

I Do Believe Help my Unbelief

by William Gibbs

I Do Believe: Help my Unbelief

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Dedicated to Bob Doak
...my true spiritual father...
who is now face to face
with our Lord

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Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe;
help me overcome my unbelief!"

Mark 9:24

Introduction

We find ourselves at the very center of Christianity. At the core of our relationship with God, we discover its seminal qualifier: **faith**. To begin with, our salvation depends on our believing God's message for mankind...the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we believe in Him and His work, we are adopted forever into the family of God. This sets the stage for the play called, "The Christian Life", which takes place after we become His children. Following salvation, the quality and productivity of our lives depend on the size of our daily trust in God's promises and techniques. Faith is the hinge pin for all association with God. Once a person believes the gospel message, thus becoming God's child, the quality of his life will be determined by the level of his faith.

When God looks at us, He examines first (as we shall see) our purity, and then He looks at our faith. We must be clean, and then we must be in a state of honoring God by believing that He exists, and that what He speaks is truth. Our hope is to achieve cleanliness, and then to find and use divine methods for strengthening our faith. The first objective (being clean) is preliminary and prerequisite, while the second (having strong faith) is the end goal. If we can learn how to increase our faith by following God's methods for growth, then we can fulfill God's purpose and plan for our lives.

Gal. 5:6 says, in part, "The only thing that counts is faith..." Vince Lombardi said, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing." Faith is the "only thing"; it is singular in its centrality to our lives with God. Nothing is more important or essential.

Preview: In this study, we will examine many truths related to faith: Satan's opposition to our faith, preconditions for building faith, and some of the ways that faith is supported scientifically and historically. We will also establish once for all the place, importance, and means for cleanliness and purity, as these are crucial to the growth of faith. And we will define and describe the parameters of faith, to see what it is, exactly, and what really increases when we "build faith". The mystery of faith's content and function will be explored, so we can know precisely what to do in order to make our faith stronger.

The presence and place of the Holy Spirit will be reviewed in some detail, so that we can be reminded that nothing we do contributes to God's work in our lives (faith is the *opposite* of "doing", or "working"). God does His work much better than we do, even though we are intended to become His instruments for the accomplishment of His purposes. Something we see again and again in our studies is this: All of Christianity is dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit. We must not neglect our preparation for accessing this power. Intercepting this power depends completely on our faith, making the enlargement of our faith the most important thing we can do.

To do this, we must fully understand the components of the "inner man" and the role that our non-material parts play. These include the mind, the soul, the spirit, and the heart. We will determine how these hidden parts of ourselves come into play in the refinement of our faith, and see how

changes in these parts can be visibly expressed as “practical” Christianity. We will bridge the gap that is often seen between the “spiritual” and the “pragmatic”, and show that the mysterious and invisible operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts can produce observable and useful results in our daily lives. Discovering how this actually works is nothing short of thrilling!

The steps in learning God’s ways and acquiring the means to access His grace and power are direct and straightforward in Scripture. The most important truth we will probe teaches us that merely “knowing” God’s ways is not enough. We must proceed beyond knowledge into areas of *divine wisdom*, and watch the words on a page in a book (the Bible) become units of spiritual power in our hearts, which in turn become specific acts of divine good that honor God, benefit us, and build up those that we serve. This study completes the picture, and teaches us the secret of how our knowledge can become faith, and shows what is required to make this happen. Great faith is within our reach; if we want it, it will come.

Chapter 1

Facing our Opponent

Why are we Here? This question seems broad and deep, esoteric and abstruse. Why ARE we here? This inquiry hails back to our origin and purpose, and begs some rationale for our existence. If, as we assume, we were “created”, along with a nearly-infinite universe, how can the Grand Maker of Everything...who must be much larger than His creation...notice and care about one infinitesimal product of His creative efforts in one isolated and insignificant corner of the universe? With so much vastness and content, how is it possible that the man-creature can matter on the stage of infinity?

God made us, along with everything else that is “out there”, because He had a specific purpose for us. Focus on “God’s plan”, however, is ordinarily well outside our stream of consciousness, because we are trapped within the confines of our daily preoccupations, our comfort and well-being, and our survival; the larger perspective of the universe and beyond mostly surpasses contemplation.

The question is begged as we consider ourselves in God’s larger context: If we are so tiny and creation is so vast, what could there possibly be about us that makes us special to God? Job 7:17 asks this very question: “What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention?” To get the answer to this question, we must stretch our perspective beyond the finite to the infinite...to God’s level, well past that of the “substantial” universe. Our true purpose supersedes and transcends the universe, extending to its original cause and initial purpose. Why did God make us, and why are we important to Him?

Philosophers have for millennia attempted to define and describe the purpose for man’s existence. As human believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the answers we accept are *a priori* and durable, because we accept God’s Word as documentation for our assumptions about the person and plan of God. So what can we glean from Scripture about God’s purpose for us?

To begin with, we must ask how and why God goes beyond His care for the collective “man”, and see why He actually zooms in on each one of us as *individuals*. What we will discover is how much God focuses on, loves, and cares for EACH OF US, separately and personally! But why is this so? Fortunately, we have already explored this question in previous studies, and we will refer you to them shortly. Currently, we will draw from those studies to help us see the larger picture as it relates to our place in creation, and to help us understand why our faith is so important.

Our purpose is framed in context with an event that occurred billions of years ago, well after God’s creation of angels. This event revolved around Satan, who was the most beautiful and powerful of all the angels. He succumbed at some point to pride, which was based on his awareness of his superiority. He decided that he was so wonderful and unstoppable that he could become God and rule the universe himself. He recruited about one-third of all the angels, and led a revolt against God. His revolt was—and still is—an attempt at overthrowing God. He is still consumed by His own arrogance, and cannot accept what we see: that his attempts will all be futile. He does not

accept his fate, and—since he is still powerful, bordering on the infinite—he is still successfully recruiting new allies for his cause...this time not from angels, but from the human race.

Back to the event in eternity past, God obviously corralled Satan at some point and put him on trial for treason and rebellion. He was found guilty and was sentenced to eternity in a “lake of fire”. He objected to this ruling, and launched an appeal of his sentence. His argument surely went something like this: “How can you [God] claim to be a loving and just God, and yet send one of your creatures (speaking of himself) to a lake of fire?” God undoubtedly replied, “You alone, Satan, are responsible for your sentence, because it is based on choices you made. Now, let me show you a dramatic play that will demonstrate your culpability for your own choices.”

God then created the human race and gave each member of that group “choice” concerning their acceptance or rejection of His reality and God-ship. This set the stage for a play in which God is currently allowing Satan to see an object lesson for choice and consequences, and human beings are teaching him this lesson, just by living their lives and making choices. Creatures with free will either accept or reject God, and they must accept the absence of God as the ultimate outcome for refusing Him. Choices bring consequences.

Clarification: In the production that God is putting on for Satan, He is illustrating that rebellion results in retribution. This shows Satan that he must suffer the consequences for his rejection of God. He is responsible for his choices. God demonstrates this law of divine physics in a stage production, wherein free-willed human beings are observed by fallen and “elect” angels. Humans make choices and then are shown to be accountable for those choices. Thus Satan is taught that he alone is responsible for his sentence.

Satan was free to choose and chose badly, and many among the *homo sapiens* species now do the same thing. Humans are free to reject God, and many do...while many others embrace grace and God’s salvation. This shows Satan that his eternal destiny is a matter of choice.

The point: Each of us has free will. Each of us will either seek God...or ignore Him...and *outcomes* will always follow that choice. We are the actors in God’s play, which demonstrates that each created being is accountable for his response to his Creator. (This is a huge study...impossible to compress into this short space. For the full story on Satan’s previous and current opposition against God, read “War against God”, in my book, *God’s Training Program for Believers*, pages 55-94. A more extensive read is given in a book titled, *The Angelic Conflict*, by Robert R. McLaughlin, available free of charge at www.gbible.org.)

Satan is seeking enlistees to bolster his efforts against the God who has judged him, and since he has all the “fallen angels” he will ever have, he is now using every resource in the world (literally) to recruit allies from among the human race. He does this by influencing human beings away from an interest in God. He is conducting a real-time, ongoing campaign to undermine, and—if possible—destroy any hint of faith toward God. He wants to prevent “unbelievers” from believing the gospel message, thus keeping them from becoming “believers”; and he wants to deceive believers that God’s promises are lies. This is where the conflict between God and Satan—occurring at the infinite level—becomes concrete and immediate within the scope of our daily existence.

Satan's Attack on Faith. Satan's greatest goal is to get us to reject grace and love and mercy. He gets us to sin and not confess. He gets us to be religious and moral and self-trusting, rather than relying on God for goodness in our lives. This leads to a diminution of our faith, which moves us away from God, thus satisfying Satan's objectives. His most serious concern is our faith.

If you have read our studies in the past, you know that Satan will undermine our faith in every possible way. If he can get us to trust ourselves to generate our own spirituality, he knows we will fail to please God. If he can get us to indulge the flesh, we will, once again, *dis*-please God. If he can get us to see the world from a human perspective, we will look away from God. If he can get us to rely on the knowledge of the world, we will have no wisdom. If he can get us to believe in money or recognition or success as our means to the good life, we will seek everything but Him. Satan lays traps everywhere, and we are easy and gullible prey for his wiles and seductions. And he is tireless. What can we do?

Jesus instructed us to pray for protection from Satan, and He Himself prayed for our protection. In Matt. 6:13, Jesus taught us to pray, "...deliver us from the evil one." In John 17:5, He addressed His Father, saying, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." We appeal to God the Father for protection from Satan because we need it. He is out to get us...to destroy us and annihilate our faith in the process. He wants us to join him or to be taken out of the way.

Satan will deceive and mislead us in every way possible. Here are some verses to caution us and instruct us against Satan's convincing and winsome arguments:

1 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.

2 Thess. 2:9-10b—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.

Matt. 24:4-5—Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ.' And will deceive many."

Rev. 12:9a—The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray...

Rev. 20:10—And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur....

1 Tim. 4:1—...deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

2 Cor. 11:13-14—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.

Satan wants us to be distracted from, confused about, or uninterested in God and His truth. The devil intends to halt or undermine our acknowledgement of God, our reverence toward Him, our humility before Him, and—more than anything else—our faith in Him. Erosion of these, more than any direct frontal assault or temptation, will keep us loyal to Satan, and we will secretly or openly

serve in his army in its opposition to God. When we are servants of Satan, we will find little or no resistance from his “cosmic system”, meaning that the world will cooperate with us in our indifference, or even defiance, toward God. The world will do all it can to accommodate our needs for pleasure, happiness, supplies, and security to keep us from remembering God. Satan is less of a problem for us when we are trusting in the world.

Even more devastating than faith misdirected toward the world, is faith expressed in ourselves. We mention this here, not to treat it fully, but to let you know that—by the time you finish this book—you will be very familiar with all aspects and dangers of self-trust. Self-directed faith is the result of PRIDE, the most destructive condition in all of creation. The worst thing we can say as believers, and the statement that brought Satan’s downfall, is “I will” (also seen as “I can”). We will have much to say about this.

Satan is always waiting in the shadows to ambush our faith in God. 1 Pet. 5:8 warns, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” To do this, he uses FALSE INFORMATION, and if you want to see the headquarters for his lies, just check out the news media or social media. The endless variety of ways in which we are misled by the world and the people in it...including many churches...is ubiquitous. There is no escaping its presence, and if we let down our guard, it will consume our faith.

1 Thess. 3:6-7 highlights the objective of temptation, which is to weaken our faith. This passage says this:

For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith.

Paul had taught the believers in Thessalonica well, so that their faith had been strengthened. He knew this made them conspicuous to Satan, who is keenly aware that the greatest deterrent to his campaign is the faith of growing believers. He even went after the faith of Jesus Christ, as shown in Matt. 4:2-3, which says, “After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’.” He was trying to get Jesus to rely on His own resources to meet His needs, but we know that Jesus lived His entire earthly life in dependence on His Father. Satan knows that—by redirecting our faith—he can get us to follow him. This is why it is important for us to build our faith faster than Satan, the world, and our own internal system of sin can tear it down.

Chapter 2

Wanting God

The Christian Life: Real vs. Ideal. It is easy to imagine the Christian life as a time of great blessing and carefree living, but this is not accurate. Believers are guaranteed hardships. When we are out of fellowship, we will be disciplined. When we are in fellowship, we will be trained. There seems to be no escaping the intensity of God's efforts to make us better...teaching us to be stronger, more trusting, humbler, purer, and so on. For those who are truly embracing God's way, there awaits an endless array of tests and trials designed to build us up and enable us to fulfill our purpose for being alive in God's kingdom. (For more on discipline and training, see *God's Training Program for Believers*, especially pages 211-250, "The Training Program".)

Scripture itself testifies to the rigorous life of a Christian, as seen in 1 Cor. 15:19, which says, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Our life is HARDER than the lives of unbelievers, regardless of what over-zealous evangelists or prosperity-promising pastors may say. Unbelievers can "pity" us for the tough lives that we have. This sounds almost humorous, but it is all too true: Chances are, if you are living a life of leisure as a Christian, then you are not doing something right. Yet there is a caveat.

Just because it is not easy does not mean that the Christian way of life is not the best life possible, as we demonstrated particularly in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. We showed in that book the prospect for reaching super-maturity and the unimaginable blessings that will come at that time. And there are intermittent blessings along the way, plus the guarantee that our needs will always be met, if we are walking in the Spirit and growing.

When we move forward, as we have seen in the past, changes occur. One of the things that changes with growth is our "taste", in that what pleases us is no longer defined by world standards. We have new delights, and events and conditions that were previously thought to be dreadful are now seen as privileges for serving and glorifying God. But the trials will come. For more on trials, see *God's Training Program for Believers*.

The most important weapon and protection we can have in times of difficulty is faith. God promises many things that can be ours, and these are accessed through the exercise of faith on a day-to-day basis. That is why it is so important for us to take the time to study the contents of Scripture that relate to the important topic of faith and the way in which it grows, in order to be prepared for the exigencies of our lives as believers.

This is important to know: When we choose God, it is because we truly want HIM; not because we are plotting some scheme for instant success and wealth and ease. It is God Himself that we want and seek.

Wanting and Seeking God. The biggest test in all of our lives is whether we want God. The first step in growing faith is seeking Him. And where does this start? It starts in the soul. There is a

“decider” at the core of our inner selves that prompts us to want Him enough to take the next step, which is to look for Him.

It is inevitable that we should become aware of Him in the world through our observation of creation. (Rom. 1:20) If what we see sparks an interest in God, we will want Him, and we will become open to the message of the gospel. *After* that time, when we hopefully become redeemed and reconciled to Him (saved), we can proceed in one of two directions: *toward* Him, or *away from* Him. The path toward Him is long and arduous, while the path away from Him is easy and smooth...accomplished mostly by simply doing nothing.

Once we become believers, we can choose to move closer to Him and seek Him further, or we can ignore and forget Him. He will not forget us, but if we move away from Him, we will be living as if we were not His children at all. Here is something we must understand: Wanting and seeking God is a life-long pursuit, and its absence will cause us to end up living for Satan, in the world, at the whim of our own sinful nature. We must choose the other alternative, which is to commit to a perpetual search for all that He is and all that He offers...to become all that He intends. This may sound a little ethereal, but we are going to get very concrete before we are through with this book; we will see specifically how we can stay on the right path, and what this will mean for us.

In seeking God, it will become clear to us that we are not just looking for ways to become “good”, but that we are looking for ways to get close to God. It is proper to seek “good”, but this is—as we have said many times—the END we hope to achieve by “finding God”. It is NOT the MEANS for locating Him. Amos 5:14 says, “Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.” Being “good” (by being cleansed) is essential to our access to God (as per 1 John 1), but our goal is to use the methods He offers that enable us to conduct a concerted SEARCH for Him; the good that results when we find Him will speak for itself.

Wanting Only God. Here is what we said about wanting only God above everything else, even good itself. God is what we want. This is what we stated on page 114 of *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*, which is reiterated here:

We want God, which leads to growth, which leads to good. This is the sequence. We do not go directly to good by wanting good alone. Wanting to stop sin and achieve righteousness is not enough to change our pattern. We must want God. He is the object of our pursuit of righteousness...not righteousness itself. Can we ever understand that what God wants from us is our focus on Him? He doesn't want us to be “good”; that will come. He wants us to want Him, take what He gives, and not substitute our own brand of goodness for His. He wants us close. This is His purpose for us, and our privilege in Him. Wanting “good” is a dead-end; wanting God is the open road.

Wanting only God, and seeking Him to the limits of our time and energy, is open to us, but we can refuse to acknowledge God's invitation, and decide that we want to pursue something else besides Him. In Jer. 29:11-14, God assures us that He is “findable”, but we must want Him...and He even tells us that when we find Him, we become part of a grand plan that INCLUDES US in the most positive way! Here is what this passage says:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity.”

This promise is meant for the Jews in Babylon, but it applies to us. If we seek God with all our hearts, we will find Him, and we will be in the center of His gracious plan. But we tend to leave out the part that says, “with all your heart”, and often see a search for God as a casual, hobby-like pursuit, to occupy some small portion of our spare time. “With all your heart” means to be consumed with a thirst for God and to want Him above anything else...or anyone else...and to put this into action by searching for Him in His Word, and in prayer.

Andrew Murray on Wanting God. Murray will be paraphrased in this section, to reflect his views on wanting God. (Endnote 1). Basically, Murray believed the following: That belief...faith...is in the heart, specifically the soul, not in the mind. Faith is a volitional act of choosing what we really want. We can *choose* today to say, “I want God”, from which will come impetus to advance and grow and serve. More than likely, however, we will choose to say, “I want recognition or fun or prosperity or intellectual satisfaction” (or whatever else there might be in the world that catches our fancy).

By choosing to want God, we sign up for the process that carries us, as His forever-saved children, toward a closer relationship with Him. We will *choose* what we *want*, and WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT WE WANT! We are born with a predisposition to search for God, with a multi-member force within us or around us that opposes it. Ecclesiastes 3:11b tells us we are born with an awareness of and curiosity about the eternal, but this does not guarantee that we will seek it. The wording of this passage is, specifically, “He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” Every human being has an awareness of God, but this does not mean that everyone searches for God and pursues a relationship with Him. Those who do will find Him!

For unbelievers who do not care for God, and never seek Him, they will remain condemned and “lost” for all eternity, unless they change their minds. Some will believe and be saved. After that time, their search for closeness to God will either go on, or it will be truncated. If we do not continue our search for God in all His fullness, we will be “saved” in the end, but we will never get close to our Father. We will live “carnal” (fleshly) lives, and accomplish little or nothing as believers.

If we want God, and seek Him, what will God give? Himself. He wants to be close to us, but we are the ones who must “draw near” to Him, through the methods that He provides. When we learn how to seek God, His righteousness, and His will, we will see the life that God wants to give us...not an easy one, but one that fulfills our most noble purposes. Once again, Amos 5:14 caps it, saying, “Seek good, not evil, that you may live [really live!]. The Lord God Almighty will be with you.” When we are close to God, and He is close to us (James 4:8), we can live with meaning and clarity...that is, really live.

Chapter 3

Does God Exist?

Romans 1:18-20. A clear statement about God's existence, and our internal awareness of it, is made in Rom. 1:18-20, which says the following:

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. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

As we saw in the last chapter on “wanting God”, we all have a sense of the “eternal” within us. This is corroborated by the incredible beauty and majesty of God's creation. By looking at what God has made, we become aware of the “Maker”. We cannot ignore the absolute reality that everything that exists did not just suddenly appear. An origin-less and purpose-less universe are unfathomable, and require a gigantic stretch of the imagination to encompass, even though many so-called “scientists” manage to span that gap. Those who reject God suffer from self-imposed blindness and a baseless faith in NOTHING! And they are “without excuse”.

Evidences for the “Faith”. As for other “evidences” for the “faith”, they are numerous, even though they are not necessary. No amount of miracles or scientific proof will change the mind of a man who does not want God. Hell itself cannot soften a hardened heart. In a parable in Luke 16:19-31, the story of the rich man and a beggar (named Lazarus) is given, to demonstrate that the mind made up about God will not be changed by external influences. A change in the mind comes only from an internal desire for God, resulting in a search for and acceptance of His truth. The story goes that Lazarus ended up by Abraham's side after death, while the rich man ended up in hell. (The untold part of the story is that the rich man ended up where he did because his heart was hard, the outcome of a life without faith. Being rich alone did not send him to hell.)

