1:16-17 tells us this: “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” The eternal and constant God of creation describes His gifts to us as “good” and “perfect”. The more we mature, the more we will see the perfection in what He gives.

The Giver is Greater than the Gift. But notice this: What we get is less important than God Himself. If we are in Christianity to “get ahead”, seeing it as a gimmick for prosperity, we are not seeking the “kingdom of God”...we are seeking our own advancement based on self-centered greed. If we want God in our lives just so that we can get endorsement and sponsorship for our own plans, then our motives are wrong and things will not work out. The *gift* is never more important than the *Giver*! If the Giver becomes our focus, we can then ENJOY God’s gifts. 1 Tim. 6:17-19 gives us the right view, as follows:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

When we want only God, what we receive will be genuinely valuable, and “the life that is truly life” will be ours. This is the gift that God offers believers. There is no better life than the life He gives. And every gift will have God’s signature on it...while each provision will direct our attention back to Him. Our job is to receive and give thanks for God’s grace...and to enjoy His gifts. Eccl 3:12-14 frames it well, as we see here:

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will revere him.

Like suffering, He uses provisions and blessings to cause us to “revere” (fear, trust, worship) Him. Gifts point to the Giver. And when our eyes are on Him, we will be able to take pleasure in what He gives. What a great and meaningful life we can have when we look *at Him* as our God...and look *to Him* as our provider. There is no better life than the one He gives. And it’s just beginning, as we are accumulating treasures in heaven that we will enjoy forever.

G. The Lessons of Life

Suffering Causes Refocus on God. In the section on “Temptation”, we saw Paul’s “thorn”, and cited 2 Cor. 12:7-10. This passage shows Paul requesting relief from temptation or testing, and God responding to Paul by pointing to grace, which is always sufficient. The new application that we want to glean from this passage is that suffering tends to make us refocus on God. It prompts us to return to

our studies of the Word, and leads us to depend on God's assets for living. There is relief from hardship...in the Word, in prayer, in fellowship, in faith, in grace. Ps. 55:22 calls for us to do this: "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." We can cast our cares on Him, because HE CARES FOR US (See 1 Pet. 5:7), and HE WILL SUSTAIN US! His compassions will never be exhausted, as per Lam. 3:21-26, which assures us of the following:

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation [rescue] of the Lord.

Rescue Comes from Our Faithful Father. This poignant passage shows us God's love, which NEVER STOPS! It shows us that His love is always fresh, and that His faithfulness—the absolute consistency of His character—is totally reliable. When we understand this, we will understand that what we get in life is what He gives, and that what He gives is couched in His compassion for us. So we can wait quietly for Him, and if suffering appears, we can know that—if we are "righteous"—He will rescue us in the *best way* and at the *best time*. Even when we fail, our stumbles are not counted against us, if we confess them to God. 1 Jn. 1:9 tells us that God is "faithful" in His forgiveness of the sins we confess. He is 100% consistent and does the same thing EVERY TIME WE CONFESS: He forgives! We see this also in Jer. 3:12b-13, which follows:

"Return, faithless Israel," declares the Lord, "I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful," declares the Lord, "I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt—you have rebelled against the Lord your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree and have not obeyed me," declares the Lord.

He is merciful, if we are contrite. In Ps. 38:18 David reported his confession and contrition: "I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin." And since he confessed, he was able to pray and anticipate God's "help", as stated in verse 22: "Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior." When we are clean, we can count on God's help. Heb. 10:22 describes it like this:

...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

And what is it that God promises? He guarantees that He will rescue us from suffering at some point, which means we can relax in suffering and keep on trusting Him. If we persevere, at some point He will remove us from our place of pain. Heb. 4:1 calls for us to rest in His care, saying, "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it." The place of rest is the place where we exhibit faith in His love and His care. No matter what comes, He wants us to keep on believing that HE LOVES US, and that what He is doing is the RIGHT THING to do! If we do not trust Him, there will be no rest for us, as stated in Heb.

3:19, which says, “So we see that they were not able to enter [His rest], because of their unbelief.”

We can rest when we trust, because we know He will deliver us from disaster. Ps. 34:19-20 confirms this, saying, “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.” It is clear that God delivers believers who are in fellowship. Ps. 91:14-15 verifies this in the following:

“Because he loves me [love of God is a sign of fellowship],” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me and I will answer Him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.”

Because we are in fellowship and walking in the power of His Spirit...and growing through study and prayer and endurance...we can count on His rescue. He will “go before us” to help us. This is what we see in Deut. 31:8, which says, “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” How much clearer can it be? Are we going to believe God’s Word and rest in His love and care, or are we going to continue looking to ourselves and the world for deliverance from trouble?

Deliverance. No matter how bad it gets, God is faithful, and He will deliver us! Paul faced what seemed like a “death sentence” to him, but he knew he would be delivered. Look at this account of Paul’s suffering from 2 Cor. 1:8-10:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will [always] deliver us.

Comfort. What is certain, and what can we count on? God’s deliverance. Relief will come, either in the form of “grace to bear it” while it is happening, or in the form of “complete removal” when the time is right. Either one is for *spiritual* believers only, and either one is an operation of grace...God *will* come through. So, He will remove suffering at some point...THIS IS WHAT HE PROMISES. Or He will *comfort* us as we go through it. This is also promised. We see God’s comfort for suffering while it is happening in 1 Cor. 1:3-7, as follows:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Comfort is available for suffering, and the believer in fellowship will assuredly receive it, while he is waiting on God for deliverance.

The Inevitability of Suffering. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer; there is no question about that. Phil 1:29-31 makes this clear, saying, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him...” Suffering for Christ is a given. But we must remember that complete deliverance or even avoidance is also possible, as per Ps. 91:10: “If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.” The mature believer can avoid certain trials, just because he is growing without them. But if tests come to such a believer, deliverance will come; until then, comfort will be given. If we are right with God, grace will be at work, and when grace works on our behalf, we *gain* and we *grow*. God will do what He has to, to teach us that grace is everything! When we suffer, we must look for the lesson of grace that He is trying to get us to understand.