The rich man cried out to Abraham in a plea for relief from his torment, and begged Abraham to send the gospel message to his five brothers. Abraham replied that no one could cross over into hell to bring any relief to him, and explained that the brothers would never listen to warnings about hell. The rich man remonstrated, saying, “No, father Abraham...but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent” (v. 30). Abraham's retort was clear: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (v. 31). No amount of evidence will convince an unbeliever, or a carnal believer, of the truth, IF HIS HEART IS NOT OPEN TO IT. He or she must first WANT it!

Still, we will present some of the more common arguments concerning scientific and historical evidences for the reality of God, Christ, and the resurrection...and for the truth of the Bible. It should be understood that faith is not based on science or tangible proof. But that does not mean that science demonstrates the absence of divinity, or that Christianity is based on a myth. Quite the

opposite, there are many confirmations for God's existence, the truth of Christ and His work, and the accuracy and veracity of the Bible...in science and in historical records. We will look at each of these separately.

Does God Exist? How can we ignore our existence, since we experience it without equivocation? We ARE, and all that is around us IS. There is no denying our reality, no matter how mystical we may become in our speculation about what we really are, or where we came from. And since all around us IS, how can we ignore the logical necessity that it all BEGAN...somewhere and somehow. All that we are and all that exists had to come from SOMETHING, since the absence of everything cannot produce the presence of something that does not exist, any more than a "zero" can become a "one".

How, then, can anyone object to the existence of God as the originator of all that is? This is much more reasonable than to believe that NOTHING made EVERYTHING. Even the "big bang" theory can go just so far in explaining the origin and operation of the universe. Where scientists get stuck is in the moment before the big bang occurred. What existed at that time? Was it nothing? If so, then where did the explosion get the contents and source materials for its burst into existence? The assumption is that whatever existed prior to the big bang had its own origin. And where did that "originator" come from? At some point, an eternal, *a priori* being must be admitted. Otherwise, the brilliance of erudite science is disclosed as pure foolishness. They cite causation of existence that they cannot remotely observe, prove, or defend, and that they cannot discover scientifically.

The question can be asked: Where did God come from? Here we have a new reality, with a full and justifiable explanation. It is this: God has ALWAYS existed, without the limitations of time or space. There can be no better rationalization for "creation" than the presence of a "creator". And the creator must be bigger than time and space and matter and all their layered components to cause them to come into being. This means He must be infinite.

As conscious, living beings, we have questions about our own viability apart from the reality of an intelligent designer. If we came into existence without Him, then we are mere cosmological flukes, without meaning and without any frame of reference. We are dandelion seeds, wafting on the drafts of endless space. This seems completely pointless and hopeless.

The biggest battle for the hearts and minds of man are not fought as "faith" vs. "science", because so much of the scientific view is actually based on faith. The core issue is not IF we have faith, but WHERE IT IS PLACED. Jimmy Williams, whose studies provide much of the conceptual content for our studies in this chapter, offered a brilliant statement on this battle, describing the uncertainty of science, often by its own admission. Here is his conclusion on this:

Ironically, the same science which took God away then, is bringing back the possibility of His existence today. Physics and quantum mechanics have now brought us to the edge of physicality, to a place where sub-atomic particle structures are described by some as spirit, ghost-like in quality. Neurophysiologists grapple with enigmatic observations suggesting that the mind *transcends* the brain! Psychology has developed an entirely new branch of study (parapsychology) which asserts that psycho-spiritual forces (ESP, biofeedback, etc.) actually function *beyond* the physical realm. Molecular biologists and geneticists, faced with the

highly-ordered and complex structures of DNA, ascribe a word implying "intelligence" to the chaining sequences: the genetic "*code*." And we have already concluded that astrophysicists have settled on the "big bang" which seems to contradict the idea that matter is eternal, and, huge as it is, the universe appears to be finite. Whether we look through the microscope or the telescope it becomes more difficult in the light of experimental science to hold to the old premise that such order and complexity are the products of blind chance. The old naturalistic assumptions are being critically reexamined, challenged, and found to be unconvincing by many of today's scientists. (Endnote 2)

We do not have to find proof of God in science, as we will surely not find it there. But science provides more proof than non-proof, so we can allow ourselves to feel "rational" in our belief that God exists. Once we believe this, then we can come to Him. Heb. 11:6b says, "...anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists..." If it is proof we want, what more evidence do we need than the small tree growing right outside the window. Look around. How astonishing and astounding God's creation is! To imagine all this without Him seems just plain silly. Ps. 14:1 said, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'."

There seems to be a pre-existent condition in man's volition, one of each individual's own choosing, that determines whether we will pursue the God that we see demonstrated all around us, or ignore the evidence that all the complexity of creation is actually an accident. Therefore, each of us possesses a personal "wanter" or "rejecter" of God. If we want Him, we will believe in Him, search for Him, and find Him. If not, He will not seem important to us, or perhaps He will be relegated to a mythological status. Luke 14:35 provides an underpinning for this idea, saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." If we have a longing for God or for His truth, then we will find Him, and then we will learn and begin to "hear" the truth about His methods and provisions. We will come to understand the God we have longed for.

We re-quote part of a passage cited earlier in Romans. We looked at Rom. 1:18-20; now we want to isolate verse 20, which says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." There is plenty all around us to teach us what we need to know in order to seek an introduction to and an audience with the Almighty Creator.

We can easily accept that there is a God. But establishing parameters around our concept of God requires us to know who He is TO US. As Christian believers, we accept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and our Savior. We have accepted this reality through faith. But Christ has a reality IN THE WORLD...beyond our faith. Who was this historical figure? Who was Jesus? Does the "world" confirm Him as a real person, and is what is recorded in agreement with what the Bible says? That is what we want to explore now.

Who was Jesus? There are two views of Jesus Christ: 1) that of believers and 2) that of the world (Satan's cosmic system). We will look at both of these before this chapter is done, though our current emphasis is on the historical figure that He was (and is).

Jesus Christ claimed to be the Messiah, as per Matt. 16: 15-17, where Jesus said the following to Peter:

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”

Jesus Christ also said that He was one with God. This is what we see in John 10:30: “I and my Father are one.” This is bold. Either this was true, or Jesus was a liar, a fraud, and a charlatan. Or perhaps He was a megalomaniac, or an insane narcissist. This would disqualify Him as a prophet, because prophets dispense only truth, and he cannot be a man of moral superiority, because he deceived his followers. He was not merely a “good man”. He was a person who lived in history, and since He claimed to be God, He must be God, or He is the worst character in all of human history.

Jimmy Williams gives us the following, which concisely frames the alternatives we are seeing concerning the person and character of Christ:

1. **He is a liar.** This would make the one who spoke of truth and righteousness the greatest deceiver in history.
2. **He is a lunatic.** Paranoid schizophrenics do not behave as Jesus did. Their behavior is often bizarre, out of control. They generally do not like other people and are mostly self-absorbed. Nor do they handle pressure well. Jesus was nothing like any of this.
3. **He is merely a legend.** The greatest issue with this option is the issue of *time*. Legends take time to develop. Yet most of the New Testament, including Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, and all of Paul’s epistles were written by 68 A.D. An equivalent amount of time today would be the interval between President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 to the present. For people to start saying Kennedy claimed to be God, forgave people’s sins, and was raised from the dead would be a difficult task to make credible. There are still too many people around who knew Jack Kennedy...and know better.
4. **He is the Lord.** Is Jesus one of these other things listed above? These seem ill-fitted for the person He was. Either Jesus was, and is, the Son of God, or else He was a madman or something worse. (Williams drew from C. S. Lewis for this.) (Endnote 3)

The greatest testimony to the deity of Christ and the veracity of His claims is His resurrection from the dead, as we will show in an upcoming section. For now, we want to see what He broadcast or demonstrated about Himself, so that we can understand His view of who he was:

1. He is able to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-10).
2. He is a healer of disease (Mark 5:21).
3. He allows others to worship Him (Matt. 14:33, 28:9; Acts 10:25-26, 14:12-15).
4. He claims to be “other worldly” in origin and destiny (John 6:38).
5. He performs miracles over nature (Luke 9:16-17).
6. He claims He has absolute, moral purity (John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21).
7. He claimed to be God, Messiah, and the way to God (Mark 14:61-62; John 10:30, 14:6-9).

8. He claimed to be the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament (John 5:46-47; Luke 24:44).
9. He allowed others to call Him God and Messiah (John 20:29; Matt. 16:15-17). (Endnote 4)

We know the claims of Jesus and the proclamations of His disciples, but what about other sources that confirm His existence historically? For more on this we turn to a study by James Arlandson. In an article titled, “Did Jesus Even Exist?”, within a subsection labeled, “So what do these non-Christian sources say about Jesus?”, he described non-biblical historical accounts that corroborate the existence of Jesus.

Non-Christian Sources on Jesus. James Arlandson cited three main sources that indicate the historical presence of Jesus.

1. Flavius Josephus, a Roman historian, cited several items of interest in his account of Jesus, given in his *Jewish Antiquities*. These include the following:
 - a. Jesus was a “wise man”.
 - b. He did startling deeds.
 - c. He won over both many Jews and many Greeks (reference to “Greeks” is probably post-crucifixion).
 - d. Pilate, when he heard him accused by the leading men among the Jews, condemned Jesus to the cross.
 - e. Those that had loved him did not cease to do so.
 - f. As of the time Josephus recorded these, almost sixty years had passed since the day of the cross, yet he noted Jesus’ followers still loved him. (Endnote 5)

Josephus clearly confirmed the existence of Jesus Christ, and cited the impact He had at the time of His life, death, and the time thereafter. Less reliable texts of Josephus’ writing, still strongly accepted by some, credit Josephus with saying the following about Jesus:

- Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.
- Jesus appeared to those that loved Him, alive and well on the third day following His crucifixion.
- Jesus “fulfilled ten thousand wonderful things” predicted in prophecy. (Endnote 6)

Many scholars dispute the authenticity of these three points, and claim they were added by “zealots” to make the gospel more “believable”. But there is no question that Josephus knew of the existence of Christ, and clearly confirmed it in his histories.

2. Josephus also recounted the execution of James, the half-brother of Jesus. Here is what he said about James: “Ananus the high priest assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.” (Endnote 7)

3. Cornelius Tacitus, a meticulous Roman historian and Roman senator, corroborated the story of Jesus in his *Annals*. He confirmed players and events described in the Gospels on the following points:
 - a) Christ was the originator of the Christian religion (“deadly superstition”, according to Tacitus).
 - b) Christ was executed during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius.
 - c) Christ was executed by Pontius Pilate.
 - d) There was a temporary setback for the religion after Christ’s death.
 - e) The religion flared back up, making it all the way to Rome.
 - f) Judea was the place of the religion’s origin. (Endnote 8)

Tacitus confirmed that Jesus existed and was executed by Pontius Pilate. These would have been obscure details dribbling in from a far-flung outlying territory, not newsworthy for the *Annals* in Rome. But the religion that sprang up from these little-reported events made them significant enough to make Roman news. These are historical facts. Jesus was a real, historical figure, not a mythical or legendary character. He must be acknowledged as a real person by even the most truth-resisting unbeliever.

Skepticism about Jesus. “Hyper-skepticism” hypothesizes that the whole Jesus movement in the First Century was a sham, foisted on unsuspecting and vulnerable Jews and Roman citizens (and others) by self-serving Christian zealots. But reality tells another story. Here is what Arlandson said about skepticism toward Christ and the advancement of His Church (pardon the lengthy quote):

Hyper-skepticism demands too much of me. It requires me to believe that the apostolic community perpetrated a hoax on society. All of the earliest disciples conspired together to create a religious movement from a fraud – a massive prank. They supposedly engineered Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples supposedly did this even though they never gained any riches or lived a comfortable life. Hyper-skepticism requires me to believe that the written Gospels are based on an absence or a zero. Hyper-skepticism requires me to believe that the Jesus movement spread like wildfire because of a nothing, a non-existent person.

Maybe it is widely (and inaccurately) believed that Christianity rose to power without any trouble, from the first day, so it was the Christians who harassed people with torture and prison, including martyrdom. Just the opposite. The early Christians were the hunted and the persecuted and the martyred, just as we saw in Tacitus. It is one thing to die or suffer persecution for something that you believe is true (though it really isn’t). But it is quite another to die or suffer persecution for a belief that you know is false. The members of the Jim Jones cult drank poison because they believed in their leader, not because they followed a messiah they knew to be false. Maybe a few really extreme and deluded lunatics would die or suffer persecution for a belief that they know to be false, but surely not a huge number, spread out over the Roman Empire. It seems that at least a few of the earliest disciples, suffering from persecution and martyrdom, would reveal to the authorities that the whole Jesus movement is a fraud and he never existed at all. However, the disciples did not do this,

and they do not fit the profile of deluded lunatics. Rather, they were honest, rational, and coherent, intellectually.

It is difficult to imagine that the disciples really believed and professed absurdities like these, if only among themselves: “We follow a non-existent person who never spoke and never did any miracles! We never saw him! We are a mushroom cult that hallucinates! We suffer from large-scale delusions! This complete non-human/human zero is why we *never* suffer persecution and martyrdom! We manufacture those reports about our persecution and martyrdom! We’re actually getting rich and living in mansions! Thank you, non-existent Jesus! Now let’s go out there and deceive people! Can I get a witness?” “No,” should come the wise reply.

The Resurrection. Jimmy Williams provides some thoughtful considerations regarding the resurrection of Christ. Much of this discussion relies on his expertise and research. (Endnote 9) First of all, the tomb into which the body of Jesus Christ was laid really was empty. He truly was buried there, yet the tomb was found empty. If the resurrection was “trumped up” by his followers, the circumstances and outcomes of his death would have not have been the same as they have been. Here are some things to think about in this regard:

- If the tomb had not been empty, and the physical remains of Jesus Christ were still there, it would have become a shrine.
- The disciples risked (and gave) their lives for Jesus Christ. If the resurrection was a “hoax” perpetrated by the disciples, would they have been so extraordinarily bold in defending it?
- The opponents of Jesus Christ did not produce the body, which would have readily refuted all claims to a resurrection. This is because no body was there.
- Opponents acknowledged that the tomb was empty by accusing the disciples of stealing the body while the guards were sleeping (see Matt. 28:13-15).
- Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, provided the tomb. Would the specific name of the owner and the location of the tomb be given if the tomb were fictitious?
- The followers of Jesus verified that the tomb was empty, which prompted them to spend the remainder of their lives proclaiming the significance of this simple fact. (See Endnote 9)

All of Christianity, and the veracity of the Bible itself, hinges on this simple premise: Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is unreasonable to look at the facts surrounding the empty tomb, and conclude that the resurrection did not occur. And given this, our faith in a risen Lord makes good sense. If He rose from the dead, the discussion is closed.

The resurrected body of Jesus Christ was seen and experienced by many people. Paul described this occurrence in 1 Cor. 15:3-8, as follows:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according

to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is proof of His authority, as He anticipated in John 2:18-22, which says this:

The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Jesus’ resurrection proves that He is the Messiah, and that He fulfilled the prophecies that foretold His sacrifice and victory. He is now qualified to say, “...I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...” So much death went into the tomb, and so much life came out of it. If this is not true, then a terrible trick has been played on those who believe.

Even the resurrection is not enough for some, however...for those who do not want God. Luke 10:31 says, “...If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” This is why salvation is based on “faith” and not “observation”. We cannot see the resurrection in front of us, but we believe it occurred.

The resurrection has specific and pragmatic meaning for believers today, in that the power of the resurrection sustains us in our Christian walk. It is the foundation for our new life in Christ, as per Rom. 6:4b, which says, “...just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Resurrection IS life, while sin is death (Rom. 6:5-14). We count ourselves “dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). We can offer ourselves to God, “as those who have been brought from death to life;” and offer “the parts of our body to him as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13). We “offer ourselves” by identifying with the resurrection, which enables righteousness through the Holy Spirit.

The key to the power of the resurrection is faith. We are called to “hope”, which is a symbol of resurrection, according to Eph. 1:18. He also called us to “power” in Eph. 1:18, which is subsumed in the following:

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... (Eph. 1:18-22)

The power of the Holy Spirit was the strength for Christ’s resurrection, and it is now the strength by which we are to live the Christian life. We sense our inability to endure, and acknowledge that

we must rely on the power of His resurrection to deliver us. See 2 Cor. 1:8-11, the heart of which says, “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” (v. 9).

Rom. 7:4 adds this: “So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.” Identification with the resurrection leaves us dead to sin and able to bear fruit. This is what else we see in this passage:

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law to that we serve in the new way of the spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. (Rom. 7:5-6)

When we focus on the resurrection (the mechanics of which we covered in the past, and continue to cover), the power of the Holy Spirit shifts into gear to empower us to deal with sin and to bear fruit.

Historical Evidences for the Reliability of Scripture. The big question we must answer is this: Can we rely on the scriptural text that we have? The answer is yes, as we hope to show in this section. By using the manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments, it has been established that the text we have is reliable. If we are going to reject Scripture as the basis for God’s clear truth, it cannot be on the basis that the text we have in faithful translations do not present God’s Word. The evidences for this are voluminous and extensive, and we can only present here a small slice of the whole body of proof for the reliability of the texts we have.

Jimmy Williams was cited earlier in reference to the historicity of Jesus, and is referenced again here as a source for confirmation of the trustworthiness of the biblical texts we have in our possession. (Endnote 10)

From issues of faithful copying by Scribes and Masoretes, to verification from the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, to pre-Messiah Greek translations, we are confident that the Old Testament, as it exists in the printed Bibles that are now extant, is accurate and reliable.

Manuscripts of the New Testament in the original Greek language date almost all the way back to the First Century. Versions, translations, and quotations confirm the reliability of the text and messages of the New Testament.

Anyone who has spent time around the Word knows that there are various translations from which to choose. Once you understand the truths of Scripture, you will see passages for which the translation is puzzling. I have asked, “Why in the world is this translated with this phrase or that word, when the original language means something entirely different?” The bias of the translators inevitably comes into play. We MUST NOT take one translation and assume that it has the same weight as the original. Those who cling to, for example, the *King James Version*, as the sole “inspired” Word of God will not have the full story, not only because the English language used in this translation is archaic, but because some of the translating is indeed inaccurate. To verify a translation, study its form in the original language, as much as possible. This provides the best

approach for arriving at what God intended when He had the writers record His messages in the “autographa” (original writings).

This does not mean that we do not have the authentic Word of God in reliable form today. It is testimony to the protective ministry of the Holy Spirit that the integrity of God’s message to mankind has been so well preserved over the millennia. (See Endnote 10)

The Old Testament. In determining the reliability of the Old Testament as we have it today, we find justification in our trust in the form and way that it has come down to us. But since we do not have the original writings of Scripture, this means we must reconstruct them and translate them into a usable facsimile of the original. The original documents were written in another language—different from ours—and at another time. But the Holy Spirit is the same forever, and He has done some things to help preserve God’s intended truth for us, as follows (still pulling from the document cited in Endnote 10):

- ❖ He provided Scribes. Scribes were professional “recorders” who viewed their words as “God’s Word”, and who were extremely careful in their copying. The complete and entire text of the Old Testament copied by the Scribes dates back as early as 900 A.D.
- ❖ He provided the Masoretes, who slavishly copied the Old Testament from 916 A.D and following.
- ❖ He kept the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave, where the dry conditions preserved them for centuries. These texts correspond very closely with other Old Testament documents; with a full version of the book of Isaiah, as well as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Samuel, and Habakkuk; and with portions of almost every other book in the Old Testament. The writing of these documents is dated around 100 B.C., almost 1,000 years before the next latest version written by the Masoretes.
- ❖ He allowed the Old Testament to be translated into Greek around 200 B.C. This project is called “The Septuagint”, because seventy Jewish scholars participated in its completion. (See Endnote 10)

These documents and processes provide us with a reliable, believable, and study-worthy Hebrew text that we can receive with confidence.

The New Testament. Williams also cited evidence for the reliability of the New Testament, offering the following:

- ❖ There are over 4,000 different ancient Greek manuscripts currently extant; these each include some or all of the New Testament. The original documents were written on papyrus, a kind of durable “paper” made from reeds; and parchment, made from the skin of sheep or goats.
- ❖ Examples of these manuscripts include the following:
 - Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus are two excellent parchment copies dating back to the Fourth Century. Sinaiticus includes the entire New Testament, and Vaticanus contains most of it.

- Older fragments and papyrus copies have been found that date back to a period from 180 to 225 A.D. Much of the New Testament has been reconstructed from these manuscripts.
 - The oldest fragment discovered to date includes a papyrus codex called the Rylands Papyrus, which contains John 18:31-33 and 37, dated at 130 A.D. The timing of this writing places its completion back into the First Century, shortly after John wrote it.
 - Emphasis: Manuscripts for the New Testament, then, go back almost to the end of the First Century.
- ❖ There are also many ancient copies and fragments of the New Testament translated into other languages, such as Syrian, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, and Ethiopic, as well as 8,000 copies of the Latin Vulgate, dating back to Jerome's original translation in 384-400 A.D.
 - ❖ Thousands of quotations are found in the writings of the early Christian clergy, from 100 to 450 A.D. Based on these alone, the entire New Testament can be reconstructed, except for fifteen to twenty verses. (See Endnote 10)

Materials providing evidence for the early existence and content of the New Testament writings are superior to ancient documents from the same period. Nonetheless, Christian documents are often questioned, while other ancient manuscripts are frequently accepted without dispute. The authenticity of the Word, however, as it was inspired by God, and now is preserved and propagated, is very clear. And there are no differences among all the manuscripts that change any major doctrine presented in the New Testament.

Conclusion from Jimmy Williams. Williams provided this excellent synopsis for the reasonableness of our faith, and offered a virtual outline for our beliefs, as follows:

When someone asks us the REASONS for the hope that is within us, that is, why we hold to the Christian faith, these are the reasons. We prefer to believe that the universe and man were created, rather than being the products of blind chance in a closed, material world. We believe that God not only created, but that He communicated, revealed Himself to humankind, through His prophets, apostles, and finally through His Son (Heb. 1:1). We believe that Jesus lived, and that His life and mission, outlined most extensively in the biblical documents but corroborated by extra-biblical documents, are what they have purported to be over the millennia: the seeking and saving of the lost through His sacrificial death. We believe that Christianity cannot be acceptably explained, historically, by leaving a dead Jew hanging on a cross. Only His resurrection from the dead adequately explains the boldness and commitment unto death of His disciples, the forsaking of worship on the Sabbath in preference to Sunday, and the exponential growth of the church which began immediately, and has continued to this day. Every mighty river on this planet, the Mississippi, the Nile, the Volga has its source. Each one begins somewhere. Every Christian church or community in the world also has an historical source. It flows from Palestine, from Jerusalem, from a hill called Golgotha . . . and a nearby empty tomb. We said in the beginning that everyone has faith, but also pointed out that faith must have an object.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the most worthy of all objects to which we could entrust our lives, our purpose, and our destiny. (See Endnote 10)

Well put, indeed. We believe this.

Chapter 4

Motivation: What Moves Us?

What is Moving Us? What we have to say now is hard to say and perhaps harder to understand, but we believe we are absolutely correct in the following: We spend much of our time trying to prove to others, to ourselves, and even to God that we are good and that we deserve good treatment and good things. God has a big job showing us that we are NOT good, but that HE IS...and that what He wants from us more than anything else is our honesty about how bad we really are. This truth is one of the most-resisted in all of Christendom. At base, very few of us are humble. Yet God does not leave us in a hopeless state as losers, but offers a way to make us winners.

God's plan is designed to make us winners by having us operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, but 99.9% of what we do is done *in the flesh*...and that's a "losing" proposition. The flesh is the same as the "sinful nature", and it is our primary motivation for sin. But there's more: The flesh is our motivation for self-styled and self-driven service for God. Andrew Murray said, "The Spirit is not only hindered by the flesh as the power that commits sin, but still more by the flesh power that seeks to serve God." (Endnote 11) The secret for serving in the power of the Spirit is found by very few, with the result that much of what is done as an attempt to please and serve God is nothing more than the flesh standing in as a "substitute" for the Holy Spirit.

Murray goes further, saying this:

What are the proofs or indications that a church like the Galatians, or a Christian, is serving God in the power of the flesh—is perfecting in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit? The answer is easy. Religious self-effort always ends in sinful flesh. (Endnote 12)

Religious flesh always ends in *sinful* flesh...or in SIN...even if the sin is not visible, such as the sin of pride, which is often concealed. The Galatians of which Murray spoke had all sorts of sin as a result of legalism. (See Gal. 5.) Murray adds, "You can see how they tried to serve God in their own strength, and they failed utterly. All this religious effort resulted in failure. The power of sin and sinful flesh got the best of them." (See Endnote 12)

The value of our actions is determined by the condition of our hearts. What is motivating us? That is the test of our worth. 1 Cor. 4:5 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.

The value of any act or thought is dependent on the motivation behind it. We see someone doing a good thing and we say, "Oh, isn't that magnanimous and wonderful?" But we do not know what is behind what we see. We can't say it must be *divine good*, just because it "complies" with the "law". It is only good if it is in accord with grace...done in the power of the Holy Spirit. And only God sees that. The point I am making here does not have to do with the sin of "judging"...that's another

lesson...what I want to establish is that each of us must determine in his own soul whether he is operating in the Spirit or by the strength of the flesh.

1 Pet. 1:13 tells us, “Therefore, prepare your minds [your inner person] for action.” The warm-up for all spiritual activity and service (that means for all our living) must be done in the heart. The heart must be ready—and stay ready—for us to be properly motivated by the Holy Spirit, rather than the flesh. And the heart must be *willing*. Ex. 35:21a frames this willingness for us, saying, “...and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service...” We are focused on “willingness” here, and not the issue of “giving”; the point is that we do right when our “will” lines up with God’s will, resulting in a heart that is correctly motivated to serve.

When we use the term “willing”, we do not mean “intending good”, at least not by itself. An example of good intentions is seen in 1 Sam. 15:13-35, which describes how a “good” act can actually be very bad. Saul had been given instructions to attack and completely destroy the Amalekites, removing all traces of them. But Saul kept the livestock of the Amalekites, with a plan to sacrifice the best of them to the Lord. The problem was that Saul was supposed to destroy them, not sacrifice them! He lost his throne as a result. The lesson: Our self-designed and self-motivated schemes to impress God do just the opposite. God disdains our “fleshly” acts of righteousness, even those we do “for God”.

Reference to Confession in the Appendices. Our only hope is to confess, as per v. 30 in 1 Sam. 15, where Saul confessed his sins. There is much to know about confession, and we will add a lot to our discussion of it in the next two or three chapters. Prior to that, if you need an introduction to or review of this basic doctrine, please take time to read Appendix A, “The Solution for Sin”, taken basically *verbatim* from *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*.

Chapter 5

Faith and Sin

The Importance of Faith. Faith is the driver for all techniques designed by God for our function as believers. This includes prayer, study, endurance, walking in the Spirit, and—yes—being cleansed from sin. Quality in Christian living is based on the amount and strength of faith. Achieving control of sin in one’s life is no exception. When we have strong faith, sin is hampered, but sin will always be with us because it is our NATURE to sin. Faith is *unnatural*, so it must be acquired...or *learned*. The goal of this book is to direct us toward a stronger faith...toward that which does not come naturally for us.

One of the most difficult lessons we will ever learn is that God is not looking for perfection in us, as something we manufacture and then present to Him. God is looking for us to access HIS perfection, beginning with His mercy and grace, through which we get forgiveness. Andrew Murray said of this the following:

There is nothing that so much dishonors and angers the Lord as unbelief—not believing His Word, not believing that He has compassion on all unworthy who come to Him in sincerity. There is nothing on which God sets His honor so much as on His free grace and His pity for the ungodly. You wound Him in the tenderest place when you doubt if His grace is indeed for you, and you drag its greatness and trustworthiness into doubt. (Endnote 13)

We will be discussing the importance of recognizing the love of God, which prompts His mercy and grace, and provides us with what we need to relate to Him in peace and harmony. Nothing offends God like the refusal and dismissal of His grace. Going back to the “War Against God” in *God’s Training Program for Believers*, we saw in that study that the very purpose for our existence is to demonstrate to Satan that God is good and gracious. It is also that God is just in sending Satan to a lake of fire for his rebellion against God, but GOD’S JUSTICE IS NOT A PROBLEM FOR US, BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST SATISFIED THE FATHER’S JUSTICE ON THE CROSS! What we are left with is grace. This is going to be a hard lesson, but we will ferret out the full truth on this doctrine before we are through.

Staying Clean. Our view of “staying clean”, generally, is “just don’t get dirty”. But it is impossible for us to go without sinning. We are surrounded inside and out by powerful forces that throw us around like a ragdoll...that is, if we are not operating in God’s power. We cannot stay clean to beat sin; we must stay “cleansed” to beat sin. We basically have the outcomes confused with the methods for achieving cleanliness...the ends confused with the means. For the most part, admit it, we believe that IF WE ARE GOOD, GOD WILL BLESS US! We think we must BE CLEAN to come to God. This is a lie, and one of Satan’s greatest tools to confuse and deceive us about God’s grace.

Often, we focus on NOT SINNING to make ourselves presentable, and what we are not acknowledging is that we can’t stop, no matter how hard we try. Conquering one area of weakness just exposes others. We do not have the ability to BE CLEAN, so we must find a way to have our

uncleanness REMOVED...OR CLEANSED. This is not to encourage sin, as Paul indicated in Rom. 6:1, where he asked, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" Then he answers by proclaiming, "By no means!" Still, being cleansed is the way to purity.

Question: Is there any chance we can become pure experientially? The answer, which may seem to contradict what we said about our inability to "BE CLEAN", is "Yes!" But how can we DO what we CANNOT DO? There is a way. In Romans 7, and in other places, Paul is clear to teach the WAY that sin can be controlled. We will discover this: Control of sin is elusive and difficult, contingent on extensive immersion in training and truth before it can be achieved. It is only through advanced maturity that our cleanliness through confession can become cleanliness in our behavior. In the meantime, we must stay clean through constant confession. (We will see more on this later. For now, if you have not read *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*, please do so.)

We must be pure for faith to be effective, and the size of that faith will be determined by the amount of our growth. Growth is not accidental, as we have seen in previous studies, and the process for growing, as well as the methods for achieving cleanliness, require *incremental* faith, so that we can rely on growth and cleanliness to bring about *accumulated* faith.

God Looks for Faith. When God looks at us, He looks first at our sin record to make sure that it has been cleared through confession. He is not looking at individual sins, *per se*, but is wanting to look past the record at our faith, which He can do only if our record is clear. The way this is analogized is that He cannot see *through* a dirty record. His real objective is to find accumulated faith...to assess the amount of faith in our soul. Cleanliness makes our faith *operational*, whereas growth makes our faith *strong*. Notice that faith is the central quality in all God-appointed activities, and that the absence or weakness of faith determines our effectiveness and our qualification for an unobstructed relationship with Him. Here is the sequence:

- 1) Sin-inspection comes first. When God inspects, He sees our SPIRITUAL CONDITION as clean or dirty. Individual sins must be removed through confession, or they will stand as a block against harmony and fellowship with God. The *condition* that results when we sin is a FAITH BLACK-OUT. It is then that the absence of faith will impact our fellowship with God and disempower us spiritually.

Hab. 1:13 tells us, "Your [God's] eyes are too pure to look on evil..." God actually knows about our sins, but He does not acknowledge each sin individually. He looks at the CONDITION sin causes, which is the absence of faith. The reason that specific sins do not register with Him is that Jesus Christ took our sins on Himself on the cross, and removed them as the reason for condemnation. The only sin that condemns us is refusal of God's grace by refusing to believe what His Son did for us. When we receive Christ, we are no longer condemned and the penalty for our sins—past, present, and future—is paid for. Now that we believe, any future sin is a family matter between the Father and His children.

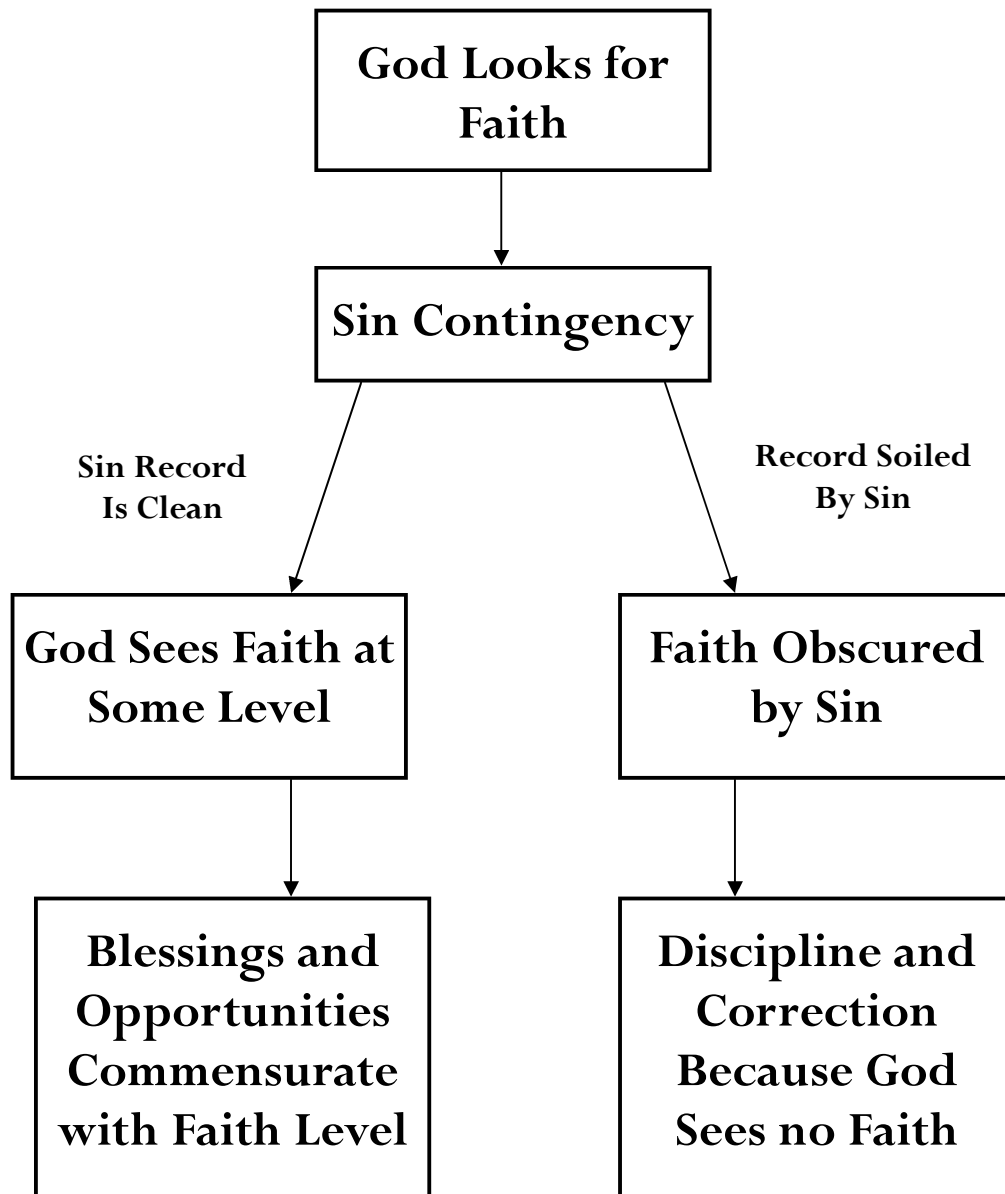
- 2) After our eternal "spiritual condition" has been remedied, the constant examination of our FAITH STATUS comes next. Now that we have been adopted as His children, God searches for ongoing, living faith in our hearts. If we are cleansed due to confession, He will see whatever faith has already developed. If we just started out, He will see a "weak" faith. If we

are growing, He will see a “strengthening” faith. If we are mature, He will see a “strong” faith. Our objective is to grow to the point that God is seeing a STRONG faith in us, because that is the place where our purpose can be realized, and His promises can be fulfilled. With strong faith, we will be surrendered to God, enjoy control over sin, find contentment, and accomplish our mission through the operation of our gifts.

From this we can extrapolate that God is not looking initially for compliance with His commands and behavioral standards...that will come with growth. He is looking for an ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY (expressed through confession) and a POSTURE OF FAITH (witnessed through growth). When these are present, we can display purity and trust, and we will meet His standards, depending on the level of our maturity. To meet His standards, we must grow, or increase our faith. We do not grow by MEETING HIS STANDARDS, which is the common theme of most churches; rather, we are enabled to meet His standards by GROWING.

For a quick reference and objective conceptualization of God’s examination of our faith, please see the chart on the next page, “Divine Inspection Chart for Believers”.

Divine Inspection Chart for Believers



Interaction between Sin and Faith. We mentioned above that sin causes a faith black-out. Sin must be acknowledged as the greatest impediment to our walk with God. Until sin is removed, we will not be happy or effective. And our faith will not grow. We cannot expect to have faith if we are sinning. In 1 Tim. 1:19, Paul taught Timothy that he would fight the good fight by “holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.” Holding on to faith and having a good conscience represent growth and cleanliness, respectively. Sin separates faith from the soul and leaves the heart defenseless...without protection from the devil, the world, our own sinful nature, and the law of sin itself.

The presence of sin reflects an absence of faith, based on a deficiency of wisdom (through growth) and an absence of cleanliness (through forgiveness). In fact, anything not done IN FAITH is itself a sin! Rom. 14:23b says, “...and everything that does not come from faith is sin.” Sin and the absence of faith are inextricably linked. Sin begets sin, because sin weakens faith, which reduces resistance to sin. Seen another way, a weak faith results in sin. And sin, once mobilized, hampers faith. Each of us would do well to examine his/her life to see what sins seem irresistible. This will expose our greatest areas of weakness, and enable us to know what areas of sin will need the most scrutiny and confession.

Faith helps with sin. Greater faith increases our awareness of sin, so we can come to realize that we cannot deal with our area(s) of weakness on our own. Doubt increases the power of sin, and makes resistance to it more difficult; whereas faith increases clarity in spotting sin and helps us to identify it as the destructive force that it is. Faith makes us more aware of the effects of sin, helps us perceive our inability to stop it in our own strength, and shows us at last that it is not our effort at reducing sin that enables control over it. As our faith grows, we become more aware of God’s pity on us in our weakness, and we begin to understand His grace in providing solutions for sin.

We will see that faith is directed toward specific objects. For example, faith in God’s promises is a major part of the operation of faith. 2 Pet. 1:3-4 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 promises, so that though them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Faith in the promises is important, because it allows us to “participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world”. The promises ALLOW participation and PREVENT corruption. What a wonderful asset this is: believing the promises. Faith in them gives escape from sin. In other words, strong faith increases resistance to sin. And when we are clean and growing, the absence of sin enables stronger faith. This is the cycle of growth and spirituality.

Moving Forward or Backward. When we want to sin, God’s Word becomes an “inconvenient truth”. We may wish we were not restrained or accountable, so that we could sin freely without accountability. But we are accountable for the sins we commit, not as individual acts of wrong, but for the carnal condition that these sins produce. The solution is not to cinch up our belts, plant our feet, and brace against sin, but to realize that the pathway to LESS SIN runs through humility and confession. These are “learned” methods, taught from the Word for our advancement and

understanding. The more we grasp the truths that teach us the processes of grace, the better able we will be to deal with our own failings. Admitting our inability to handle things on our own is not intuitive or natural, but it is something we can and must learn.

To learn, we must be clean; then we must constantly seek the truth. 1 Tim. 3:9 says, “They must take hold of the deep truths of faith with a clear conscience.” A clear conscience is always one that results from God’s act of forgiving and cleansing our sins...the result of confession. When we are forgiven and our sin record cleaned, we can learn; truth is accessed through cleanliness.

The process of learning, or “the learning cycle”, which we will see in detail later on, is disrupted or short-circuited by sin. This is important: Sin and rebellion truncate learning, stopping all progress toward maturity. When learning stops, progress is halted, and a kind of “continental drift” occurs, moving us further away from God, rather than closer. Heb. 2:1 admonishes, “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” Ignoring truth increases drift, while learning truth prevents it.

When we drift, we become easy prey for the deceptions and temptations of Satan. We must stay pure to prevent Satan from pulling us away from our spiritual focus. Eph. 4:27 say, “...and do not give the devil a foothold.” Literally, this command says, “...and do not give the devil a room”. This means a room in your soul. When Satan sets up camp in our hearts, he is a constant drag on our faith. Now, this may sound like a rare and extreme occurrence, but it happens with everyone...all the time. If he can keep us in a pattern of sin and convince us that there is no need to confess our inevitable wrongs, he can keep our faith in check, and cut us off from all divine power.