God permits pressures on believers for a lot of reasons. One is that, if He did not, and it were known that believers never suffer, then every single human being would logically choose to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved, just to avoid suffering. But this would—in effect—show God as unduly influencing our free will, and/or having us “choose” Christ for the wrong reason. So the absence of suffering for believers cannot be true, because He preserves the integrity of our free will at all times, and He wants us to choose to believe in Christ because we desire a relationship with the Father. The simple outcome is this: Believers are not insulated from suffering.

For any preacher or evangelist to paint the Christian life as a bed of roses is to misrepresent the gospel message. The Good News is that we will no longer be condemned when we believe. The hard part is that we will suffer, because of our faith. And since this is true, it is important for us to know the effects of that suffering: We *learn and grow* from *tests and trials*. Events of hardship are like mini-lessons brought to us so that we can understand how God works, and see the mechanics and methods of grace. We can learn from life’s experiences if we are in fellowship, praying, and studying the Word. These will help us see God’s hand in the things that go on around us.

Suffering and Prosperity are Hard to Manage, and May Pull us Away from God. Satan is betting on us not being able to handle our suffering, which would, according to his logic, show the angels that God’s grace is inadequate and unfair. It is easy for the devil to convince a believer without strong faith that God is either ignoring him or not showing love to him. This sets up a sequence which results in the believer moving away from God, at which time the suffering becomes discipline. This is followed either by a return to God, or a further withdrawal into carnality and unbelief.

Keep in mind that prosperity can pull us away from God, just as quickly as suffering. When someone receives great wealth or power, it tends to make him feel self-sufficient and invincible. The tendency that evolves is to turn all attention to “self”, and to move our values away from God to what we have and/or what we want to acquire. The dangers are these: That if we are *suffering*, we may feel sorry for ourselves and retreat from the One we think is dispensing unfair hardship; and if we are *prospering*, we may think we don’t need God, so we head out to have a “good time”.

Maturity Comes Through Suffering. God is working to perfect us, as per Phil. 1:6, which says, “...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until

the day of Christ Jesus.” The Holy Spirit was given to us at salvation, and His work will proceed “to completion”, or toward maturity, if we cooperate with Him. As we have stated before, we will learn the easy way or the hard way. Studying is the easy way to learn how God deals with us, and what He wants from us. And as we learn about Him and are “perfected”, our new outlook will enable us to find joy and contentment in every condition. Paul expressed his contentment, even in the face of horrible suffering, in Phil. 4:10-13, as follows:

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Whether Paul was in adversity or prosperity, he had learned to maintain his faith in God, and He was content. Paul was saying that he could endure ALL TESTS, and maintain a divine view-point. This is because he had learned the mystery of suffering and knew how to carry on without being derailed by mishap. He had learned a great deal from the Word and life, and he used what he knew to keep him going...i.e., he benefited from the tests, because of his KNOWLEDGE. Learning about God’s power enables us to get maximum gain from all tests. It is to OUR BENEFIT, as we studied earlier, to *endure* the training. We see this in Is. 16b-17, which says, “You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction [death]; you have put all my sins behind your back.” The focus in this penitent prayer of Hezekiah is on the “benefit” of suffering, whether it is for discipline or training.

Responding Properly to Affliction. Whether we are being corrected, or being put through exercises for endurance and strength, affliction will have a good effect, *if we respond to it properly*. Hos. 5: 14b-15 shows how we should respond to discipline and training:

I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.

Admitting our guilt is the right response to *corrective* suffering. As for suffering for *training*, our right response is to simply *keep on seeking* (this assumes that we have already “admitted our guilt”). Regardless of what happens to us, or why it happens, we must continue to fire on all cylinders and move with every ounce of our energy toward God. Otherwise, what starts out as training will switch to discipline and God will “go away” and “back away” from us. If we maintain our spirituality and our quest for more of God, then suffering will feel less like suffering and more like joy...heat will feel cooler, cold will feel warmer, hunger will feel fuller, and less will feel like more. In other words, with spirituality, the sensation of pain will be reduced; our losses will become tolerable; waiting will feel like forward motion; and hope will stand strong in the face of hopeless conditions. God will *mitigate* or *forego* the suffering of a “righteous” believer, as the believer is learning about grace through intensive study.

The Eternal Perspective. Throughout our training we must focus on eternity, as opposed to temporality. 2 Cor. 4:17 reminds us, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” Rom. 8:18 adds, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” When Scripture repeats itself, we must pay attention. Here we see the point being emphasized that the pains of discipline and training are nothing compared to the eternal gains they bring to us, if we embrace them with God’s perspective and absorb the benefits. But if we do not have the right perspective, it’s back to the training field! God will continue to bring experiences to us that shape our view and make it more like His, UNTIL WE FINALLY GET THE POINT. Ps. 119:65-75 gives us “the point” in the following:

Do good to your servant according to your word, Lord. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I trust your commands. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees. Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart. Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands. May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word. I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

When we embrace suffering, we are asking God to “teach” us, to give us knowledge and wisdom. We are humbly looking for Him to give us what we do not have, and to implant in us what we do not know. His teaching is worth more than all the riches and fame in the world, because our hope is enshrined within an *eternal* frame, and this makes our immediate time and place insignificant.

Transformative Effects of Suffering. We recognize that it is God’s character and complete foreknowledge and wisdom that is at work to “form” us now...as He created us in the beginning...to be like Him. It is “good” for us to be afflicted, and—according to the divine view point—good can come from it. So we cannot be disheartened, as per a verse we have seen before, 2 Cor. 4:16, which says, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” We believe that perseverance will transform us on the INSIDE—in the heart—regardless of the hammering effects of training on the outside. This is no cake walk...the Christian life...and only those who see the greater goal of spirituality and spiritual production will succeed.