Continuing in this same passage, look at Eph. 4:28 and follow the text down through Eph. 5:7. These verses show the sins to be avoided, sins that will prevent fellowship with God and sap our strength. But we must not be enticed to attempt resistance of these through our own resources. To resist sin, we must “expose” them to God (Eph. 5:12-13), so that we can “wake up”, meaning “repent”, and “rise from the dead”, meaning to “be restored to fellowship with God” (Eph. 5:14). This is the only way Satan will ever be invited to move out and leave us alone...but this will only happen with great maturity.

With maturity, the outcome of significant spiritual progress, we can overcome temptation and live in victory over sin. Growth of our faith is the way of escape, which can be inferred from 1 Cor. 10:13, as follows:

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.

The way to stand up under temptation is to *prepare beforehand*! To beat temptation, we must grow to a level that our faith is strong enough to overcome it. Even then, it is not the faith itself that overcomes temptation, but the power that faith accesses...the infinite power of the Holy Spirit. Without preparation, or significant progress toward maturity, we cannot expect to be delivered from the temptation which Satan is setting in our pathway. Matt. 6:13) And remember, if we are not “clean” along the way, we will never make progress and “become prepared” in the first place.

If sin persists unchecked, soiling the soul, a firm resistance to all things spiritual rises up, and a condition of persistent deafness to God's voice develops. Heb. 3:12 warns us, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." Notice that this condition of a "sinful, unbelieving heart" takes place among "brothers", or believers...God's very own children. The solution to this decline of faith in believers is seen in the next verse, which says, "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." We are encouraged when we receive profuse amounts of truth...virtually drowning ourselves in it...and one form of this is through accessing the instruction and edification which others offer through their gifts. This is especially true of the pastor-teacher, who ideally is teaching truth.

Truth will displace sinful thoughts, just as the power of the Holy Spirit will displace the power of our sinful nature. If we do not follow the pattern of learning truth, and staying clean to keep the Spirit in charge, we will cool toward notions about God, and we will eventually "freeze Him out", meaning that our hearts will become cold and unresponsive to Him.

Heb. 4:7 says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." If we are open to and searching for God and His truth, we will listen to and absorb what He says. This will prevent us from becoming insensitive to His teaching and His leadership. If our hearts ever become truly hardened to God, it will be very difficult for us to return to Him. We will be saved in the end, but "as one escaping through the flames" (see 1 Cor. 3:14-15).

The Next Chapter. Chapter 6 continues more discussion on sin, adding numerous truths concerning God's response to and treatment of sin, and disclosing many of the nuances of sin's presence in our lives that are often overlooked.

Chapter 6

(Much) More on Sin

Looking Back at Chapter 5. The main point of Chapter 5 was that sin blocks faith, yet there is a solution for sin. Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, and the effect of His sacrifice is that sin is not seen as an insurmountable barrier to a relationship and fellowship with Him. Christ took on the sins of humanity. 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.” We get into splitting hairs a little here, but this is important. Sin is covered, but not gone. (Unbelievers refuse this covering, and will “die in their sin” of “unbelief”, as per John 8:21-24.)

It has been well-established that believers sin. We also indicated earlier that God does not “see” the sins of believers as individual acts of wrong, but as the general causes of darkness in our soul; this darkness is evidence for the absence of faith. His greatest disappointment with us is to look at us and see faith missing. Zero faith is the result of sin. Here is the point: Sins themselves are not the point of God’s inspection...these have been covered. The presence or absence of faith is the crucial condition for God’s pleasure and approval. When we sin, we become “carnal”, or controlled by the sinful nature, and that is when faith is squelched.

We must not, however, be deceived into thinking that avoiding sin is the first thing we do. Any direct attack we make on sin apart from God’s power will not be effective. Dealing with sin is important, but certain preliminaries must be taken care of, so that God’s strength can be engaged to help us control sin. Accommodating these “preliminaries” is our first priority. We must learn that sin will be stymied only by recognizing God’s infinite mercy and grace, and by using His assets and techniques for strengthening our faith. The point of our lives is not self-induced purity, but the building of a strong faith-structure in the soul. When this happens, sin will be diminished.

Discipline for Sin. The only thing believers are “judged” or “disciplined” for is rejection of grace for Christian living. Sin itself is not the issue; rather, it is the **CONDITION IT CREATES**, which is loss of fellowship leading to something worse: the blockage of our faith. The loss of fellowship and the resultant hit to our faith are tantamount to a rejection of God and rebellion toward Him. Yes, believers can reject God and His grace, but we must acknowledge that this will bring corrective action from the Father.

Eccl. 8:11-13 describes the kind of discipline that a “sinful condition”, which we know means a “faithless status”, will elicit. This passage says the following:

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.

“Wicked” men are those without faith. The wicked do not “fear God”, meaning they “have no faith in Him”. Discipline will come to those without faith, and the more we KNOW about our need for more faith, the more we will stay on the path that leads to its increase. “Knowing” is key. Luke 12:47-48 says this:

That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his 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.

“Knowing” teaches us what to avoid, yet it increases our responsibility to use what we know. If we understand grace and mercy, and grasp the methods for building faith, we are responsible for accessing and using these. The more we know, the more we are held to account to apply what we know.

2 Pet. 2:20 adds, “If they 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.” Our heavenly Father will not be pleased if we are not employing the techniques and assets that He provides for managing “corruption”. The consequences for believers in time is worse than that for unbelievers (in time). A parent corrects his own children...not the children of others.

Job 36:5-12 tells of the plight of the “faithless”, telling us that the “wicked” will die, but the “righteous” will prosper. Once again, the “wicked” are those believers who have sinned and are unrepentant, and the “righteous” are either those who have been cleansed, OR those who have reached such an elevated state of spiritual maturity that victory over sin has been achieved. (There is scriptural evidence that only about eight people in each generation will reach the level of “super-maturity”).)

What can happen with unconfessed, uncorrected sin? Lev. 26:14-17 gives the answer for this, as follows:

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.

Terror, disease, loss of sight, loss of income and personal freedom, loss of success, loss of power and influence, and constant fear and anxiety. But that’s not all. Verses 18-39 give an even more dismal picture of what a carnal, faithless believer can expect. The conditions described in verses 14-17 worsen by a factor of seven, over and over, until the corrective enforcement has reached a level many times worse than the original discipline. When we sin, CONFESSION CANNOT BE DELAYED, or disciplinary actions will accumulate and multiply.

We must also understand that—as crucial as confession is—it is only the beginning of the process for changing our level of faith. Following confession, meaning an attitude of genuine contrition and humility toward God, we must proceed with study, prayer, endurance, and so on, to advance our growth.

We can never let up. Sin will never “spend itself” or wind itself down or play itself out. It will even intensify as our growth moves forward, so we must never let our guard down or relax our vigilance toward the ever-ready encroachment of sin. We must never get the idea that we can take a break from our spiritual regimen; if we go to sleep, sin will assuredly prevent our progress and halt our faith.

Sin Increases with Maturity. Perhaps you think you just misread this section title. It seems illogical to think that greater strength and more faith could cause sin to increase. We have said repeatedly that the way to victory over sin is increased faith. But, indeed, the principal of *sin becoming stronger as faith grows* is valid. Before you slam the book closed, consider what the Bible says about this. Rom. 7:21-25 is our proof text for this position. This passage says the following:

I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but 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: Although 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 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? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

We gave an exhaustive study of this principle in *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*, and refer you to that book for a thorough explanation on the nature of sin and how to deal with it. The name of the principle is “the law of sin”, as we saw in the passage just quoted. To summarize this principle, we quote from *Killing Sin* (p. 115), which says this:

The Bible seems definite that we can quell sin, with sufficient maturity. But maturity is not without its perils. A paradox seems to exist in the notion that burgeoning maturity will strengthen against sin, while sin will increase with maturity. This means the struggle does not end, just because we are maturing. Our journey is difficult and not for the faint-of-heart. But I believe we can reach a level of maturity that will enable us to truly resist sin ...a time when Satan will back off, because he witnesses our solid commitment to God (James 4:7). In the meantime, we will be swimming against a strong current.

There is light ahead, but we are not there yet. Until we mature to a seriously high level, we will not enjoy the easing of sin’s encroachment. It is ubiquitous, elusive, and persistent. It will never leave us alone, ambushing us in shocking ways and at times when we least suspect it. The attacks from Satan, the world, and our very own nature are overpowering, a fact often overlooked in modern churches, where we constantly hear that we have complete victory, just because we have been saved.

When we do “right”, Satan sends reinforcements, concentrating his resources in places where the greatest threat to his cosmic programs exist. When a believer is seriously maturing and walking in the Spirit, this evokes the power of the Holy Spirit, against which Satan is powerless. Satan’s increased effort against believers who are getting closer to God works closely with the law of sin. The potent force within this law, along with the influence of the insatiable sin nature and the constant tug of the world, intensifies with greater righteousness, creating deceptions and temptations we did not anticipate.

We can never let our guard down. 1 Pet. 5:8 tells us, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” The phrase, “Be self-controlled and alert” is, literally, “Be sensible and watch”. This calls for us to stay focused on our studies and prayer, and to take advantage of the fellowship that results from cleanliness and advancing faith, to enable us to keep our footing under sin’s attacks.

Our defense against sin is seen in Rom. 8:1-4, which instructs us with this:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 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.

We have said already that our sins do not bring condemnation to us, but they are still a huge problem. Why? Because they erode our faith and undermine our God-consciousness. This is why God has given us a way to block sin through humility and confession, without which our faith would be blacked out. (Paul called this a “shipwreck” of our faith in 1 Tim. 1:19). Control of and ascendancy over sin in our daily lives will only come when we live, as we just saw in Romans 8, “according to the Spirit”. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that sin can be controlled. We will have more on this later in this book.

Grieving and “Quenching” the Spirit. Eph. 4:30 says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” In regard to this verse, Andrew Murray said this: “How can anyone grieve the Spirit? Above all, by yielding to sin. He is the Holy Spirit, given to sanctify us and...to fill us with the holy life of God, with God Himself. Sin grieves Him.” (Endnote 14) When we sin, the Holy Spirit is grieved and alienated, and His power is cut off from us. The Spirit’s power circuit within us is conducted through our faith, and if sin is present, faith will be short-circuited.

Some specific sins that grieve the Spirit are given in Eph. 4:31 through 5:6. These can be summed up in the following:

1. Lying
2. Inappropriate anger
3. Stealing
4. Corrupt and/or pointless conversation (rather than edification, as per Eph. 4:29)

We are also not to “quench” the Spirit (KJV word). NIV renders 1 Thess. 5:19, as follows: “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” This corresponds well with the concept of cutting off the Spirit’s power, as the heat of “fire” is energy...or *power*. The term “shunt” is useful here to illustrate what happens when we put out the Spirit’s fire. A “shunt” is used to re-route or divert, as with an electrical circuit. It is used, in another example, for moving a train to a side-track. This depicts very well what happens to us when we lose contact with the Holy Spirit: We get off-track. And notice: When we are side-railed, we will see no movement or progress. We must get “back on track” to continue our advancement.

Instead of grieving and quenching the Spirit, we are to be “filled with the Spirit”. We will have much to say about this filling in a later chapter.

The Darkness of Sin. Eph. 4:18 says, “They [unbelievers] 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.” We can see that the sequence is given in reverse, applying equally to believers and unbelievers. The first condition that occurs is the “hardening of the heart”, which is a refusal of unbelievers to accept Christ, or ongoing (or recurring) refusal of believers to seek God and His truths for living. The outcome is ignorance, which means lack of knowledge, or the absence of “saving knowledge” for unbelievers and “living knowledge” for believers. The final outcropping of ignorance is darkness and separation from the life of God. Unbelievers are separated from God *forever*...or until they believe in Christ...while believers are separated in *time*, due to their lack of interest in God, until they confess and get back on the growth track.

What is the result of “hard hearts” (negative volition, leading to ignorance, which results in darkness and separation from God)? It is a life of sin and/or one characterized by self-styled religion and morality. Eph. 4:19, which immediately follows v. 18 above, says, “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.” Applied to us as believers, this means that the pattern of refusing God and His truth leads to ignorance and places us in the dark, where sin’s power over us is overwhelming. We get involved in sin and we always want more. SIN IS NEVER SATISFIED! The longer we remain in the dark, the less we will be able to see the evil we are doing.

Matt. 6:22-23 describes this condition, as follows:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness?

As the human eye perceives reality, so the human volition—or passion for God and truth—perceives divine reality. Unfortunately, most believers go through life with their spiritual eyes closed, and refuse to seek the truth. Darkness is the absence of light, and light consists of the action of the Holy Spirit within believers. Without the light of the Holy Spirit and His truth, there will be only darkness, consisting of sin and/or legalism. And that darkness is severe. What we are doing is extremely wrong and we can’t even see it!

1 Cor. 6:13-20 cites an example of behavior in the darkness, and gives an alternative, saying this:

You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against his own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Our bodies are members with the body of Christ, yet they can move away from Him and unite with sin and sinful practices, such as with a prostitute. Our bodies are temples, yet they can exist in total darkness. At that time, we are not only NOT holy, we are ANTI holy. Yet we are still “indwelled” by the Holy Spirit. Our goal is to bring our bodies up to the level of that holy place within us where the Spirit resides. When He is in charge, there is light, and our bodies honor God. When His influence is shut out by sin, our spiritual environment is a complete black-out.

We are not building a case for “morality”, but for finding and using God’s methods for keeping us in the light. This has been our quest from the time we wrote the first sentence of our first book.

The World. One of the greatest sources of our darkness is the world which surrounds us. We often measure ourselves and each other, not by divine standards, but by “world” standards; we want to be highly-esteemed in the view of the world. But we are children of God and virtually exist in a different and separate kingdom...or at least we should. A person who is great in the world is not likely to be great in God’s kingdom, and vice versa. Rev. 3:17-18 distinguishes the view point of the two realms, as follows:

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.

We tend to measure our status and worth in worldly terms: wealth, possessions, influence, knowledge, intelligence, skills, beauty, modernity (being “cool” by the latest standards), and a myriad of other yardsticks for determining our relative place in the hierarchy of humanity. Meanwhile, we can be poor and naked in God’s arena. The things that are recognized and praised by the world are not always bad in themselves, but they become bad when we become *attached* to them. An example of this is a love for money, which is “a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). Money is not bad, but giving it a value that makes it more important than our spiritual connection and growth gives it power to control us and keep us away from a pursuit of God and His benefits.

An important lesson in regard to our perspective and values, and a caution against what can happen when these become distorted, is found in Rev. 2:4-7a, which says this:

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. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The object of our first love is truth and God's ways. This is our "lampstand", or the light for our path. Ps. 119:105 describes this lamp, saying, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." This is revealed in the phrase, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says..." (Rev. 2:7a, cited above). If we hear properly, we will know to "repent"...or confess...constantly. The lampstand that can be taken if we don't confess is the teaching that we receive from the Holy Spirit. If we do not listen to God's Word *in fellowship*, He will not teach us. If we lose our "ear" for the truth, we will not hear His Word.

When we become attached to other things apart from God...and embrace the view of the world...we lose our "love" for God's ways, and thus move ever deeper into the philosophies and practices of the world. To get out of the pit of the world, we must separate ourselves from it. But here we must be careful in our approach to this worthy goal. As happens with most spiritual goals, the condition we aspire to—separation from the world—is an *outcome of*, and not a *means to*, spirituality. We don't change our worldly values by trying harder not to participate in the world's system. We will only withdraw from distorted world values when spiritual values displace them.

Separating from the world is a kind of "fasting". This is an extension of fasting, which is commonly seen as giving up food or drink for a time...but here, we are applying it as separation from the world entirely. Fasting is a picture of a larger spiritual process, which is leaving the values of the world by embracing divine values. For faith to develop fully, the establishment of new values must supplant worldly ones, which is what happens in the growth process. James 1:26-27 sees this process as follows:

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

"True", or valid, religion is to keep oneself from the pollution of the world. It is only in the place of God's truth and His Spirit that we can find distance from such entanglements. I suggest that you read "The World", found on pages 95-117, in *God's Training for Believers*, which gives a thorough discussion of the traps in the world and how to avoid them.

The world is a prisoner of sin, and when we are enthralled with the world, we will be enslaved by the sin which holds power over it. Gal. 3:22a says, "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin..." One of the evidences of improvement in our spiritual status is separation from the world; this is what happens when we consistently choose God's path toward holiness.

We are Unlovable, but Grace is Greater than All our Sin. We are best when we know our great weakness and helplessness apart from God's strength. We fail God repeatedly, even though we are His redeemed children. The more we know about God and His grace and His love for us, the

more compunction we will have to move toward Him. When we move toward him, our faith will grow, as per Andrew Murray, who said this:

...faith can flourish only in the poverty of the soul. While your feelings of unworthiness and guilt cause so much darkness and anxiety in the depths of your spirit, it is by this means that you will be driven to your Lord. (Endnote 15)

We are bad, and our awareness of our unworthiness, in juxtaposition with God's greatness and generosity, causes us to be cognizant of the vast difference between God and us. When we learn of God's grace and mercy...His faithfulness and love...we can do nothing but bow before Him spiritually in humility and appreciation. Murray adds, "...the fruit of true faith is a sincere, inward penitence and a deeper humiliation because of our sin." (Endnote 16) Major point: This contrition is not a bad thing; in fact, God loves it.

God honors our remorse by forgiving us, as per 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." Because of His faithfulness in loving us, He will forgive us...IF we obtain His mercy through confession. This applies to ALL believers. Murray said, "In Jesus is life, even for the most wretched of sinners." (Endnote 17) This can apply to unbelievers, of course, but we are seeing this truth as it applies to believers who have wandered away from God.

Murray adds still more, saying, "Forgiveness must be only the gateway or beginning of a holy life." (Endnote 18) The "holy life" that Murray is citing refers first of all to our *eternal position*, which changes when we are saved; but he also has in mind a "*holy condition*", which is our potential as believers living in the world. The key to holiness is not self-discipline, but forgiveness. The big problem with most believers is that they don't rely on grace and mercy...and forgiveness...for holiness, but instead depend on their own "fleshly" resources for achieving "holiness". Ain't going to happen!

A note on forgiveness: If all sins have been removed from believers for all eternity, why are we talking about a need for forgiveness for believers after they have believed? Regarding believers, forgiveness is the term used to show the light and fellowship which God reinstates whenever we bring an attitude of contrition to Him, because we have sinned (a frequent occurrence). There is no condemnation for believers, so forgiveness for them is not the alleviation of eternal damnation; rather, it is the restoration of harmony with the Father, which has been disrupted by sin.

In the next section, we will see in more detail WHY God does this for us. As we have already suggested, it is because of His LOVE, or GRACE, that He shows MERCY to us, and thus is able to FORGIVE us. Lam. 3:22-24 says the following about God's compassion:

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.

God is compassionate and loving, longsuffering and faithful. These are new and fresh each morning. Our job: Morality? No. Our job is to wait for Him, knowing that He is everything we need, and that we can have everything He is by confessing and moving forward each morning while His “renewed” mercy is bringing “newness” to us.

Resistance to sin comes through our ever-increasing awareness of God’s grace, patience, and love, and a greater understanding of our own inability to be like Him or please Him or do “good”. Our awareness of His undeserved love compels us to grow, so that we can find ways to overcome sin in our lives and become more like Him. Heb. 4:14-16 tells us how this works, as follows:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Our weaknesses don’t surprise God or drive Him crazy. He has sympathy for them, which is why He has made provision for them. God’s provision of His Son enables us to qualify to come to the His throne with confidence. It is there that we will receive mercy and forgiveness, followed by grace to help us in all aspects of our lives.

The love that prompts such great provision needs more consideration, which we will provide in the next section.

The Love of God and Sin. We will not fully understand the love of God until we reach full maturity. But we can see incrementally as we are growing the magnificence and breath-taking beauty of His most prominent feature: love. God’s justice and righteousness were satisfied on the cross. That leaves the door open for love. When we move under the cross as heirs of Jesus Christ, the greatest and most important quality that we find there is God’s love. Seeing our relationship with God through the prism of His love shows the true perspective of His attitude toward us, and reveals the potential we have for fellowship with Him.

We approach this subject with great reverence, because this topic places us directly in front of the throne of grace...the throne of God’s love. When we consider God’s love, we are touching on the most holy and unimaginable aspect of His person and character. We cannot know God if we do not understand His love. Our purpose now is to GRASP the love of God. Eph. 3:17b-18 addresses this, saying 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 the love that surpasses knowledge...

God is infinite, as is His love, so any notion of an Almighty God needing to be impressed by His created beings in order to love them is ludicrous. His love does not depend on our performance, but on HIS CHARACTER, NATURE, AND BEING, which He is free to express due to the work of His Son. He made us, He saved us, and He loves us...that’s the full story.

When we learn about God's love, and see it in contrast to our sin and sinful nature, we start to see how bad we are. We wonder how God could love such sorry creatures as us. It becomes apparent that we cannot be good enough to please God and keep His favor. We are weak, basically hopeless. But when we understand God's love, we will see that this love comes from His essence, and not as a result of our merit.

Once again, we cannot be "good enough" to satisfy God and draw His favorable attention. Any "goodness" will come from God's divinity, and not from our humanity. (The message of the world is that "people are intrinsically good"...this is a lie.)

Regardless of how bad we are, there is safety in God's love...nothing to fear there. 1 John 4:16-18 describes this, as follows:

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in [God's] love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

There are several serious studies buried in this passage, but we will limit our conclusions to these two: 1) We do not have to fear the judgment seat of Christ, when all believers will be evaluated, and 2) the one who lives in fear of judgment will not be able to mature, because he is not embracing grace. This will prevent him from having God's love perfected in him. When we do embrace grace, we experience God's love, and we know then that we are cared for. As we mature and walk in the Spirit, we become conduits for His love...expressed primarily through our gifts.

We cannot "earn" God's love, but we can reject it, either by not believing in Jesus Christ for salvation, or—after being saved—by living and thinking as though God's love does not exist. We are called upon to "know" His love, which is seen to be "beyond knowledge"...so we must come to know the unknowable. This is our hope for this study: to know the love of God. When we can do this, we will be able to comprehend the very "fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19).

As we increase learning, then, we will increasingly see God's love, and we will comprehend that God blesses us, not because of our morality or our being good enough to deserve His favor, but because we understand and use His methods for ACCESSING GRACE! With growth, we will see the advantages of grace, and will discover that grace can give hope for victory over our wretched humanity...not only through forgiveness, but also through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit through a growing faith. Maturity and the power of the Spirit: these usher in God's love and permit us to resist the onslaughts of evil. This is true whether our brand of evil is found in the form of religion and legalism, or is manifested as some form of immorality or other spiritual breakdown.

It is important to avoid a breakdown. Rom. 11:22 says, "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off." Believers who do not access grace...or do not "continue in his love"...have cut themselves off from it, so they are not experiencing the full benefits and blessings of God's "kindness". Furthermore, rejection of kindness results in acceptance of sternness.

God has designed a plan to make us acceptable, bad as we are, so that He can help us and we can enjoy His kindness. The primary way for experiencing God's love is to get His forgiveness, as we have repeated *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*. By God's plan, believers are forgiven through humility and confession...through facing their own inadequacies, not by denying them. This technique will continue to be a central theme for as long as my fingers can stroke the keys.

Grace and mercy provide the means for forgiveness, while humility provides the method. The way it actually works is for grace to come through mercy. When grace is free to operate because we have been forgiven, we will receive all kinds of assistance in dealing with sinful or self-righteous patterns. To be sure, we need the help. Rom. 5:20 with Rom. 6:1-4 show us that grace works to help us with our evil tendencies, as follows:

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin...

Without becoming too analytical here, we can see clearly that grace increases with greater sin, which does not mean it is okay to sin. We are eternally, positionally DEAD to sin, so when sin appears in our lives, it contradicts the eternal position we have in union with Christ. We are, however, often ALIVE to sin in our temporal condition, so that we must look to "increased grace" for resolution to the sin problem.

Again in Romans 6, we see in verses 11-14 further proof that grace is the solution for sin. This passage gives us the following:

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.

Grace is contrasted with law. Forgiveness, rather than following the law, is the way to reach spirituality. To frame the concept of the law, and to dismiss it as any means for spiritual living, we offer the following from our notes on a sermon by Robert McLaughlin:

- The law reveals sin, but cannot fix it. (Rom. 3:20)
- If the law were effective, faith would be irrelevant. (Rom. 4:14)

- The law brings wrath upon those who follow it. (Rom. 4:15)
 - The purpose of the law is to increase sin. (Rom. 5:20)
 - Believers are not under the law. (Rom. 6:14)
 - Believers have been delivered from the law. (Rom. 7:1-6)
 - The law is good, perfect and holy, but cannot help you be good, perfect, or holy (Rom. 7:7-12)
 - The law which promises life only brings death through sin. (Rom. 7:10)
 - The law makes you sinful beyond measure. (Rom. 7:13)
 - The law is weak. (Rom. 8:2-3)
 - Sin gets its strength through the law. (1 Cor. 15:56)
 - The law is a ministry of death. (1 Cor. 3:7)
 - The law is a ministry of condemnation. (2 Cor. 3:9)
 - Law leads to fading away. (2 Cor. 3:11)
 - The law produces a mind-hardening and heart-hardening veil. (2 Cor. 3:14-15)
- (Endnote 32)

These passages and principles show that the law does exactly the opposite of what people believe. Rule-keeping and morality do not invoke the power of grace, nor does a rigorous conformity to the law bring God's approval and favor. You see, we cannot KEEP THE LAW, and if we break ONLY ONE LAW, we have broken them ALL! What we must depend on, because it is what God wants to give, is MERCY, which leads to FORGIVENESS, which unlocks GRACE. We can't live up to God's standards, so we have to get forgiveness for our constant failure to meet them.

Does this mean we are excused from sin? No! But the way to deal with it and control it and reduce it is by CONFESSING it. This leads to the EMPOWERMENT of the Spirit, which leads to LESS SIN! This is not licensing sin; this is using God's way of conquering it. We may make exterior changes through self-improvement, but the worst sins will remain, such as pride, jealousy, hatred, greed, and gossip. God's way for us to overcome sin is to GROW through confession, prayer, absorbing truth, and enduring God's training.

Believers are "under grace", and grace is the means for truncating the reign of sin in the mortal body. Love found a way to cover our sin, as we have always taught...and love provides a way for sin to be dealt with in our experience. There is much to know about this...so much that this knowledge will only be found in super-mature believers. So don't expect to have this happen immediately...just know that it can be done. In the meantime, we must rely heavily on the aspects of grace that erase our wrongs, because our well-being and advancement depend on forgiveness. In a forgiven state, we can move forward toward maturity, where we will eventually see God's love crush evil in our lives.

During our growth period, we can see ongoing restoration through grace, which—as we have said—begins with love and mercy and ends in forgiveness. Ps. 57:9-10 says, "I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies." This is incomprehensible love, but not

unreachable love. This love persists past all our failures. Our job is not to attempt personal perfection, but to seek constant forgiveness. That is the key to improvement in performance. (I know, I am repeating myself, and intend it.)

Thank God, His love never stops and never fails, which is why Ps. 119:76 says, “May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant. Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.” This is echoed in Ps. 119:88, which adds, “Preserve my life according to your love, and I will obey the statutes of your mouth.”

It is because of His mercy and compassion that we are motivated to confess and to grow by processing His truth into our hearts. His essence extended toward us is grace...and our correct response to grace is humility. Thus it is that the kindness of God leads us to confession, as suggested in Rom. 2:4, which asks this question: “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance [confession]?”

Love leads to the confession of our sins, which satisfies God’s holiness and unveils His faithfulness. 1 John 1:9, quoted earlier, says, “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” It is in His love and forgiveness, and not in ourselves, that we meet His requirements for righteousness and purity. His love sustains us and keeps us...and EXCUSES our weaknesses, when we acknowledge them to Him.

Our awareness of our weakness opens the channels for His love, meaning that we must not despair at our inability to fight off sin in our lives. When we confess, we accept His love and this delights Him. As a result of His love, our sins are covered, which enables us, as we stated so clearly in *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*, to live constantly in His love and forgiveness. This also allows us to continually move toward Him by growing in “grace and knowledge”.

Truth Discloses Love. Growth is a key component in understanding love—and in living in the light of truth. This suggests we should constantly be LEARNING THE TRUTH about His love, so we can acknowledge it fully. Passages in the Bible that deal with God’s love are everywhere, and we should watch for them. Many times references to love will be seen in proximity with those dealing with truth. This is reflected in the following verses on God’s love, many of which link love with the mastery of truth:

Ps. 26:3—...for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.

Ps. 40:10-11—I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. Do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord; may your love and your truth always protect me.

Ps. 92:2—...to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night...

Ps. 103:2-4—Praise the Lord, O 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...

Ps. 138:2—I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness...

Ps. 143:8—Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

Jer. 31:3—The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

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. (Also, see “The Fullness of God”, p. 32, in our book, *Step by Step toward Surrender*.)

There are many other verses that disclose the place and importance of God’s love, and why we must learn about it. In fact, the entire Bible is a declaration of His compassion for us. To really understand the Word of God is to comprehend the love of God. Ps. 119:124-125 says, “Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees. I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.” What is our proper request to God in light of His love? TEACH ME! Give me discernment and wisdom concerning Your character.

We want to know about this love, because we want God to “deal with us” according to it (Ps. 25:7). We want Him to “deliver us” according to His love, while He is teaching us (Ps. 109:26). We want His mercy and love to cleanse us, as per Ps. 51:1; this verse says, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

Final Point on Love and Sin. We must not live in fear of reprisal for our sins and failures; we must live in celebration of God’s love, which covers our sins and gives us strength and hope for each new day. He has made access to His love so easy for those who have believed in Him and are thus born again...all we have to do as believers is to come to the throne of grace with confidence in His love, knowing that this is where we will receive mercy and forgiveness, and where we will find grace to help us in every area of our lives. (See Heb. 4:16.)

It is easy to become discouraged by our inability to fully conquer sin, but we must understand that even our despair is Satan-induced. Why? Because it prevents the acceptance of grace and mercy. The key is to use and receive grace with *boldness*, so that grace can have its full effect. We must never feel that grace is reluctant, even though we don’t deserve it. Grace is assuredly not deserved, but we can receive it with confidence, because its operation rests on the character of God, rather than our morality.

When we fail, dear brothers and sisters, we must have confidence that such a time is not the end, but the beginning. If we will bring our failures to God, He will remove them from our record, sending them as far away from us as the east is from the west. God has provided a way for Him to love us without ceasing and without impediment. And He has planned a way for us to access it. All He needs is our purity through forgiveness, and our permission through faith. There is much more to learn about this, so the thread of God’s love will be woven into all the studies that we will see in the remainder of this book.

On the following page is a poem calling for us to accept God's love. This poem was written by Venetia Taylor and can be found in her very excellent book of poems, *Desert Pathways*. (Endnote 19.)

Let Yourself be Loved

What have you done that's so bad?

What have you seen?

What have you heard?

Who told you that I wouldn't love you?

Let yourself be loved.

Open up to me.

I'm waiting at the door

To embrace you.

Let yourself be loved.

Open up to me.

I'll remove the illusions that blind you;

I'll expose the lies that delude you.

Open up to me,

And listen carefully.

It doesn't matter what you've done.

I'll show you a new way to see.

I'll whisper to you a new way to hear.

I'll love into you a way

To let yourself be loved.

Just take the focus off of you

And see the love in Me.

Formal Focus on Confession. Lev. 26:40-42 says this:

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac, and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

Even with confession, which is God's way for believers to clear their sin record, someone has to "pay". Our payment was made on the cross, so that all that remains is for us to confess our sins, as we shall see. This is typical grace: God pays; we benefit.

We will be looking closely at confession as God's way to clear our sins, and will discover its value as the beginning point for every other spiritual process. According to God's design, there are two main parts to the life of a believer. These two pillars of the Christian life are described as the "filling of the Spirit", which occurs when we are "cleansed" through confession, and "a walk in the Spirit", which is made possible when our attitude toward God and life consists of "faith". We will get into these two aspects of Christian living, which have been thoroughly covered in past writings, but which always need more review and additional examination.

This section deals with the first half of Christian living, which is the removal of sins that we have committed. This is done through confession of our sins to God the Father. The technique of confession is more important than most believers realize, yet is less formal than one might think. Confession is actually an attitude. We are accustomed to seeing the confession process as specific events of contrition, but we must remember that God looks at the heart, and if He finds humility there, He honors this as confession. It's all about our recognizing His God-ness, and our dependency on His mercy and grace.

Coming clean before God begins with a willingness to stand uncovered before God to show our trust in His grace and mercy. We invite His inspection, because we know our honesty and humility before Him will bring His forgiveness. Ps. 139:23-24 gives us the prayer we are to have in our hearts when we approach God in search of cleansing. This passage says, "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."

We are not afraid of exposing our hearts, because we know He will deal with us in love and kindness. He will forgive our sins, when we confess them. This goes against our nature, which is to hide our failings and hope that no one discovers them. We hope the memory of our wrongs will fade and we will be "good enough" to balance the books on our good/bad behavior. Often, we think that our blessings and care from God will depend on our ability to produce more good than bad. This shows a wrong view of God.

We tend to see God operating in a progressive, linear, time-driven sequence, the same way that we do. If we can "do good" today, we expect to be "rewarded" tomorrow. But God will first of all see the details of our lives more as a whole, and evaluates our acts as parts of our condition, more so than individual acts of transgression. Ps. 139:15-16 describes this as follows:

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

When God looks at us, He is looking at our present state as part of our “book”. He has “ordained” our days, which means first that He permanently overlays our lives with specific grace when we are saved. After this, God sees us in a special and loving light while we are living out our days in this foreign land. But He knows when His children are drifting away from Him.

When we err, our condition is highlighted as needing divine attention, which brings corrective action. We must never forget, no matter how bad we are: Everything we experience with God comes to us as beloved children. We will be disciplined when our condition slides, but we can always enjoy the patience and love of a benevolent and welcoming Father, and we can know that everything He does for us is done to bless us and to **MOVE US IN HIS DIRECTION**.

His response to us as His errant children is not to come after us with a whip, but to coax us to honor His grace by being unafraid to say to Him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (Luke 15:21). His guaranteed retort is to say, “I forgive.”

On the other hand, individual sins, which add up to our condition, must be acknowledged. If we refuse to see and admit our sins, as Job did, then we may suffer as rebellious children, and receive our Father’s correction. Yet—very important—we are not punished for our sins, but for “unconfessed” sins, because...if we do not confess...we are “unforgiven” in a temporal sense...still approved positionally, but unclean conditionally.

KEY POINT: Job suffered, yet his three friends were wrong that he was suffering for his sins; he was actually suffering for “unconfessed” sins. In Job 31:6, he said, “...let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless.” Oops. Wrong thing to say! The fourth friend, Elihu, cleared it up by telling Job the following in Job 33:8-12a:

But you have said in my hearing—I heard the very words—“I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy, He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.” But I tell you, in this you are not right.

Fortunately for Job, he later realized his sinfulness and acknowledged his sin before God, as we see in Job 42:1-6:

Then Job replied to the Lord: “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

This took him off the hook for divine correction, because he finally repented...or confessed his sins.

But we must be clear: Even though our Heavenly Father will prod us back onto the right path, His love for us never dampens or wavers. He loves us without question and without hesitation, all the

time. Discipline? Yes. We will experience it. But will there be any loss of love or special, specific attention to every detail of our lives? No.

What we are actually seeing when discipline comes goes beyond God's correction of our condition, or His dealing with our individual sins, and moves to the heart of the problem: our *lack of faith*. Here is how this works: When we refuse to confess our sins, we are showing that we do not *believe* that God is waiting and willing to forgive us. We are showing no *faith* toward His *grace*. Jesus Himself said, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent [confess] (Rev. 3:19)." Being "earnest" means being "honest". This is what God wants. When we are honest about our sins, He sees our faith toward His love and mercy, and He honors this faith with forgiveness.

If we do not confess, God will pursue us...get our attention and invite us back into fellowship with Him. In Luke 15:3-7 Jesus tells the story of a sheep which was lost, and cites the efforts of the Shepherd to recover the lost sheep. This is not a story of salvation, but one of a believer repenting for his sins...confessing them. When God finds us in contrition for our sins, He restores us, as described in Luke 15:5: "And when he finds it [the lost sheep] he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home." Notice how the recovery occurs: He "joyfully" carries us back "home". He takes us back into close fellowship with Him and His flock, when we have confessed.

When God forgives, it is a thorough cleansing, as described in Is. 43:25, which shows God saying, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." Is. 44:22 confirms this, adding, "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you." When He forgives, it is absolute, as we see again here:

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 [trust] him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (Ps. 103:11-14)

God made us with free will, even knowing we would follow Satan and rebel against Him. He knows we are dominated by our sinful natures, which is why He has devised His plan to offer recovery and restoration to us. When we are clean, our relationship with Him is refreshed, and our faith becomes operational. God speaks and we are cleaned...upon our confession (Eph. 5:26).

God Loves to Forgive. We refer again to Luke 15 to see, not only the lost sheep, but also the lost coin and the lost son. All of these are representative of a believer out of fellowship, due to unconfessed sin. This passage shows God's heart for believers who move away from Him; He is waiting to be gracious. The father's restoration of the lost son in this passage depicts perfectly God's attitude toward believers who are willing to be "cleansed". He gives His highest and best to the "restored" believer.

God does not restore us to fellowship because we earn it or deserve it, but because we bring our faults to Him. The younger brother got more than the elder brother when the errant son returned home in Luke 15. The "sinning" brother was honored more than the "moral" one. This is because the older brother was "luke-warm" where his father was concerned, whereas the younger brother found grace. Big brother had amazing resources at his disposal, but he did not RECEIVE them, because he

was out with his friends and distant from his father. Yes, little brother left it all, but he came back home with humility...and FULL RECOGNITION OF HIS FATHER'S GRACE AND GENEROSITY...and the father was HAPPY to restore his youngest son.

God's forgiving us and restoring us is not a burden to Him, or something He labors to perform; He does this "joyfully", because He "loves to show mercy". He doesn't love sin or approve of us sinning, but He loves to *forgive* sin. I believe there is no single activity God loves more than forgiving us, because it honors the work of His Son...He is very proud of His Son's work, and it pleases the Father to showcase what His Son has accomplished. It PLEASES HIM to show mercy and forgive us, as we see in Micah 6:18-19, which says this:

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 and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (emphasis mine)

This is meant for Israel, but this reference works for church-age believers, as well. He delights in showing mercy to us. Seeing this process as something God loves to do makes us feel easier about going to Him with our violations of His standards. He is not standing tall above us, waiting to punish us when we confess; when we come clean with Him, He enfolds us within His arms and says, "Welcome home, my child." He loves to forgive.

On the next page is another great poem from Venetia Taylor (see Endnote 19), this one depicting forgiveness:

Forgiveness

To the One who knew me before I was,
Who created me in the darkness of my mother's womb,
Who knew my name and the color of my eyes,
I lift up my soul, my spirit, my body.
There is nothing about me that I can hide from You.
I am naked.
I am exposed.
So shine Your light into my darkness to disclose my shame,
And I will confess it.
And when You hear it, You will forgive.
I am in pieces, but
It is Your hand that puts me back together.
I am blind, but
It is Your lips that kiss my eyes to give me sight.
I am alone, but
I feel Your arms around me.
Your heart beats within my chest;
Your tears roll down my cheeks;
Your smile beams from my face.
But when I walk away to sin,
And know that I have stepped back from You,
The heaviness comes,
Consumes the air...
I cannot breathe
Without You
Near.

Sincerity. There are very few teachers of the Word that agree with the things I am saying about confession. I can count them on one hand...or at most two hands. But Andrew Murray is certainly one of them, which is why he is quoted so often in my writing. Here is one of his statements on this topic:

Few Christians realize how necessary it is to be in earnest about the matter [confession of our sins], or feel that an honest confession of sin gives power to live the life of victory over sin. (Endnote 20)

Murray, like J. Hampton Keathley, III, declared the importance of confession, but Murray also indicated, as we saw in the quote just given, that sincerity, earnestness, honesty, and genuineness are crucial to the process. The most important aspect of this technique is our awareness of GOD as the reason and basis for our paying attention to our sins, and our decision to take them to Him. To be “earnest” means to look at our sins first, but then to be fully aware of the One to whom we give account for sinning in the first place. Confession as an acknowledgement of our sins is useless if it does not include God as the qualified recipient of this admission.