Rom. 5:3-5 gives us another view of the purpose for suffering, as follows:

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

We see the sequence that develops when we welcome the training: “Perseverance” is enduring the training, knowing that it will benefit us. This builds “character”, which is suggestive of the character of

Christ, generated through fellowship and the control of the Holy Spirit. And sustained character increases “hope” (or *faith*), which is the ultimate marker for spirituality and maturity.

James 1:2-4 gives us another look at the outcome of and purpose for training:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

When tests and trials have done their work, maturity will be achieved.

Perseverance. Perseverance is faith that is sufficient to allow grace to operate throughout our training. When this “work” of faith persists, and the training is completed, the result is that we become “mature and complete, not lacking anything.” If we want to be “finished”, as fully-trained warriors in God’s army, we must give attention to the growth and development of our faith, whereby we will endure God’s training; then God can FINISH the work of building our maturity.

This is confirmed in 2 Thess. 1:4-5, which says this:

Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

The perseverance of these believers through all their trials shows that God was justified before the angels in giving human believers the righteousness of Christ at the time they believed in Him. Perseverance through persecutions is also evidence that the grace of God is working, and that faith can be sustained, regardless of personal gains or losses.

More on the Value and Purpose of Suffering. We aren’t through with verses verifying the value and purpose of our suffering as Christians. Another “classic” is given in 1 Pet. 1:6-7, which says this:

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

With the right view, we are happy to see training come, and—more than that—delighted with its result, which is this: Faith is strengthened and we earn greater rewards for spiritually-motivated service.

Ps. 66:10-12 gives a description of our training that is similar to the one above in 1 Peter:

For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

An external view, once again, shows us “wasting away”, but all this is CHANGING US in our souls! And change we must, if we really want to SERVE. Job said, “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” Is it fun? No. But it is necessary, and when we see its pur-

pose, we will endure the pain.

2 Cor. 12:10, a passage we have seen before, gets very specific about the tests that come, saying, “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in [my] weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” Here, then, are the tests:

1. **Insults from others.** We must use all the techniques of spirituality and maturity to surmount these and forgive insults against us.
2. **Hardships.** This is mental pressure from environmental and psychological stress. This is lightened by knowing and believing the promises of God.
3. **Persecutions.** This is systematic testing that comes from groups or institutions. Whether we are tormented because we are Christians, or because we are actually wrong, prayer and endurance will help us get through.
4. **Difficulties.** These represent the strains of misfortune and even disaster that come to all believers. This is the time we can know we are weak, and understand that the only way we can get through setbacks is to acknowledge our weakness and allow God’s strength to sustain us.

The Suffering Cycle. The Old Testament is full of illustrations of God’s grace operations. This is what we see in Deut. 8:1-9, which depicts the whole cycle of suffering leading to blessing, as follows:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you. Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

This is a beautiful picture of God’s provision while we are training, and it shows a desirable outcome afterward: *graduation* and *prosperity*. There seems to be a time, as with Job, when training is over, and we can fully enjoy the fruits of God’s work in us. But while we are training, God wants us to be humble and wait on Him for relief, rescue, and results. The very best thing...ALWAYS...is for us to confess regularly, pray consistently, study faithfully, and believe what we learn. If we use God’s methods for growth and walking in the Spirit, we will surmount our training, and we will emerge champions and

heroes of grace.

Learning in Times of Prosperity. We have focused primarily on suffering as part of our training, but we have also seen that there are occasions for learning in times of prosperity. We want to explore in more detail the impact and opportunities of prosperity. Just as “perspective” is important in the area of suffering, it is crucial that we keep the right view when things are going “swimmingly”. Once again, the correct view sees through a wider-angle lens, so that we see the panorama of eternity, and not just the narrow focus of our little lives on earth. We talk about what is “ours”, and private property is a principle of Scripture, but *nothing is really ours*. We are borrowing the space we occupy, and anything that makes our lives comfortable or enjoyable on *terra firma* is temporary and in a constant state of deterioration. There is no real permanence in the world. Even the bodies we occupy are “running down”.

Once again, nothing belongs to us. Everything belongs to the Lord. Haggai 2:8 confirms this, saying, “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,” declares the Lord Almighty.” Ps. 24:1 adds, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it...” Ps. 50:10-11 caps it, saying,

...for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is mine and all that is in it.

It is all His: all we see, hear, taste, smell, and feel. None of it belongs to us. What we get is what is GIVEN to us for our use while we are here. Matt. 7:11 suggests this: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” We are dependent on what GOD gives, not the world. Consider Rom. 8:32, which says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” The human race benefits from all that God gives, but believers—God’s children, especially those who are in fellowship and maturing—receive special provision. This is what we see in Ps. 84:11, which says, “For the Lord is a sun and a shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” And verse 12 adds, “O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.”

Prosperity Can be a Product of Maturity. God does take care of His own. A good example of God prospering believers is seen in the case of Abraham. He was enormously wealthy. And why? Because of His faith. Look at Gal. 3:6, which says, “Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” Then verses 7-9 connect the blessings of Abraham with his faith, and suggest that we can be blessed, as well (although perhaps in a different form). Here is what these verses say:

Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

To reach the level of faith that such blessings require, we need fully-developed maturity. It is interest-

ing that, when we reach a higher level of maturity, our image of “blessings” tends to morph into one that is more spiritual and less temporal and corporeal. A mature believer will see ANY situation as a blessing and an opportunity to participate in the “life that is real life”. Meanwhile, God will always provide our basic needs...this is PROMISED. This principle was in evidence when a crowd gathered to hear Jesus teach the Word. He took seven loaves of bread and a few fish and fed all of them (around 4,000), with seven baskets left over. Such provision is standard for seeking believers. Phil. 4:19 promises, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” If we are “abiding in Christ”, meaning “in fellowship”, our needs are covered.