When we confess, then, our thoughts must be directed toward God as our forgiver. Just being contrite or ashamed of our sins means nothing if we do not link these with the great Forgiver. Sincere confession begins with knowing that it is God to whom we are confessing...we are bringing our sins TO HIM. It is HE who is faithful and just to forgive.

It seems worth our while to take the time to explore a little further the issue of sincerity, especially as it relates to our confession, but also to our faith and other areas of Christian living.

When we come to God, we come AS WE ARE, not as we think we should be. This is the distortion that too many impose on our approach to God. We don’t clean up to come to God; we come to God to be cleaned up. Being sincere is being honest with God...right to His face.

Many verses call for sincerity in our faith. 1 Tim. 1:5 cites “sincere faith” as the way to grow in love for fellow believers. 2 Tim. 1:5 shows Paul commending Timothy for His “sincere faith”. There are other applications for sincerity. Heb. 10:22 calls for us to draw near to God with a “sincere heart”. In Jer. 29:13 we are told to seek God with all our heart. This is a “sincere search” for God. 2 Cor. 2:17 tells us to exercise our gifts “with sincerity”. Col. 3:23-24 admonishes us to “serve with sincerity”. 1 Pet. 1:22 tells us that love comes through sincerity. 1 Pet. 4:8 cites “loving deeply” as an expression of sincerity. 1 John 3:18 asks for us to love with actions and in truth...or to do so sincerely.

Sincerity has many applications in Scripture, relating to searching for truth, faith, love, nearness to God, confession, and virtually every other aspect of the Christian life. This makes sincerity important in our relationship with God. Murray summarized the place of sincerity and told us where we get it. Here is how he put it: “Remember, sincerity is the outpouring of the heart before the Lord, and it is obtained nowhere except in fellowship with Him and through His friendly grace.” (Endnote 21) Sincerity is opening our hearts, exposing our weaknesses, and releasing all parts of our lives to God. Sincerity is wanting to get closer to God, and bringing our true selves to Him.

The topic of sincerity seems so pervasive that it extends beyond our ability to compress it into a few sentences, but at bottom, it seems to connote our being who we truly are in connection with Who God is.

Return to Me. It is important NOT to stay away from God, even though sin is clearly and readily present. I love 1 Sam. 12:20, which says, “‘Do not be afraid,’ Samuel replied. ‘You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.’” Sin does not need to stand between us and God, yet the least promoted of all the techniques is that of confessing our sins to the Father.

As our knowledge and faith grow, we become more aware of our sins in the light of God’s presence, which prompts us to take them to Him. When we relinquish our mistakes to Him, He disposes of them. When we refer our sins to God, we are plowing in the fertile soil of humility, and becoming increasingly keen to mercy and grace. We have done evil...we always will...but we should not MOVE AWAY FROM GOD. Rather, we should quickly return over and over and over, with confidence that He will never tire of forgiving us. This will strengthen our faith and eventually enable us to overcome the patterns of sin that slow us down and block our service.

Examining ourselves, inspecting ourselves, checking our own record, judging ourselves: These allow us to dump our errors on God. Lam. 3:40 says, “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.” And once we have returned, as we must do continually, and have been restored, we must MOVE ON.

We must not dwell on or hang on to the wrong we have done, no matter how severe it is. Guilt as a part of confession is legitimate, but guilt after confession is an expression of distrust in the character and promise of God. He has promised to forgive if we will confess. To hold on to guilt after He has forgiven shows a refusal to accept grace, which always offends Him, and puts us right back into a place that is “away from” Him. In *Step by Step toward Surrender*, we see the following in our discussion of dealing with sin (see p. 38):

When we sin, what should we do? Agonize at length, vow never to do the “thing” again, do penance, hide? No! We are to CONFESS our known sins to God with the assurance that He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). And then we should RESUME OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES WITH CONFIDENCE AND COMMITMENT TO GROWTH AND A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD! Move on! When God forgives, we should accept this by faith and keep going. We don’t have time to pine away in guilt over our failings...just confess them, and then get up and go.

When we get back underway with prayer and receive again the truths of God’s Word, we will move toward maturity. Constant confession equips and qualifies us to pray effectively and to learn. There’s more: Not only can we progress toward greater faith through the instruction of the Holy Spirit, but we also have the POWER of the Spirit to help us resist sin and exercise our gifts of service. This is the outcome of cleanliness...fellowship with the Spirit that makes everything else possible.

Fellowship is a big topic, and sin is the breaker of fellowship. Murray echoes this in his inimitable language, as follows:

O Christian, if you are seeking to have fellowship with Jesus, do not fear to confess each sin in the confident assurance that there is deliverance. Let there be a mutual understanding between the Lord Jesus and your self that you will confess each sin, and obtain forgiveness. Then you will know your Lord as Jesus Who saves His people from their sin. Believe that there is great power in the confession of sin, for the burden of sin is borne by our Lord and Savior. (Endnote 22)

Then Murray adds this:

Confession means not only that I confess my sin with shame, but that I hand it over to God, trusting Him to take it away. Such a confession implies that I am wholly unable to get rid of my guilt, but by an act of faith I depend on God to deliver me. This deliverance means in the first place that I know my sins are forgiven, and secondly, that Christ undertakes to cleanse me from the sin, and keep me from its power. (Endnote 23)

Confession of sin is often trivialized or made into a formal process; OR it is neglected altogether. The only form of confession that God does not accept is one that is not from the “heart”; i.e., comes from the “mind” alone. Like truth stuck in the mind alone, confession that it is confined to mental assent alone will not be effective. Confession must go on in the heart.

Even confession can become a mechanized form of legalism, or an effort to “please” God, rather than a true contrition in our hearts that recognizes our own weaknesses and identifies God’s mercy and grace. Any honest look at ourselves will tell us that our only proper response to God’s presence inside of us is one of humility and—if sin is on our books—shame. The alternative is to carry with us a kind of pride when we visit to the throne of grace. We might say, “My, aren’t I good because I confessed.” Confession can become a source of arrogance, the same way that knowledge can (1 Cor. 1:8: “knowledge puffs up”), or the same way that self-satisfaction with rule-compliance can (Mark 10:20: “Teacher...all these things I have kept since I was a boy...”).

Perfunctory confession is not confession, but mere compliance with the guidelines, a kind of rule-keeping or legalism. A true awareness of God’s love in the process of confession will remind us of our smallness, and the magnanimity of God in forgiving us. True confession is based on a genuine recognition of grace and mercy, and a true view of ourselves as helpless without Him. With true confession, we will be returning to the Lord.

For a concise list of techniques for confession, see Appendix B, “Ways to Confess our Sins”.

Confirmation of the Truth Concerning Confession. Confession receives much more emphasis in Scripture than most people acknowledge. It is good to know what the Bible says, writ large, concerning confession, just so you know that it is not some privately-conceived notion (even though it does not receive wide-spread emphasis in most churches). We have presented in previous studies a list of references in the Bible that deal with or illustrate confession. We repeat the list in the appendices for your convenience. If there is any doubt about the place of confession in the lives of believers, this collection of verses should put that uncertainty to rest...and this list is by no means comprehensive. See Appendix C, “Verses on Confession”.

Cleanliness Promotes Faith. We do not become pure in our hearts (or “pure of heart”) because we make ourselves that way, but because God creates purity in us when we are contrite and humble before Him. When we sin (and when do we not?), faith is not operating, or—at a minimum—is not dominating. Life is different when we sin because our faith is diminished. Never forget: Sin diminishes faith.

Ps. 32:10 says, “Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.” The two most extreme spiritual conditions are thought to be “evil” and “good”. But in reality the two major poles are “evil” and “faith”. When we sin and do not genuinely confess, faith hides; but when we are restored by returning to the Lord, faith re-cranks and then sustains our spiritual walk...at least until we sin again.

Our objective is to keep sins cleared, so faith can work. And once we are pure, our objective is to increase our faith so we can stay that way. Sin is discussed so much by Paul and others because it blights and blocks our faith, not because it offends God; remember, the work of Christ covers our sins. The greatest effect of sin is not *disappointing God*, but the *dampening of our faith*. Lack of faith is what offends God the most. The only way to fix this is to STOP SIN, so faith can stay strong.

Our purpose regarding sin, then, whether it is negative (erasing sin) or positive (avoiding sin)...is always to operate in the belief that God is the power and force behind any effective dealing with sin. When we sin, we are saying that God is not real. But when we realize that *He is real* and that *God’s Word is true*, sin loses its power over us. Sin diminishes faith, but faith diminishes sin. Grow faith and sin will eventually shrivel. The key to godly success is GREATER FAITH, while the greatest impediment to success is sin. Sin is the destroyer; its target is faith.

Dealing with Sin Requires Using all Assets. It is important to combine all available resources in order to avoid sin and produce good. We must, of course, stay clean through confession and humility. Then we must pray, as this is the time of acknowledgement, petition, thanksgiving, and intercession. And we must avail ourselves with opportunities to study and hear God’s Word. We must also endure God’s training: tests, trials, and temptations. And we must access the gifts of others for support, as we operate in God’s strength, so that our gifts can concomitantly edify them. These will strengthen us against sin.

We cannot expect any one of these to do the job alone. All of these are essential if we are to build our faith and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot neglect even one of them. This is “our part”...to access God’s grace and use His assets to enable us to live within His plan. When we do this, God’s part is engaged, which is to protect us from evil and sustain our spiritual walk.

God Delivers us from Evil. God has provided assets to help us deal with our sin. We are fallen creatures in a fallen world, and we are still tethered to our own sinful tendencies and the world which promotes them. We are desperate for His rescue and deliverance. Our helpless plea is articulated in Ps. 6:1-4, which says this:

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faith; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long? Turn, O Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.

This passage may deal primarily with discipline for sin, but buried in this prayer is a cry to be relieved from the domination of sin. Verses 8 and 9 in this same passage confirm this, saying, “Away from me, all you who do evil, for the Lord has heard my weeping. The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer.” Evil doers here can be seen as satanic forces that promote sin in the world and within us. Weeping can be the agony of helplessness in the face of persistent sin. There is no greater source of sorrow than the sin we cannot stop. The deep suffering that comes from repeated or perpetual sin is the most devastating dilemma in the heart of a believer who is growing.

But there is hope. 2 Cor. 1:21a says, “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.” We do not make ourselves firm and resolute and determined as a sure defense against sin. Our defense is God and His truth and His Spirit. Our whole objective for all the writings we have done is to find out how to access and maintain direct and unobstructed contact with our Defender, so that we can draw on His strength to enable us to stand firm...and beyond that...to WALK.

Gal. 5:24-25 gives us the means for standing firm against sin and walking in righteousness, saying the following:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit [meaning “walk by means of the Spirit”].

In the eternal perspective of God, we “LIVE” by the Spirit forever, or have eternal life through Him. But temporally and experientially, we may or may not be “WALKING” by the Spirit. This is determined by the presence or absence of sin, with its “passions and desires”. If the sinful nature is in charge, we cannot be walking in the strength of the Spirit. It is only when the Spirit is in control, due to our cleanliness and the resultant fellowship we have with Him, that we can walk in the Spirit. This is our hope and our rescue.

Today is the day of our deliverance. Victory over sin while we are still on the earth does not occur in a single moment, with an expectation that it will last forever. We have today...right now...and that is when the battle is and when we need to find grace. 2 Cor. 6:1-2 says this:

As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.

There are three basic types of salvation: 1) salvation at our initial time of believing in Christ, 2) salvation or deliverance from various conditions during our confinement in “time”, and 3) complete salvation, which will occur when we move into the eternal state. We are speaking of the second type, which is rescue at the present time. NOW is when we are alive in the world, and NOW is the time we must draw on grace. We must not slow down in our study and prayer until we have victory in our bodies and souls. We cannot let up. NOW is the time of our deliverance from evil.

Chapter 7

Understanding Faith

Appendix on Faith. For a good foundation on the basics of “faith”, please read Appendix D, “Walking by Faith”, which is a compilation of excerpts from the basics course, *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*. Also a must read, at the end of this book, is Appendix J, “Perspective on Faith”. To flesh this topic out further, you can read one of our earlier books, *Walking by Faith: Pathway to the Promised Land*.

Praying for Faith. It is suitable for us to ask for our faith to be increased. The apostles did, and so can we. (Luke 17:5) It is suitable for us to pray for faith to grow, which means IT CAN. Faith at salvation is a one-time occurrence. At that time, the exercise of faith is “once-for-all”, with results that last forever. This faith either exists...or it doesn’t. After salvation, faith is a varying condition that will wax or wane (grow or shrink), depending on our desire for more or less of God in our Christian lives. The fact that SAVING FAITH is instantaneous (based on tenses in the original language), while SUBSEQUENT FAITH is long-term and variable, is evidence that the faith of the Christian life is not the same as the faith of salvation.

Luke 17:5 says this: “The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” Faith *can be* increased. In Mark 9:23-24, a father responds to Jesus’ assurance that “everything is possible for him who believes”. The father responded, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” The advancement of faith corresponds with the reduction of unbelief, and the fact that Jesus accepted this prayer shows that it is good for us to ask for less doubt and more faith. We can pray, “Father, teach me what faith is, and then show me how to acquire it. Help me learn HOW to believe.”

Starting to Get a Handle on Faith. God made faith the center and heart and pathway for everything related to Him. Faith is our means of participating in His kingdom. Faith is the avenue to the answers we seek, and the means to pleasing God. A lack of faith strengthens sin, and where sin exists, faith is absent. All spiritual techniques, operations, assets, and conditions are dependent on faith. In fact, the level of sin in our lives is a gauge for the amount of faith we have accumulated. If you want to know how much faith you have, look at your sin pattern.

Reduction of sin reflects the strength of our faith. Inserting a question here: Which is more important to the strengthening of faith: 1) being clean (in fellowship, controlled by the Spirit)...or 2) being mature (growing through assimilation of truth and endurance of God’s training)? Ultimately, maturity has more to do with the *size* of our faith (it is actually the *measure* of our faith), but spirituality relates to the *direction* of our growth, since we will never advance toward maturity without accessing forgiveness through confession. Spirituality opens the gate for growth, but faith is both the means and the goal for all we will do *while we are spiritual*! Both cleanliness and growth are indispensable.

Faith is framed as an attitude toward God. It is confidence in things we cannot see, based on a passion for and an ongoing exploration of all things divine. Heb. 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure

of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” We see evidence for God, but we do not see God Himself, which means that our acceptance of His reality is based on what we believe is true, sight unseen. Visibility is secondary, as we see in 2 Cor. 4:16-18, which says this:

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. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Visible reality is transitory and fleeting (“wasting away”), whereas the invisible is permanent (“eternal”). God and His reality exist with or without our faith, but faith allows us to access the spiritual dimension. Faith is God’s view...divine view point...which includes our acknowledging Him and being always conscious of Him as the ultimate Life. The opposite view represents a “world” view point, and preoccupation with self and selfish wants and pursuits. We want what we see and we see what we want, while the unseen goes unnoticed, unless we have a spark for God. This dilemma persists as long as we are unbelievers, and even after...until our faith has grown and become established.

Faith and Reality. In the physical world there are causes and effects that are generally predictable. We sometimes present faith in a mechanistic way, but the spiritual world does not work like, nor share value with, the physical world. There is a reliability to faith, but it is not always observable IN THE WORLD, because faith operates in a SPIRITUAL REALITY. Our greatest provisions and blessings take place in God’s world, which is spiritual, existing far beyond and above any physical reality. Faith is real, as God is real, but these do not display themselves in the way to which we are accustomed. This is why growth and the operation of faith are so elusive.

Faith is viewed in many ways. The notion of faith in general is very popular and has wide appeal. Most believe that “believing enough” is the key to “making things happen”. This idea is pervasive in television shows and movies; we must have faith. But this can only work IF our faith is framed in a scriptural framework, and the faith in question is directed toward the true and living God. It is only then that “what happens” will be an outcropping of God’s design for outcomes in our lives. General faith, on the other hand, may even work in the substantial world, due to Satan’s attempts to prove his point that faith toward the “universe” is useful. If we believe in the world, Satan can cause results that verify that faith. Tricky.

Real, spiritual faith has far-reaching effects that cannot be compared with the effects of believing that the universe will care for us. Worldly, satanic conditions will evaporate and disappear, while spiritual conditions persist forever. Our goal is to grow our faith enough so that it will eventually, not only accommodate all spiritual requirements and needs, but will spread to cover all aspects of all realities, including benefits that will be visible in the world. Worldly benefits do not stand as our objective, but we will see them, when faith reaches a sufficient level. (See *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last.*)

For believers, faith must be attached to God by believing in His truth. Truth builds faith, and faith based on accumulated wisdom will be directed toward God Himself. This is part of a “learning

cycle” that we will study in detail in Chapters 10, 11, and 12. This examination will show EXACTLY how faith grows and what this means to our daily lives.

Protection Coming from Faith. We will also see later in this book that the greatest value of faith is that it enables us to function in the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. If I could pick one, single point at which the Christian life is lived, it is when the Holy Spirit is greeted with faith. This is the most God-pleasing thing we can do...allowing Him to be our God. The more we are bearers of faith toward Him, the more He is God to us.

When faith grows, we can be sure of God’s protection. Faith is an important piece in the armor of God that He provides for us, as per 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 arrows come at us in two primary ways: 1) enticement into sin/self-righteousness and 2) attacks from the world (health, finances, relationships, etc.). Faith shields us from these things...from sin by keeping the Holy Spirit in charge of our souls, and from suffering and loss by keeping us connected with God’s gracious provision.

1 Thess. 5:18 tells us this: “But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” Faith is the product of maturity, while love is the outcome of fellowship. Hope here is the eternal perspective, which is the outlook we have toward the eternal state...when “salvation” will be fully realized. Our emphasis in this study is on faith as our breastplate. This again shows our protection from times of “darkness” (v. 4-5), which is the time when sin is dominating, and during which we have no self-control. Faith keeps us in the light.

When we walk by faith, with the direct result that we walk in the Spirit, we overcome the world. 1 John 5:4b says, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” To withstand the attacks of Satan and his cosmic system, we must have strong faith. This is our defense against both insidious and blatant assaults.

When suffering comes, faith is our refuge. Heb. 10:35 and 39, taken together, say this: So do not throw away your confidence [faith]; it will be richly rewarded...But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved [delivered].” Strong faith delivers us from suffering, or from its effects. Faith protects us from any unpleasant thing in our lives and gives us the strength to endure and/or surmount all circumstances.

Faith Really Counts. Heb. 3:1 commands us to maintain God-consciousness, which is a sustained and ongoing form of faith. We do this by staying focused on the work of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit He sent after He ascended into heaven. This verse says, “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.” When we are thinking about God, and when our thoughts are influenced by faithful attendance to study and prayer, we will be trusting Him.

Gal. 5:6b tells us that faith is what really counts, saying, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Our goal is to develop a faith that is strong enough to produce divine good...seen as love. This love comes from God, of course, and is an extension of our fellowship and

walk with Him. Without faith, we will not love, and without love, we cannot serve God. Everything hinges on faith, which is why it is so important.

As believers, we have a sense of purpose in pleasing God, and we want to fulfill our purpose, but there is no shortcut for achieving this. We must grow our faith for this to happen. Heb. 11:6 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.” The thing that pleases God is our faith, which is why its significance cannot be overestimated. In fact, anything associated with an absence of faith is a SIN! Rom. 14:23b states this clearly, saying, “...and everything that does not come from faith is sin.” If faith being present is the only way that sin can be foregone, its importance is appropriately emphasized.

Examples of Faith. Scripture gives some great examples of faith from the Old Testament. These are provided, not to show how spectacular these individuals were, but to demonstrate how much God values faith over anything else.

Rom. 4:20-21 tells of Abraham’s faith, who was under hopeless conditions for having a rightful heir. This passage says the following:

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.

The term “was strengthened” actually means “had been strengthened”, which indicates that Abraham had grown over time and through eagerness to know and serve God, and had developed a mature faith. He had learned about God and was totally convinced that God could do what He said He would do. Noteworthy is the fact, not only that Abraham’s faith had grown, but that faith CAN grow. It advances, on the basis of its being fed through the mechanism of grace. (Do not despair of weak faith; that can change!)

Abraham was not alone; there were many others throughout history that had strong faith. Heb. 11 points to some of these, citing those who operated “by faith”. Included are these:

- By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain. His sacrifice was based on faith.
- By faith Enoch was taken from this life without dying, having been cited as one who pleased God.
- By faith Noah built an ark and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.
- By faith Abraham obeyed God and went to a strange new land...the promised land.
- By faith Abraham was enabled, against all odds, to become a father, because he considered God faithful in the fulfillment of His promise of an heir.
- By faith Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice, even though Abraham knew that Isaac was the one to continue Abraham’s line.
- By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau.
- By faith Jacob, while he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons.

- By faith Moses' parents hid him from the marauding king, knowing that Moses was special.
- By faith Moses rejected Pharaoh's family and chose to suffer with his own people.
- By faith Moses left Egypt.
- By faith Moses kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood.
- By faith the walls of Jericho fell.
- By faith the prostitute Rahab welcomed the Jewish spies.
- And still others: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, who accomplished many great things through their faith.

It is so easy to paint these great accounts of faith with an indifferent gloss, as though they were mere stories; but the circumstances that these OT believers went through would curl our hair, if we knew or could witness the details, let alone experience what they did. Their faith was strong, strong enough to make them noteworthy in the annals of divine history. This is because God honors faith above all things, which means that—above all things—we must cultivate our faith.

Law vs. Faith. The line between law and faith is blurred, despite the seeming disparity between the two. Following the path of the law amounts to our humanity attempting to honor divine standards and produce divine good, while following the path of faith is tantamount to trusting God to do His work and produce His righteousness through us. Unfortunately, we get these two paths crossed. We think that WE can do what only GOD can do.

In our salvation, as well as within our lives thereafter, law-keeping prevents access to God, while trusting opens it up. Both salvation and life are possible because of faith. On the other hand, rule-keeping will not save us and will never make us holy as believers. We have discussed this thoroughly in the past, and do not need to repeat it here. For those who may not have seen our previous studies on “law vs. faith”, we are providing a synopsis in Appendix E, titled, “Law Contrasted with Faith”.

The thing we emphasized in this appendix, as we must do again here, is that righteousness does not come through law-keeping, but through faith. Rom. 1:17 sizes it up this way: “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’.” This verse refers to righteousness acquired forever at salvation, but also applies to the lives of believers as we move toward experiential righteousness, which is the character of God that the Holy Spirit expresses through us as we grow. Notice that this says the “righteous” (justified, saved) will “live by faith” (be cleansed, move toward maturity).

Living by faith means our lives are centered on God, and that we are focused on His power and providence. Faith is the means for living productively, or for producing “righteousness” or divine good. From faith comes obedience to God's commands, both positive (do's) and negative (do not's). In Rom. 1:5 Paul said, “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.”

Faith generates obedience. Obedience promotes righteousness. Righteousness produces love. With faith we will see God's love bursting from our hearts in the form of generous service to our brothers and sisters. This does not mean we will project scintillating personalities or that we will be

gushing over everyone in our periphery. It simply means that our gifts will be effective, and provide edification for others.

Hab. 2:2b-4 frames our need to live by faith, saying the following:

Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. [And here it is:] “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith.”

Living by faith means operating in a “faith cloud” that we carry with us, an ambience in our spirit that abides throughout all conditions. When we live by faith, faith works in our lives to keep us close to God and functioning in God’s power. The “law” will eventually be kept better than ever, not by our own strength and initiative, but as an outcome of faith. And our function as instruments of the Holy Spirit will bear fruit for God.

Recap of Faith Operations: Confession returns us to fellowship, which restores the power of the Spirit. This allows us to operate at a level commensurate with the size of our faith. If faith is small, sin will bully and coerce us; if it is strong, we will see sin kept under control. The amount of faith we have built up will determine the intensity of spiritual power that is engaged within us. Greater faith comes from sustained growth, which involves assimilation of truth and enduring God’s training. The final objective of our core purpose is to relentlessly advance our faith to higher and higher levels. The way to do this has been provided in this book, and more completely in previous books; our purpose is to master this “way”.

Where does Faith Come From? The answer to this question on the origin of faith is simple: It comes from God. This does not mean that we do not have free will, either at salvation or during our Christian lives. It does mean that God alone provides the means and the power for our growth. 1 Cor. 3:6-7 says, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” When our faith grows, it is because God makes it grow.

Heb. 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the Father.” Jesus designs and completes our faith. He is the source for “finished” faith. Rom. 12:3 adds this:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

God gives us faith when we embrace truth. When we hear God’s truth, we can accept it or reject it. If we accept it, then that truth will have the effect of strengthening our faith. The process for this involves a “learning cycle”, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 10-12. As we learn, either through being taught or through the experiences God brings to teach us, we are acquiring pieces of God’s nature, and our faith is less questioning and more unclouded by doubt. (See 2 Pet. 1:4.)

We are fallen creatures that have been bought, but we still live in a fallen state and a fallen world. Our faith is based on recognition of God’s grace and love, and not on anything we are or anything

we can do. Our participation is based solely on our wanting God and looking for ways to get closer to Him. We don't have to search very far; His truth is nearby. The problem is that a true thirst for God is rare, so strong faith does not occur often.

Faith that comes from God consists of more than calmness in the daily storms of life. The ability to withstand misfortune is sometimes more a matter of personality than faith, and this ability is seen throughout an unsaved humanity. True faith is more related to a connection with God that comes through reaching out for His mercy—resulting in *spiritual* durability—and less about how controlled our emotions are in a crisis. I believe a feedback loop for emotional control CAN take place with advanced spirituality and this will stabilize emotions... but this will only happen when our faith reaches a certain level, as we discussed in *Step by Step toward Surrender*.

Here is the point I am trying to make at this time: Real faith comes from God, and it is this faith that can accumulate in the soul. This faith will become more effective and productive as it grows. The key to acquiring this faith comes, not through feeble attempts to correct our own weaknesses, but through our accessing His methods for allowing us to tap into His strength. We want HIS strength...the faith HE gives...not the misdirected faith we fabricate through our own psychological or emotional gyrations.

Keys to Building Trust. The keys to trusting God include worship, waiting, and deep silence. This is according to Andrew Murray, who concluded this:

It is as we take His word from the Blessed Book, and bring it to Himself, asking Him to speak it to us with His living, loving voice, that the power will come fully to believe and receive the word as God's own word to us. [Endnote 24]

When we are clean and our hearts are focused on God, we can receive truth that will become the framework for the operation of the Holy Spirit within us. This concept will become clear, once we have arrived at Chapters 10-12, where we will see exactly how truth becomes wisdom...which then becomes the fabric of our faith and the weapon of the Holy Spirit.

We will see as we progress that assimilation of God's message to us is the primary key in the development of our faith, when it is received in a receptive, reverent, and expectant way. This is one of the most profound and powerful concepts we will ever examine: the impact of truth on our lives. The outcome, as we will show, is greater faith, which is our objective.

Faith is the glue that ties all spiritual things together. It encompasses confession of our sins, fear of the Lord, preoccupation with Christ, humility, prayer, acknowledgement of God, surrender to God's will, God-consciousness, walking in the Spirit, and so on. These are essentials to Christian living that we see over and over, and none of these can be separated from our faith.

The faith we aspire to is based on a singular thirst for the divine...for God Himself. Murray said of this, "So the cure of a feeble faith is alone to be found in the invigoration of our whole spiritual life by intercourse with God." And then he added, "...let faith look to God more than the thing promised." (Endnote 25) It is God Himself, and not His benefits, that will inspire us, motivate us, and draw us toward Him. We are sick of the darkness and honestly seek His light. This light, as we suggested, is found in His truth.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 connects truth and faith, saying, “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.” The KJV says, “That the man of God may be perfect [mature], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” The word translated “perfect” is literally “fitted”, which means completely fit, as a football player gets into shape to play the game. Fit means READY. When a believer is ready to accomplish good works, it is because his faith is complete.

The faith that grows is not just a figment of the imagination. It is a substantial quality that exists to a greater or lesser degree, based on a believer’s following the protocol for spiritual growth. When God restores us to fellowship through confession, that which follows should contribute to growth. This means we must pray immediately, and follow this up with faithful study of the Word, so that we can acquire the wisdom that will constitute the substance of our faith.

The fact that faith can grow, as we cited earlier, is clearly established in Scripture. The following passages remind us of this, as we see in the following:

James 1:2-4—Consider it pure 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 you may be mature and complete not lacking anything.

Jude 1:20—But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Col. 2:7--...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Rom. 4:20—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.

Rom. 10:17 says, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” When we study the Word, absorb the truth, assimilate God’s message...faith comes.

Building our faith is the same as “drawing near to God”. Heb. 10:22 says, “...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.” To draw near, we must first of all be “cleansed” (James 4:8), and then we must “hold firmly to the faith [truth] we possess” (Heb. 4:14). Only then can we draw near in “fullness of faith” (Heb. 10:22). When truth resides in our souls, and we are clean, we can draw near to God, where faith blossoms.

Humility and Faith. We provided a complete chapter on humility titled, “Walking Humbly before God”, in the book *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*. The part of that chapter that pertains to our current discussion on humility and faith is found on pages 93-95, in a section appropriately titled, “Humility and Faith”. Here is an excerpt from that section:

We begin with a quote citing the need for humility, and highlighting the problem of pride as an impediment to faith, as follows:

Brother, have we not been making a mistake in taking so much trouble to believe, while all the time there was the old self in its pride seeking to possess itself of God's blessing and riches? No wonder we could not believe. Let us change our course. Let us seek first of all to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God: *He will exalt us*. The cross, and the death, and the grave, into which Jesus humbled Himself, were His path to the glory of God. And they are our path. Let our one desire and our fervent prayer be, to be humbled with Him and like Him; let us accept gladly whatever can humble us before God or men;—this alone is the path to the glory of God. [See references for quotes from Murray on p. 104 of *Step by Step toward Surrender*.]

Any attempt to have faith and build it up will be futile, as long as our hearts are dominated by pride. It is only when we are “humble” that we can *believe*...and grow our faith. Murray said that pride and faith are mutually exclusive, as we see in the following:

In our text [John 5:44] Jesus discovers to us that it is indeed pride that makes faith impossible. ‘How can ye believe, which receive glory from one another?’ As we see how in their very nature pride and faith are irreconcilably at variance, we shall learn that faith and humility are at root one, and that we never can have more of true faith than we have of true humility; we shall see that we may indeed have strong intellectual conviction and assurance of the truth while pride is kept in the heart, but that it makes the living faith, which has power with God, an impossibility.

We can acknowledge the truths we hear and go through the motions of Christian living, and still not enjoy that “life” which comes through deep and rich communion with God, made possible by God's grace and accessed by faith. If pride is resident within us, we will be seeking to “receive glory from one another”, and thus will not be exercising faith toward God.

Increased faith will decrease pride and increase humility, while increased humility will lead to greater faith...one of many binary-star-type arrangements in the Bible where two spiritual essentials share energy and momentum, thus propelling each other.

Andrew Murray on Strengthening our Faith. I am looking at my own writing right now as an outside observer, and I can see that there are many good qualities lacking in my “scholarship”. One of the academic deficiencies of my recent writing is that I lean too heavily on Andrew Murray. This is not sound research, but gives the exact support I need for my uncommon view of God's dealings with believers.

After discovering about five years ago that GOD does the work, NOT US, I felt a little lonely in my position on this issue. First of all, I found the late J. Hampton Keathley, III, whom I loved, and still honor, but then I found Murray, who dates back to the 1800's. He is now my primary mentor. Some of our views differ, but not many...for example, he is a Calvinist and I am not. But differences have been substantially over-ridden by commonalities, and he stands alone as the teacher I draw the most from. Furthermore, the thing I really appreciate about Murray is the way he says what I have already thought and said and written, although never with his flair and flourish and beauty.

I will continue to pull from the exceptional work of Andrew Murray, as long as it contributes to my description of God's grace and assets, and my prayer is that God—and you—will overlook my failings as an academician. Having said that, I will grant that the views in this section are all either reflections, or direct quotes, from Andrew Murray's book, *How to Strengthen your Faith*, especially pages 12-28 in that book. (Endnote 26) I will indicate exact page numbers whenever I actually quote his work.

Murray believed, as I do, that the Holy Spirit is our teacher and the provider for spiritual growth. And he concluded, as I have, that the work of the Holy Spirit is in the soul or the human spirit, and is thus not witnessed directly. Murray stated, "...when they wait for the influence of the Spirit to carry them on to faith, they must not expect this influence to be unveiled to them in a conscious and tangible manner." (Endnote 27) The influence of the Spirit will be seen as gifted production in service to others, but the actual transmission of divine energy from the Spirit to the believer is not "felt".

The medium, or conveyor, of the Spirit's influence is faith. Faith is not only the means for the control of the Spirit; it is the evidence for it. When we are trusting, we can be sure that the Spirit is in charge. He gives us the faith (and we will see how)...and the faith He gives sustains His own operation within us. The key is our cleanliness, which enables His access to our hearts, for as long as we do not sin. Okay, this will not consist of a lengthy period, as we sin with such great frequency; this reminds us that constant confession is essential. This is why we often reduce confession to an attitude of humility...keep it coming.

Faith activates the control of the Spirit; the control of the Spirit provides opportunity for building faith. Fellowship PREPARES us for growth, but growth from fellowship is not automatic, as it must be accompanied by our use of the techniques. We must study, pray, and use all other methods for living that God has provided, WHILE WE ARE IN FELLOWSHIP, in order to grow. No technique will be effective, if we have not been cleansed before using it.

Murray cites several key aspects related to strengthening faith, as follows:

- Yield your body
- Open your heart
- Pray
- Want Him
- Search for Him

Embedded in these are the processes of humility, acknowledgement of God, fellowship, and study of His Word. To these we can add the endurance of the training that God will bring to us to strengthen our faith. When we do these things, our faith will increase, so that God can do His work. This is what we see in Phil. 2:13, which says, "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." It has been well-established that God does the work; He produces His own good and executes His plan. He does not depend on us...we must depend on Him.

Faith is the way that we turn the work over to Him, so He can engage us to be His tools to accomplish the work. This is the main reason that faith must grow, and we have seen repeatedly that knowledge is the key to our advancement. Of this, Murray said, "Truth awakens confidence." (p. 14)

We build our faith by hearing the Word, and we absorb what we hear by believing it. When the Spirit teaches us, our faith strengthens. Luke 8:11 describes Satan attempting to prevent this, saying this:

This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 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.

If the seed of the Word comes to rest on willing hearts, it will prosper and yield growth. Hearers who want the truth will receive it, and those who receive it will be delivered by applying what they learn. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” (p. 15) Faith grows with increased understanding, which opens all spiritual doors.

Murray also cited the importance of confession in his discussion of strengthening our faith. He said the following about the need for believers to confess:

Repentance is not an actual victory over sin. Rather, the sinner [sinning believer] has to bring every sin to the feet of the Lord Jesus, the great Victor over sin, so that He may take it away. This cannot take place unless the sinner has acknowledged, by faith, that Jesus is faithful to forgive sin and “to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Murray expressed elsewhere that confession is a contingency resting on the operation of our free will. We make a decision from our own volition to believe and accept His promise to forgive...so we confess. The result of confession is that we recover our faith (to its very limits) in the One who forgives. We express a decision to believe by confessing, and faith becomes virulent through our being clean. Of course, there are crazy-powerful forces waiting to persuade us to choose sin again, which we are prone to do quite readily.

When we come to God to present our sins, this must be an honest presentation of ourselves to God *just as we are*...who and what we really are...not who we wish we were or who we try to portray ourselves to be! This honest coming-out from behind our façade is what God wants...and what He can work with. The believer who does this is the one who will be filled with His Spirit, who can thereby grasp His teachings and move closer to Him.

So we see Murray reiterating what we have said many times concerning the Christian life. He cites the two main pillars of Christianity: 1) fellowship through cleansing, resulting in the filling of the Spirit, and 2) stronger faith through knowledge of God’s Word. We get in fellowship to study at His feet, as those who are prepared to grow. The Spirit then becomes the agent for our understanding, which causes growth.

Growing Faith for the Right Reasons. Sin is attractive and is often “fun” or relieving in some fleshly way, but there is agony associated with it. When we sin, we not only have the accusatory voice of our own conscience...and the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit convincing us of our sin...we also have God’s corrective action, known as discipline. When we confess, so that the things happening in our lives are no longer categorized as discipline, our training begins. This is not just a process of sitting comfortably in a cushioned chair in Bible class; this is the rigorous and sometimes painful regimen of suffering for growth.

On the other hand, there are blessings that come when we at-last mature, when life does become more like a piece of heaven on earth. This is for those who reach super-maturity. But Christianity will not guarantee “happiness” in the worldly sense, even though it is often marketed with that promise. We do not believe God’s Word because it is profitable, but because it is TRUE. Wanting God and wanting truth is not tantamount to wanting prosperity. If we see Christianity as a “get-rich-quick” scheme, our aspirations are misplaced and our real purpose will be disappointed.

If our idea of hanging around God and godly people is part of a plan to increase status, power, and wealth IN THE WORLD, we may achieve a certain amount of these, but these will not be coming from God and will become meaningless at some point. These will never fulfill our real purpose or God’s plan. In fact, God hates the message of “prosperity” which uses legalistic practices, such as “tithing”, as a way to open the financial floodgates of heaven and make one rich and powerful.

The purpose of faith is to fulfill spiritual objectives, and we will be cared for along the way while faith is growing. But make no mistake, an attempt to use God or faith as a means for advancement in the world shows a glaring misconception and misuse of grace. Ironically, plans to use godly things to advance oneself materially may indeed work, because Satan will see to it that misplaced faith is rewarded. But these will have no benefit in God’s kingdom, and will prevent our achieving God’s will.

The Fullness of Faith. We want to be sure that our faith is directed toward the right object, and that it reaches its full potential. Christ pointed faith toward His deity, and acknowledged that His humanity could do nothing. In John 14:10, Jesus said, “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” The point we want to make is that many churches today worship the humanity of Christ and not His deity, calling on us to imitate Him and control our actions based on an image of what He would do (WWJD). Our true call is to worship the deity of Jesus that gave divine value and provided purpose for his humanity. It is God that we worship through Him.

Full faith comes from full understanding of God, especially His love, which is seen in His Son as being wide and long and high and deep, and as being so great we cannot fathom it. (See Eph. 3:16-19.) Knowing this love will have this effect: It will enable us to be “filled to the full measure of all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19). When God becomes our passion, we will find avenues for growth that will lead us to a full faith, where God will do the unimaginable (Eph. 3:20). And this is open to EVERY believer. Murray sizes up our opportunity this way:

“It is true,” we may say, “but is it for me?” Yes. The blood of Jesus covers you, as it does all who have believed. And now you can walk and live in that assurance. You, as much as anyone, have the opportunity to participate in clear conscience, full faith, cleansing—i.e., mercy and grace. (Endnote 28)

Murray provides an excellent discussion of the fullness of faith, which we summarize in the following:

1. The ultimate limit of faith is based on what is *possible* with God. This is pretty open. If it is possible with God, faith can accept that it (whatever it is) can be done.

2. Fullness of faith comes from an enlightened heart, which has fully accepted and received God's truths for living.
3. God's work is supernatural, so *faith* is not the same as *thought*. Faith surpasses knowledge, and is more than we THINK. We draw near, not with a clear head, but a true heart. We don't want a clear head to approach the throne of grace; we want a clean and willing heart. Faith is more than intellectual understanding.
4. Faith is not *feeling*. Faith is a *true heart*...the whole heart. It is likely that you will *feel* that so little is changing. This is why churches that emphasize feelings try to conduct activities that concentrate on ramping up feelings in order to verify that God is there and that all participants are in touch with Him. But we are not connected with God through our feelings, but through our SPIRIT, and the spirit operates far above the level of our emotions. Emotions may occur as a result of activities in the spirit, but emotions are not a means for influencing our spirit or enhancing the relationship we have with God. Apart from FAITH, we have no connection with God, and feelings will never substitute for faith.

Faith and Surrender. Our goal in the development of our faith is to reach "super-maturity", which is characterized by "super-faith". We discussed the concept of super-maturity in several books, beginning with *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, followed by *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You* and *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*, ending with *Spiritual Overflow: Knowing and Using Your Gifts*. Super-maturity leads to the fullness of God, control of sin, fulfillment of God's promises, and the meaningful use of our gifts. When we reach super-maturity, after extensive study and training, we will reach the point of complete dependency on our heavenly Father for everything we need in all areas of our lives.