Prosperity can be Taken Away. But having our needs met is not necessarily what we have in mind when we use the term “prosperity”. This word implies something beyond the basics...i.e., prosperity is something *extra*. It is when we get more than we need that we tend to value what we are *given* more than the *Giver*. Satan wants us to see ourselves as self-sufficient and “self-made”, as Nebuchadnezzar did in Dan. 4:29. This passage shows his attitude at the time: “Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the palace of Babylon, he said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’” His arrogance was palpable. God’s response to this pride was, as follows: “Your royal authority has been taken away from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle.” And this went on for seven years, time enough for this king to recognize that God is the One Who owns the kingdoms of the world (even though he has given great latitude to Satan to influence and even control them), and God will place leaders, or allow them to be placed. The lesson of Nebuchadnezzar is this: God doesn’t want us to do things, and then pat ourselves on the back; He wants us to trust HIM to do them, and then give Him credit.

Wisdom is Greater than Prosperity. Focus that rests on ourselves results in pride and/or selfish expressions of greed or ambition, which quickly branch into all kinds of sins...such as stealing, murder, coveting, and envy...and we end up in a rabid search for fulfillment in the things of the world. The alternative is to focus on the Word. Any plans we make should allow time for study and growth. If we are in a position or occupation that is so demanding that we have no time for study, we should consider changing what we are doing to enable us to concentrate on the assimilation of truth. Pr. 16:16 says, “How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding than silver!” Wisdom has implications for all of eternity, whereas wealth and the things it buys create false illusions of certainty and security in our immediate environment. The things we want that money and power promise are not attained by pursuing them. Wealth is an attractive lure, but its promises are empty and disappointing. (Ask anyone who has won the lottery.) We get true satisfaction, happiness, security, and fulfillment only from God, based on our relationship with Him. If we are clean, we will qualify for His benefits.

Qualifying for Prosperity. The truth is, everyone would rather be prosperous than destitute, and there are spiritual conditions that promote prosperity. The keys to prosperity are these:

- Confession. “...no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” (Ps. 84:11b) See also Ps. 51:1-6; James 4:8-10; 1 Jn. 1:9

- Prayer. We should pray for daily provision, as Jesus did. Matt. 6:11; Matt. 6:33; Matt. 7:11
- Study. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15) See also 3 Jn. 2-4; Deut. 28:1-12; Jn. 8:31-32; Josh 1:2-9.
- Application of what we learn. James 1:22-25; Matt. 7:24; James 1:26
- Faith. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Heb. 11:6) See also Gal. 3:9.

The problem with prosperity is that, without copious amounts of faith, we can’t handle it. The Bible says plenty about the deleterious effects of wealth, and makes it clear that it can be a good and enjoyable thing; but this presumes a spiritual state that remains stable, even when prosperity flows. When we have money, we have freedom to please ourselves, as Solomon did, and to spend time acquiring and using things that interest or amuse us. It is easy for the activities that money avails to upstage our commitment to study and growth. Living in prosperity makes it more difficult for us to stay spiritual and faithful...“fun” replaces fellowship, shopping replaces prayer, and pursuit of money replaces a search for truth. It is hard to be wealthy and stay on track spiritually, because priorities become distorted and confused. Spiritual progress is hard enough without the distraction of prosperity, but when we have the freedom and opportunities that prosperity brings, it becomes exponentially more difficult...a “camel-through-the-eye-of-a-needle” kind of thing (see Mark 10:25).

Prosperity, then, is a real test of our faith. Will we stay focused on the daily intake of the Word, continue our prayer regimen, and watch for opportunities to exercise our spiritual gifts? Or will we just use prosperity for pleasure? Which is easier and more attractive? It’s no contest; sin is *fun*, after all, so there goes spirituality and maturity...right out the window. This means we should be “careful what we wish for”, because the prosperity we think we value may be our downfall. Management of prosperity, like the endurance of suffering, requires preparation and perseverance. If you are not prosperous, thank God that you don’t have that pressure, and keep moving forward in your spiritual development. If God determines that your growth will not be stymied by it, He can bring prosperity to you in an instant. Don’t be surprised if this happens. Just remember to seek first His kingdom, so that things which come will fit—and not disrupt—your training program.

Sadness can Prompt Wisdom while Pleasure can Prompt Foolishness. Eccl. 7:4 says, “The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.” This depicts a view of spiritual reality, followed by an expression of what happens when the world view dominates. In the house of pleasure, we DO NOT LEARN, which means that pleasure, though it is a good thing, can be bad if we live IN it and FOR it. When we see prosperity as the place where we want to take up residence, and pleasure as the way to spend the time we have, these can easily become idols and pull us completely away from our purpose. Everything we have and everything we intend should revolve around our need to learn and grow in our understanding and use of grace. Prosperity

will work for us only if it does not hinder us from life in the Spirit. No matter what we possess, we will not be content if we are not using God's grace techniques and assets. Hopefully, we will be able to learn about these the easy way, with or without prosperity.

The Loss of our Original Christian Zeal. When we begin our Christian experience, we have the rosy glow of new-found love for God and the life He offers. But the flaming zeal of our first encounter quickly fades, and we come to see that the Christian way of life is riddled with difficulties and hardships. Many young believers, like many newly-weds, see difficulties as a challenge to the validity of the new relationship. Where did the heart-flutter go? The thought may occur: if the feeling is subsiding, maybe the experience is false. This is why our relationship with God, like that of newly-married couples, must be based on commitment and knowledge. Marriage is hard work, and so is the Christian life. Both of these consist of a string of struggles and hardships, not just an unbroken flow of blessings and bliss. When we are saved, what is required IMMEDIATELY is training in the basic doctrines of the Word. The books we have offered, especially *Bible Basics for Living*, are not a bad start (free downloads can be accessed at my website: www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com). Or even better, start with J. Hampton Keathley's, *ABC's for Christian Growth: Foundations for Living*, available at www.bible.org. God has used the late J. Hampton Keathley's gift to encapsulate all the important doctrines...clearly and thoroughly...and *ABC's* is a must-read for new and seasoned believers alike.

Training is Urgent. One thing is certain, no believer, especially a new one, should begin service until he or she is trained. Working and serving are not the MEANS to growth; they are the PRODUCT of it. Once training in the Word is conducted and a new believer graduates beyond infancy, then service can begin. God will add His own training along the way to supplement study as a means to direct and solidify faith. Then the believer will be equipped to produce fruit through his ministry...meaning that his gift will edify others...with the ultimate result that the gospel will be propagated and God will be glorified.

All of us need training all of our lives. And whether the course we are enrolled in at the moment has a label of "suffering" or "prosperity", we must remember that there is nothing more important than our refinement for service for our Master and Savior Jesus Christ. Everything else is trash...literally. This is exactly what Paul stated in Phil. 3:7-11, which gives a beautiful statement of his values and priorities, as follows:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in^a Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

We want to "know" His power, but this means we must also "participate" in His sufferings. The end result is that we will see our "faith" grow, so that we can "gain" a closer relationship with Him, and be

“found” in fellowship with Him, where His “righteousness” can be produced. Our role is to KNOW Him. There is nothing we have or can ever acquire, even comfort and ease, that will supersede a close walk with His Spirit. Only when we submit to His program of training for spirituality will His “righteousness” be seen in us.

Principles on Suffering. Finally, we want to present some conclusive principles on suffering, and the scriptures that go with them, as follows:

- **Suffering hurts.** This includes all kinds of trials. “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine...” (1 Pet. 1:6-7a)
- **Suffering tests faith and builds maturity.** “Consider it joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4)
- **Suffering forms character and builds faith.** “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Rom. 5:3-4)
- **Endurance of suffering requires commitment.** “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” (1 Pet. 4:19)
- **Suffering should be no surprise to believers.** “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” (1 Pet. 4:12-13)
- **Suffering is the destiny for believers.** “...so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.” (1 Thess. 3:3-4)

We are no longer of this world, and we can stop kidding ourselves that we are. The world does not work for us...we are misfits. If we try to fit ourselves into the world, we can probably do it, but there is no lasting joy there. Our place as Christians is close to the One whose name we bear. And we will not find rest away from Him. Thank God He is here with us to help us through the jungles and rip currents of this dangerous world, which doubles as our training course.

H. Revisiting Discipline

Discipline is for Unconfessed Sin. We have often said that discipline is for sin, but in a sense this is misleading. Sin, as a problem for believers, has been forever resolved at the cross; and positionally we have the righteousness of Christ. But sin exists in our hearts and lives, and must be dealt with, so grace found a way to wipe it out. The key to *less* sinning is maturity, and we aspire to that. But the crux of the problem with sin is not sin itself; it is our *not using the grace technique* of confession for expunging sin from our record. It's like having a "Get out of Jail Free" card and never playing it. A refusal of grace results in our having an outstanding record of sin that culminates in our needing to be corrected through discipline. Discipline leads to our *use of grace*, as much as it does a direct change in our behavior. It is true, however, that behavior will change as an outcome of correction, IF we keep on confessing, praying, studying, and so on. If we keep growing, behavior will change.

God Knows We are Weak. Earlier, we talked about TRYING to be "good", which is contrasted with using the grace system. We showed the futility of self-effort to perform divine tasks. We can't be CLEAN, and we can't DO GOOD THINGS...apart from GRACE! The flow of dependency and empowerment is unmistakable in Scripture, and we have discussed this topic *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*. God knows we are weak and helpless, and that we are incapable of resisting sin on our own; this is why He provides assets for us to deal with it, and offers HIS strength to overcome it. If we do not accept his offers and assets, remedial outcomes will ensue. He does not FORCE us to love Him, live close to Him, and accept His grace; but He provides outcomes to *remind us* that this is what we *can* and *should* do. Like a patient Father, He is there waiting for us to come to Him and fellowship with Him.

Correction is Given in Love. By degrees, we are getting a better understanding of discipline. It is not a venting of "divine wrath", though it may feel like that at times. Correction is given in love to call us to Him for what He alone can give: forgiveness and full restoration to fellowship. We have said before that there are two basic reasons for suffering: one is to prompt our confession, and the other is to train us. If we are in fellowship because we are currently sanctified from sin, we can be sure that any suffering will be for *training only*. This is "good" suffering, because it moves us forward, whereas discipline just get us back on track so we *can* move forward. *Testing* is to *train* a spiritual believer to *trust* God to meet all his needs. *Discipline* is designed to get us *back on the field*, so *training* can resume.

We sometimes call discipline "punishment" or a kind of "judgment", but we must be careful about the way we use these terms. God does not discipline simply because our crimes merit punishment, but because He is guiding us back to fellowship, where correct behavior can be achieved. He uses discipline to TEACH us, the same as any good parent would do for his children. Any parent who "loses it" and punishes a child just to vent frustration and anger, will provide minimal benefit to the child, and may do great harm. *Effective correction* is a deliberate, objective process designed to help a child understand and implement principles of life and behavior. This process is carried out in a well-thought-out plan for equipping the child with skills for living. God's discipline carries with it this same kind of meaningful plan and purpose: He wants us to LEARN.

If we are paying attention at all, we will learn from God's corrective actions and MAKE CORRECTION. Any suffering that continues after correction and confession will become training, which provides potential for progress on the maturity scale. If we do not respond to discipline, however, or if we respond in rebellion, we have seen that the intensity of discipline will increase over time, extending to the extreme of physical death. In discipline, however benevolent its intention, the severity of loss and pain can reach levels that are full of agony and anguish. On God's side, we see love and solicitation, but on the carnal believer's side, we see pain and suffering. When these come, examine yourself to see if sin is on your record; then CONFESS your sins immediately. This is your only refuge and respite from the dilemma of discipline. Pay attention to the lesson, and learn that grace will not be ignored for long. There are consequences for refusing God's love in the form of correction.

Conclusive Note: 1 Thess. 1:6 gives us wonderful solutions for suffering of any kind; these are seen as “fellowship” and “study”. Here is what this verse says: “You became imitators of us and of the Lord [signs of fellowship]; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message [kept on studying] with the joy given by the Holy Spirit [joy signifies the filling of the Spirit].” No matter what suffering may cross our paths, our job is to CONFESS, STAY IN FELLOWSHIP, and KEEP ON STUDYING...and—as we have seen—KEEP ON PRAYING.

I. Perfection through Suffering

Looking Back. We hope in this section to repeat the seminal points of our discussion on the place and value of suffering, and to give a summary of our findings. The main point we want you, the reader, to get from this book is that training is intense and demanding, but that it is well worth enduring. Other points have revolved around this one. For example, suffering for training is something that is influenced by our spiritual condition and the strength of our faith. We have also seen that training *builds* faith, and this leads to a closer walk with God. We also understand from Scripture that suffering will end at some point for believers who are maturing and walking in the Spirit, but there is no way to predict how strong it will get or what type of suffering will be introduced when it comes.

Are we Ready to Train? The questions we have to ask ourselves are these: 1) Do I want God? And 2) Do I want to serve God? If so, am I willing to go through training so I can join His team? Whether you want to join a football team, a “seals” team, or a team of engineers, you must commit to the training it takes to perform a task on the team. The label of “team member” is not enough. Beyond being on a “team roster”, there is this question: Are you going to be a “player” on the team? Will you do what it takes, so you can actually “get in the game”. Training for spirituality requires tenacity in drills that will test your desire for God...your volition for the divine. You will either persevere, or you will quit and walk away.

By the way, this is not an invitation to enter a world of “self-effort” and “works”; it is a call to grace, where the real “work” gets done. If you really want God, studying and praying are not a matter of effort, but something you derive satisfaction from, an easy drawing on the resources of grace. Once you *decide* that God is what you want, you will sign up for His rigorous training, and the endurance that

ensues will not be based on legalism, but on a faith that accepts the methods of grace. Being a believer is not enough...you must also *train*. If you have enlisted, welcome to the team.

God's Objective. God PLANS our training, and we must remember that His view encompasses specific training exercises that best fit His plan and provide the greatest benefits for each of us. He cares about our SPIRITUAL condition above all else; He wants to *shape* our hearts to bring our spirits, souls, minds, and bodies into alignment with His will. He wants us to *think* like He thinks. He wants us to develop a heavenly perspective and discount the mundane and corporeal. He wants to matter more to us than any condition of life, and He longs for unreserved commitment. So He brings events to our lives that test and build our faith in Him, so we can BELIEVE MORE and GET CLOSER TO HIM!

By growing, we bring production into our Christian lives, in the form of *active grace*, or the work of the Holy Spirit within us as believers. But growth requires training. We are reminded of Rom. 5:2-4, which tells us what training accomplishes. This passage says the following:

...through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Perseverance is a kind of faith, and faith brings production. This is God's objective: Divine *production* bringing divine *glory*, wherein God is virtually honoring Himself. But as the glory cycles *from* God, *through* us, and *back to* God, we become pictures of His grace for all the angels to see, so that God's grace and justice are completely vindicated. This is the BIG reason for our training: God shows how grace and mercy are granted to those who choose Him. Conversely, this shows why His judgment of fallen angels is justified.

We Train so God can Work. Tribulation, affliction, and hardships make us stronger when we trust God to get us through them. These represent events of training which enable God to feed His character into us. This, in turn, enables Him to perform His work through us. Col. 1:29 sums this up, as follows: "To this end I Labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." For the purpose of Paul's ministry, he worked hard and struggled constantly, but he made it clear that this was done by God's "working" (His energy), which does amazing things with astounding power and might. Training will be difficult, and afterward we will work our fingers to the bone, but both the training and the work are God's and the sooner we relinquish to His training and "work", the sooner we will be equipped to "serve", as we have signed up to do. And remember, "...our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (2Cor. 4:17)

Blessings Come as we Pass the Tests. When we pass the tests that are brought to us, we will not only receive stronger faith and confidence in God, we will enjoy tremendous blessings from Him. In Deut. 28:2-6, we see the kinds of blessings that will be manifested, in addition to the spiritual benefits we get from our growing faith. The following account of these blessings must not be discounted; they

are viable prospects for a growing believer:

All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

When we pass the tests as they are given, by taking God up on His grace-offer to forgive our sins, answer our prayers, strengthen our faith, and sustain our walk, we will enter a new kind of life that we never imagined possible. God will bless us, and do great things in our lives, as we see in Eph. 3:20, which says, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory...” We can’t dream up the kinds of things God is waiting to do “according to his power” that is “at work within us”. The achievements this verse is citing CANNOT BE MEASURED! This is because they are produced by the infinite God. Yet we tend to persist in measuring and comparing *our* deeds, as though these mattered at all to God. What matters to Him is our *faith increasing* and our *self-trust diminishing*. He will *work* as we learn to *rest*, even though our resting will leave us drained. You see, His work will wear us out, because what He is accomplishing, in and through us, will stretch us to the limits.

The “prophets” in the Old Testament were ignored, rejected, abused, and even killed because of their teachings, but they were blessed. They are a model to us for endurance. James tells us about this in the 5th chapter of his writing, verses 10-11, as follows:

Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Perseverance brings blessings, but giving in to pressure truncates them. When trials come, our first tendency is to “grumble”, so James warns against this in verse 9 (James 5). In verse 8 he admonishes us to “be patient and stand firm”, a posture he portrays in verse 7, as follows: “Be patient, then, brothers, unto the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.” Like the prophets and Job, these farmers trusted in God for provision and waited patiently for His deliverance and care. They understood that true blessings come through perseverance, and grumbling leads to carnality and reversionism. James 1:20 says, “...for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” Then verse 21b gives us the appropriate response to trials: “...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save [deliver] you.”

God will Help us Pass the Tests. If we lose faith when bad things happen, we will also lose spirituality, and our divine supply will be cut off. If we will transfer our anxiety to God, and pray for relief, remembering to keep ourselves clean through confession, we will come through each difficult time

intact, and we will emerge stronger and wiser. If we are trusting God, He will GIVE us endurance, because our strength for *anything* comes from Him. He encourages us through the Scripture, as we have seen. He also gives us strength directly through His Spirit, if we remain “in the Spirit”...or “in fellowship”. And He will hearten us through other believers. Rom. 15:4-5 describes God’s “encouragement” agenda well, saying, “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.” So even our endurance comes from God. We see more and more why faith is so important, because it is God who does *everything*.

The Cross. We bear the cross of Christ, but we do not carry it alone. The “cross” we are to bear is not some standard schedule for suffering that is the same for every believer. We all suffer in distinct and individual ways, and the suffering that we do is not always seen by others. Our cross is our “personal” cross. We would love it if we could just believe in God and His Word and all His promises and trip happily along without a break in our faith. But we do not work that way. Because of the forces of opposition that we face, and because we are weak, we require additional convincing of the truth and greater understanding of God’s power. To truly grasp these, we will have to be trained. By enduring our training—going through the suffering and tests that are designed to build our faith—we will be taking up our cross, and we will be identifying ourselves with the crucified and risen Son of God.

Here are some ways that we *identify with Christ*, as we *bear our cross*:

- “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” Gal. 6:17
- “I die daily.” 1 Cor. 15:31
- “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” Col. 3:3
- “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” 1 Jn. 3:16
- “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” Jn. 17:16
- “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Rev. 3:21
- “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Rom. 8:17)
- “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matt. 10:39
- “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” Mark 8:34b-35
- “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Lk. 9:23

We can take great joy in the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us. It is the single-most important event in all of existence. But even though we acknowledge and give thanks for the cross, we don't really fathom the complete depths of the sacrifice that was made. All we can do is *accept its benefits*, and this acceptance alone honors the work of the cross better than any intellectual or emotional capacity for imagining its scope and severity. We *glorify Christ* when we use the techniques and assets which we are able to use BECAUSE OF THE CROSS. The greatest glory comes to Christ when we "approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace" (Heb. 4:16)...i.e., when we are right with God and functioning in His power. This is when the Holy Spirit conducts His ministry of directing attention toward Jesus Christ to glorify Him, which is accomplished through the "righteous living" that the Spirit does through us.

Arrival. To reach this pinnacle of Christian service, we must be trained, and the further we move along in God's training and study program, the bigger the tests will become, yet the greater the blessings will be upon their completion. Advanced maturity brings advanced training. So, how badly do you want it? If the point of your life is to "get all the gusto you can get", then don't sign up. Just get saved and then live a mediocre life with no fruit and no lasting satisfaction, and take whatever you get when you enter the eternal state. But if you embrace the possibility that your time can count for something, and that the gain greatly outweighs the sacrifice, then you can pray, "Father, train me in your wisdom and way, and give me your endurance and comfort to stay the course and finish my preparation, so I can perform your work...your way...in your power. Softly, I ask...gently, if you please...but teach me what I need to know. And thank you for your care, as I go through what you have planned for me."

God's Care Along the Way. Here are some verses to remind us of God's care for us as His *children*; these should be recalled, as we enter and endure His training course:

- We are God's children, and will be treated as such. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12-13)
- We have the title of "sons". "For you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Rom. 8:15-16)
- We are sons of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal. 3:26)
- When we ask, in the Spirit and according to His will, we get what we ask for. "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:11)
- We can drop our burdens on God, even the trials of training, because He cares enough for us to take it away. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift

you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Pet. 5:6-7)

As children of the King, we need not fear life in the kingdom. We are privileged and protected. But we have training to go through to make us fit subjects for the Great King. We must show Him, above all, that we trust Him and His grace and wisdom. And we must believe that He loves us and is waiting for us with open arms. And even though His training may become intense, we must continue to believe, and we must thank Him that we are deemed worthy of His refinement, whatever that demands. So let us surrender to the training, submit to the pressure, and acquiesce to the adversity. Let us be able to say, with Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4:7) And God will fulfill in us His promise: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.” When God is finished with our training, we can get the T-shirt that says, “I Survived God’s Training Program”, which on the back side will say, “But I Cheated...I Had Help”.

J. Scriptures on Training

- Job 5:17-18—Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.
- Job 14:1—Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.
- Ps. 9:9-10—The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord have never forsaken those who seek you.
- Ps. 34:19-20—A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will broken.
- Ps. 119:71—It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.
- Eccl. 7:3—Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.
- Is. 30:20—Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more: with your own eyes you will see them.
- Is. 48:10—See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.
- Jn. 16:33—I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.
- Mark 4:17—But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the world, they quickly fall away.
- Acts 9:16—But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man [Paul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will

show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

- Rom. 5:3-4—Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.
- Rom. 8:17-23—Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.
- Rom. 8:26—In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.
- Rom. 12:12—Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
- 1 Cor. 4:11-13—To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.
- 2 Cor. 1:3-4—Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.
- 2 Cor. 1:7—And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.
- 2 Cor. 4:11-18—For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is

temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- 2 Cor. 5:14-15—For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.
- 2 Cor. 12:7—To keep me from being conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.
- Gal. 2:20-21—I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.
- Phil. 1:29—For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.
- Phil. 2:27-30—Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.
- Phil. 3:10—I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.
- Col. 1:24—Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.
- 2 Thess. 1:4-5—Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.
- 2 Tim. 2:3—Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
- 2 Tim. 2:12—If we endure, we will also reign with him.
- Heb. 5:8-9—Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...
- James 1:2-4—Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

- James 1:12-16—Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers.
- James 5:10—Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
- 1 Pet. 1:6-7—In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.
- 1 Pet. 2:21—To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.
- 1 Pet. 4:1—Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.
- 1 Pet. 4:12-14—Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.
- 1 Pet. 5:8-10—Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Scriptures Specifically About the Dangers of Success

- Deut. 8:11-18—Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors

had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

- Prov. 30:7-9—Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.
- Eccl. 2:4-11—I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man’s heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.
- Hosea 13:4-6—But I have been the Lord your God ever since you came out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me. I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.
- Luke 12:16-21—And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Final Statement

When we enter the Christian life, we have ideas about what it will be like to be a child of God and to walk in the steps of Jesus and live a life of love and blessings. But the reality does not exactly match our image, because there is evil in the world, and within us. Fortunately, God has made arrangements and provided assets for living to enable us to deal with this evil. We saw in this book the techniques of grace that God avails: confession, prayer, learning, trusting, and training. The point of this book has been to look at *God's training*, as well as to advance those tools that God offers to help us prepare for, and endure, the training.

The purpose for our use of the techniques, and of God's training, is to build our faith. Trusting in God is both a technique in itself, and the most important outcome of all of God's methods. Our objective is to grow in grace and knowledge, and to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit through an ongoing faith. Reaching the point where we are "walking in the Spirit" continually will require our use of all the grace assets that God makes available. And this will demand training, so that we can mature and flourish by His grace, and so we can function in His power.

When we complete our training, by stages and over time, we will receive unbelievable blessings from God, and will participate in the performance of incredible things for, and by, Him. At all times, we should remember that, even in blessing, we must sustain a perspective of the supremacy and preeminence of God. In *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*, within the "Final Statement" in that book, we concluded the following:

And know this: Even if there were no blessings, no abundance, no protection, no assurance of good in this life, the choice for us remains clear...it is God we choose. Father God, we want only you.

And now we ask this: "Because we want you, Lord, we ask that you prepare us to serve you by training us in your Word and in your ways, and that you bring experiences and events to us that bring us closer to you. Strengthen us, protect us, bless us as you please, and be patient with us, your imperfect and impetuous children."

Endnotes

1. “Why Christians Suffer”, an article by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 1. This article is published online at www.bible.org. (Bible.org, Dallas, TX)
2. *The Angelic Conflict*, by Robert B. Thieme, Jr. Published by R.B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, P.O. Box 460829, Houston, TX 77056-8829.
3. *The Angelic Conflict*, by Robert R. McLaughlin. Published by Robert McLaughlin Bible Ministries, Cranston, RI, 2012.
4. *The Interlinear Bible*, edited and translated by Jay P. Green, Sr., p. 11. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Lafayette, Indiana, 1985.
5. *The Cross*, a series of sermons by Robert R. McLaughlin. Available at www.gbm.org.
6. *Systematic Theology*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer. Published by Kregel Publications, P.O. Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, with special permission from Dallas Theological Seminary. Cited in *The Plan of God*. Robert B. Thieme, Jr. R.B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, P.O. Box 460829, Houston, TX 77056-8829.
7. *Ecclesiastes*, a series of sermons by Robert R. McLaughlin. Available at www.gbm.org. Also a book, *Ecclesiastes*. Published by Robert McLaughlin Bible Ministries, Cranston, RI, 2012.
8. *The Ryrie Study Bible*, by Charles C. Ryrie, p. 156. Moody Publishers, Chicago, 1986, 1994.
9. *Ecclesiastes*, a series of sermons by Robert R. McLaughlin. Available at www.gbm.org. Also a book, *Ecclesiastes*. Published by Robert McLaughlin Bible Ministries, Cranston, RI, 2012.
10. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, pp. 96-100. Biblical Studies Press, 1006-2002. This book is available at www.bible.org.
11. *A Literal Translation of the Bible*, edited and translated by Jay P. Green, p. 945. Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody, MA, 1987.
12. “Holy Spirit in the Old Testament”, an article by Bob Deffinbaugh. This article is published online at www.bible.org. (Bible.org, Dallas, TX)
13. “Salvation in the Old Testament”, an online Q and A by Hank Hansgraaf. This session is available at www.equip.org, Christian Research Institute, Charlotte, NC.
14. *ABC's for Christian Growth*, p. 198.
15. *ABC's for Christian Growth*, p. 185.
16. *A Literal Translation of the Bible*, p. 915.
17. This list of “positive outcomes from suffering” comes primarily from J. Hampton Keathley, III, in an article published through www.bible.org. The exact name of the article containing this list could not be ascertained; the information presented here came from my study notes of the article.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

About the Author

William D. Gibbs, III, spent 25 years in public service as an educator and curriculum designer. He served as teacher, principal, superintendent, and curriculum developer in the public school systems of Texas. He has now taken his skills in the area of learning-program development and is channeling them into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much of his career in education was spent developing programs for at-risk students. Continuing in that vein, he writes books that dig into the heart of God's methods for Christian living, especially as they apply to new or struggling believers. The same way that he built systems for filling-in gaps and establishing solid foundations for student learning, he has—by God's grace—built on the foundation of the Word to provide understandable studies that facilitate Christian living and accelerate the growth and effectiveness of believers.

Gibbs began an intensive study of the Word in 2010, and initiated a practice at that time of recording his findings in writing; this process has yielded over a dozen books. *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, carries the concepts presented in previous writings to a new level, adding additional findings that sharpen understanding of divine techniques and assets, which enable believers to reach maximum maturity and capacity for service.

Website: www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com