Once the dominoes of super-maturity start to fall, from surrender/fullness of God to the control of sin to advanced blessings to great productivity, each one that follows falls quickly. We quoted the following statement from *Step by Step toward Surrender* in our last book, *Spiritual Overflow: Knowing and Using Your Gifts*, and we cannot resist inserting it again here. Here is what we said, which we believe provides a good summary of surrender:

This is the giving of our all. This is our intended destination, the Shangri-la of our Christian faith, our highest service, and our finest hour. It may seem a little artificial or contrived to call this highest point of maturity "surrender"; it might be called "rest", or the "fullness of God", or "ultimate-maturity". Whatever label we give to it, this maximum point of spiritual growth is the moment when God becomes the center of everything, not a peripheral interest. This is a time when a mature believer realizes that anything "God-like" must come from "God". We will call it "surrender", because that term fits, and because it is used in Scripture. Reaching this point means the development of "full faith" leading to "complete release". It is a time when we see God fully, trust Him unreservedly, and discontinue self-effort completely. It is a time when we relinquish all of God's work to God, and lay ourselves...all we are and all we have...before Him, submitting our bodies to be the gloves

He will wear to accomplish His divine purposes. (taken from *Step by Step toward Surrender*, pp. 150-151)

For the complete story on surrender, take time to read *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*. And keep in mind as you move along your path of growth that super-maturity is open to every believer.

Stand on Your Faith, or Fall! Our faith will keep moving as believers. It will move up on the faith scale, or it will slide down. The gravity of sin and/or self-righteousness will tend to pull it down. Faith moves against all natural forces, so it will grow and be strengthened, or it will fall.

Ignoring or neglecting the Word or confession or prayer leads to a reduction in our faith. Our aim is to keep faith moving in a positive direction, but this is not easy, as we are finding out in this book. If you are concerned about the level of your faith, this is a good thing, because this means you are more than likely feeding it and promoting its growth. Those who are unconcerned about their faith and spirituality are those who are tending to droop in their faith posture...these are the ones who need to wake up and restart the growth process.

Is. 7:9b says, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." In other words, it is only WITH FAITH that we will stand, especially when we approach God. He is watching us for signs of faith, and if we have little or no faith, we will not stand! We choose whether to pursue stronger faith through the use of grace assets, or to forget God and seek whatever favors we can find in the world apart from God. The only way we can remain strong and hold our place is to increase our faith...to stand firm in it. If we want more in our relationship with God, we will seek ways to strengthen our belief in Him.

Scripture admonishes and extols faith and its maturation. 2 Tim. 1:5 highlights genuine faith, saying, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." In 1 Tim. 1:3b-4, Paul instructs Timothy to "command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith." What God does with and through us is based on faith.

Heb. 10:22a continues in this vein, saying, "...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..." Then notice the prerequisite for such faith in the second half of Heb. 10:22: "...having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." Being clean is a gateway to the development of our faith, but be reminded: We don't clean ourselves up to come to Him; we come to Him to be cleaned up.

Cleanliness must be followed by ingestion of the Word, as truth is the nutrient for our growth. This is what we see in Heb. 5:11-14a, which says this:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 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. But solid food is for the mature.

At whatever level our faith is currently operating, there is a formula or recipe of doctrine that is appropriate for us.

Intake and assimilation of truth is the key to our growth. Without a constant supply (new knowledge) or re-supply (review and repetition), we will lose ground. And, of course, confession—which cleanses all unrighteousness—is prerequisite to assimilation. So we see again the two pillars: spirituality through cleanliness and maturity through growth. These are the hallmarks of a sincere desire to invoke and adopt the character of God. As a snippet from Is. 48:1 says concerning those who are not sincere in their quest for God, they take oaths and call on Him, but “not in truth or righteousness” (the two pillars!). We must stay clean, and then we must learn. That is the Christian life in a nutshell...all else will follow!

Hos. 4:1-3 depicts the outcome of weakening faith, as follows:

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.

When faith slips, sin increases, and consequences arise. Verse 6 in this passage tells us why this happens, saying, “...my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” If we do not maintain a growth trajectory that leads upward, we will fall, and this will affect us in every way. 1 Tim. 1:18b-19 describes this as follows: “...fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.” When our faith is shipwrecked, our spiritual lives will surely sink.

Believing the Promises. Believing is the active part of faith, and God’s statements to us are the articulation of what we are to believe. Believing is the “how”; the promises of God give the “what”. Our faith in what God provides is built through believing that He will deliver what He has promised. We recall Abraham: “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.” (Rom. 4:20-21)

When we examine the status of our own faith in specific situations, we must follow this with a search for specific truths (promises) that address the situation. We must know what God has said, and acknowledge that he will deliver what He has promised. The Holy Spirit brings power to the promises, and our belief activates that power. God’s promised provision will not impose itself on us; we must accept it by faith. If we have no confidence in the promises, they will have no effect...they are just words on a page. But if we accept God’s power and understand His love, all that He has promised can be ours. All that is left is the fulfillment of one more proviso...loving God.

Ultimate fulfillment of the promises will not occur until we have joined the ranks of those who truly “love God”, or those who have reached super-faith (super-maturity). If faith and love are absent, the promises will lie dormant, and will not help us. But when we grow in our faith, we will come to see His love and accept what He wants to give. Building faith is learning how to let God

give His love to us. And building faith unlocks our love for God. As we grow, we will eventually reach the level of love for God that He will be enabled to release all His promised blessings.

The contract God has with us pertaining to our lives, then, comes with an “if” clause. From various parts of Scripture, we have seen examples of conditions that God specifies for full provision: “if we confess”, “if they will heed my word”, “if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray”, and “if you believe”. These conditions harbor techniques that include confession, learning the Word, prayer, and trusting God. When these are fully engaged, the conditions will be met and the promises will be fulfilled. We will see the following from each one of these, respectively: forgiveness, wisdom, answered prayer, and blessings of all sorts.

And, of course, we must *know* the promises to see what God intends for us. To review a list of representative promises, see “Believing the Promises of God”, beginning on page 44 of *Bible Basics on Walking by Faith: Pathway to the Promised Land*. Then watch for your own personal favorites as you read and study the Word.

Grace Provides. 2 Pet. 1:3-8 shows the thoroughness of God’s provision, and then shows how faith in Him leads to growth and productivity. This is what this passage says:

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 [His power and love] 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. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control; and to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has supplied everything we need for “life and godliness”, and these are accessed through “promises”, or through the guaranteed function of His grace and love, manifested in His provisions and assets. Think about it. Matt. 6 tells us that God cares for the birds and the flowers and even the grass. Verse 30 says, “If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” Speaking of the birds, He has already said, in verse 26b, “Are you not much more valuable than they?” He gives us all we need...IF WE SEEK HIM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST! (v. 33)

God fulfills His promises based on our attitude toward Him...our interest and belief in Him. Our faith enables His grace. Rom. 4:16 discloses the pattern: “by faith”...“by grace”. Faith allows grace to get the credit, which is where it belongs. This verse says the following:

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law [Jews] but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham [Christians]. He is the father of us all.

Our part is faith; God's part is grace. Thank God our spirituality and destiny depend on grace. Would we want it any other way? Would we want God's salvation and provision for life to depend on how well we do...on our *earning* God's favor? Absolutely not!

To get all that God offers, we must get to grace. To get to grace, we have seen that we must first get to mercy and receive forgiveness and cleansing. Then we draw grace by our faith. Recall Heb. 4:16, which tells us, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." This confidence is preceded by a firm faith (v. 14), which arises from our being cleansed when we "give account" of all those things that have been "laid bare" before Him (v. 13). Grace is our bedrock; faith is putting our weight down on it, so we can rest in the certainty of that grace.

Prayer and Faith. This topic is so pervasive, it is hard to limit it to a section with just a few paragraphs. This note will not present the doctrine of prayer, but will highlight it briefly to remind us of its importance in our relationship with God, and our constant need to be in communion with Him through prayer. Prayer has many conditions and outcomes. For a complete discussion on prayer, please read a previous study, *Being Devoted to Prayer: The Pathway to the Throne*.

Prayer is linked to faith, and faith supports prayer. When faith is strong, we will pray more...and when a prayer is offered in faith, it will be effective. James 5:15a reminds us, "And the prayer offered in faith will [for example] make the sick person well..." This is followed in 16b by a promise that summarizes the outcome of prayers from believers whose faith is growing: "The prayer of a righteousness man is powerful and effective." This is the Word of God telling us that our spiritual condition and our maturity, when strong, will make our prayers POWERFUL and EFFECTIVE.

The prayer of faith is rooted in a life of faith. When our hearts and lives meet God's requirements, we will see great effects from our prayers. But note: Proper LIFE AND HEART CONDITIONS precede sufficient FAITH. We must be led by the Spirit...and we must be growing. Then our prayers will be meaningful and fruitful. When faith is full, answers to our prayers are assured.

What we Expect from Faith. This subject is more difficult than it seems. We have questions about the "believe and receive" notion, which has received so much abuse from groups that see God as a genie, and promote Christianity as a means to prosperity. Part of the confusion about this comes from their definition of prosperity; their view is linked to the world and what it offers, rather than to God and what He wants to give.

We must remember that our basic lives, as citizens of heaven, take place at an invisible, spiritual level. Our greatest provisions and prosperity are defined in terms of spiritual growth and fellowship with God, rather than monetary or material gains or sensual pleasures. So when we talk about faith as a way to invoke the blessings of God, we must understand what this means. Faith is the way to open God's *best* for us, but this does not mean that Satan's cosmic system will provide the best definition for what that is.

Faith is not self-hypnosis. It is not bearing down in our minds *trying* to believe. Faith will not come through our efforts at trusting. Faith is the product of specific spiritual processes, yielding precise results designed by God to enrich us in HIS way...or through the ways and means He has provided to enable us to fulfill His will and plan for our lives. Many preachers, trying to get us to "believe",

attempt to convince us that we are simply not trying hard enough. So off we go in the flesh to do what only the Spirit can do.

There is faith that is “for” and faith that is “against”. Faith that is “for” anticipates the acquisition of what we want; this is faith that wants something we do not have. Faith that is “against” expresses hope that conditions in our lives that are uncomfortable or undesirable will be removed. Either kind of faith can be misconceived. When we trust God, whether it is in regard to getting something we value, or the removal of problems or adversity, it is the *personal condition we bring to the event* of “faith-expression” that determines its efficacy.

Conditions that affect the outcome of what we hope for involve spiritual readiness. With greater spirituality (fellowship and the filling of the Spirit) and maturity (full faith as the result of growth), we have a better perspective of *what God wants* and *what we should want*. In other words, with continued spiritual emphasis, the inculcation of God’s view point shapes our internal desires and values and shifts them from *what we want from God* toward *what God wants us to have*. What we hope for...changes! God’s values are the right ones, and it is our sense of what is good that needs to change...and it will, if we persist in a consistent pattern of growth. In the end, we will choose to take what God offers, or choose what we can scrape up. Guess which is best.

Faith Affects Outcomes. Does faith affect outcomes? Mark 11:24 says, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” This is from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself. If we believe, we will receive. This needs to be explored fully. Murray takes the position that we indeed receive when we believe. We will examine what he says.

First, we must consider the word “believe” as it applies to the process of receiving. What is implied in a genuine expression of faith? First of all, we know that faith is operational due to our being cleansed, in fellowship, and filled with the Spirit. Secondly, the expression of faith is couched in its level...how much it has grown (and faith the size of a mustard seed is BIG faith). With fellowship and maturity, we have the faith we need to get what we ask for. And what does it mean to “get what we ask for”? Murray says that the “one thing He asks of us as we pray: BELIEVE that *ye have received*; He will see to it that He does the thing He has promised.” (Endnote 29)

We must be clear, though: What God promises may not be a Mercedes Benz! What we are “believing” may not be aligned with what God wants to give, so our *belief* must be adjusted to match God’s will. That comes only with growth. Murray helps us dig down into the heart of how God’s will for us may differ from our own aspirations and desires, saying this:

He wants His oft repeated “ALL THINGS” to enter into our hearts, and reveal to us how mighty the power of faith is, how truly the Head calls the members to share with Him in His power, how wholly our Father places His power at the disposal of the child that wholly trusts Him. (Endnote 30)

It is His POWER that God wants to give, and everything else will follow as He chooses, with a guaranteed minimum that our needs will be met...according to His will. On the other hand, the biggest reason we don’t get what we ask for is that we do not believe! This applies to every aspect of our lives, including our resistance to sin. We must not reduce “all things” to that which we esteem “possible”, because this limits God to begin with. By reducing “all things” down to “some things” and

then down further to a “few things” and finally down to “nothing”, we show the diminished faith that we bring to the prayer table.

Enlarging faith yields an increasing percentage of what we want and ask for, because what we ask for increasingly matches what God wants to give. When we mature, our prayers will coincide with God’s will. We must pray, and we must wait; and as we advance, we will see greater correspondence between what we ask for and what we get. In the end, we will see what it is that God really wants to give, and that is this: It is His own SPIRITUAL STRENGTH, emanating from His mercy and grace and love. Murray described this nicely:

He gives the spirit of faith; let us not be afraid that such faith is not meant for us. It is meant for every child of the Father; it is within reach of each one who will but be childlike, yielding himself to the Father’s will and love, trusting the Father’s word and power. (Endnote 31)

To this I add: When we have confessed and prayed and studied, and “capacity for grace” has come, we will know that *taking* the provision which God has promised actually becomes a RIGHT! Is this because I reach a point where I finally “deserve it”? Of course not...our righteousness is as filthy rags! We have the right to receive what God promises when we open ourselves to His love, which is attainable through super-maturity, surrender, victory over sin, and entrance into His rest, as we have studied in our last five books.

Achieving this level of holiness is rare, assuredly less than one percent of the Christian population, due to the extreme opposition that accompanies advanced maturity (from Satan, His cosmic system, the law of sin, and our very own sinful nature). All the forces of hell, however, cannot withstand the power of God exhibited in someone who truly advances to a high level of faith. Faith leads to power, and power leads to victory. That is where we want to be.

In the next chapter, we will examine this power...the power of the Holy Spirit...and see how it enables us to fulfill all God’s commands, and His will.

Chapter 8

Living in the Power of the Spirit

Man Compared to God. The thing that I have discovered over time is that most people, including believers, do not distinguish God from man. Most of the views of God that are expressed are based on some humanized hybrid, something along the line of an extra-super man. The tendency is to view God as emotion-based and our relationship with Him as dependent on our performing in a way that merits His approval and credit.

God is God. And here is where we stumble. I am not going to try to use superlatives and wax verbose in trying to describe how big and great He is, but I will say that He is about 99.9% underestimated and underrated by mankind. He is bigger than we can possibly imagine. When we think about God, we tend to see Him as “local” and “incidental”, rather than what He is: the Maker and Master of All the Universe and the true Ruler of All Existence.

A correct image of God will form the basic premise for all we ever achieve as Christians. It will be impossible for us to do what the true and living God wants, as long as we envision a “god” that is small and limited. His realities come out of infinity; our perception of them comes out of limitation. The difference between the real God and us is vast, and for the most part, we avoid the strain of having to get a true picture of Him. The following comparison is a partial list of qualities belonging to God, as contrasted with those which characterize man. Here is how we stack up against God:

Man	God
Dependent	Self-sufficient
Imperfect	Perfect
Powerless	Omnipotent
Sinful	Holy
Small	Infinite
Helpless	Helpful
Partial knowledge	Omniscient
Self-preoccupation	Perfect love

How can tiny and helpless man hope to impress an infinite God? We can’t, but we often think we can. We have such exaggerated views of ourselves. The hardest lesson we will ever learn is how wrong our view of God is. By contrast, when we know how big He is, we will see how much we depend on Him. It seems so hard for us to shake our own humanity and self-importance.

We are Weak. Part of believing how great God is depends on our seeing how sorry we are by contrast. Any real (divinely-initiated) good that we do will depend on our relinquishing our own

arrogance and self-reliance, and embracing the view that anything that is divine comes from divinity...from God. Paul recognized and admitted the deficiency in himself and acknowledged how God could use his weakness. He confessed his insufficiency over and over, and actually rejoiced in it, as we see in the following passage:

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. (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

Our strength does not rely on our searching deep within ourselves for some reservoir of potency, but on the strength of another, which we access when we realize we don’t have what it takes, but GOD DOES! By acknowledging this, we find the joy of discovering His strength. This realization, perhaps more than any other single spiritual exercise, empowers us and moves us forward. We “boast” about our weakness, so that “Christ’s power may rest” on us.

2 Cor. 4:6-7 tells us that the light of Christ shines from His face into our hearts when we receive “knowledge” of God’s glory (v. 6). This light is a treasure, about which Paul said this: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” The light and the power do not originate with us, but come from God, and knowing where our strength comes from begins the process for accessing it. When we know we are weak, we see that we must share in a power that is not our own. We are clay into which God must breathe His life.

Divine Compensation for our Weakness. Mercy and grace and love are the basis for a plan that provides conditions and ways for us to get past our weaknesses. As we grow into an understanding of this plan, we allow God’s methods and assets to move us toward a closer relationship with Him. As we get closer to Him, we access more of His strength, which overcomes our weakness. This sounds easy, but this is very difficult, and such advanced spirituality is RARELY SEEN. Why? Because we are WEAK!

Spiritual progress is not achieved through removing “negative” aspects of our lives, such as sin or legalism, but through participation in the “positive” provision of mercy (forgiveness), leading to grace, which provides righteous behavior and effective service. Participation in grace through faith allows the positive to overpower the negative.

Sequence is important in the process. We do not get close to God...or stay close to him...by cleaning up our act. We allow God to clear out our sin, as only He can, so we can get close to God; this will allow us to change our pattern. If we could do this on our own, then Christ’s sacrifice would not have been necessary. Christ died on the cross and paid for our sins, because we are incapable of dealing with sin without His direct involvement. This is true not only for salvation, but for living. If we could live righteously...as believers...the Holy Spirit would not be needed. Since we cannot produce divine good, it has to come from the One who IS “divinely good”.

God has provided specific techniques for overcoming our weakness and accessing His strength. Application of these methods precede implementation of divine assets. To get God’s power, we must meet the conditions inherent in the techniques. The most basic list of these includes confession of our sins, prayer, study, and enduring God’s training, as we have seen in the preceding sixteen books

that describe them. Some of us (very few) will apply these faithfully over time, and will eventually reach super-maturity, surrender, victory over sin, fulfillment of promises, and complete and effective service. To get there, we must find grace TODAY...for TODAY.

Forget not His Benefits. For the most part, we deny ourselves the benefits of grace, and God's provision for our failings. Ps. 103:1-5 tells us what happens when we remember grace; this passage says this:

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O 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.

God does the following, according to this passage:

1. Forgives
2. Heals
3. Protects and rescues
4. Provides love, both toward the believer and from the believer
5. Satisfies desires
6. Renews strength

Without the benefits of grace, we will not achieve any kind of righteousness. In Matt. 5:20, Jesus said, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." The Pharisees and the teachers of the law kept the law better than anyone else. And we have to exceed their superlative achievements to enter the kingdom? Impossible! This is why our righteousness must not depend on our own compliance, but on the grace of the One who sets all standards in the first place. Absent grace, we are sunk!

In Jer. 32:39, God showed what He promised the Israelites, illustrating what is available to us, saying, "I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear (trust) me for their own good and the good of their children after them." By GIVING us a singleness of HEART and ACTION, God makes provision for what we lack (we will refine our view of what we get and how we use it in Chapters 10-12). Why does God make provision for us? SO WE WILL TRUST HIM!! To get the unlimited resources of grace, we must have what God gives the willing: a dedicated, precise focus on the goodness and grace of God.

Who gives an "undivided" heart? God alone. Ez. 11:19 confirms this, saying, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh." This is specified for the Jews, but can apply to us. God is our source for the kind of concentrated faith and focus that He demands. And He has shown us how we get this...once again, Chapters 10, 11, 12.

Our Part; God's Part. This is one of the greatest areas of confusion and satanic deception around. 99.9% of all churches get our part and God's part mixed up. They emphasize what WE can do,

rather than examining what Scripture says about what God does, is doing, and will do. We must learn ways to allow GOD to do.

Does this mean we will be passive? No! Learning God's ways and using grace techniques involves effort that is exhausting. This does not represent "work", but is accessing grace to do the work. Still, there is much to do to make this happen. It is a matter of knowing what to do...and doing it...not as a matter of keeping the law or following rules and mores, but using God's system of grace for adding to our faith. Like Paul, we will be working "harder than them all". This is exactly what he said in 1 Cor. 15:10: "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." When God is working, we are His instruments, which can leave us in a heap...exhausted.

When God is doing His part, He offers strength to us for the accomplishment of His proscriptions and missions. If we attempt to bypass the assimilation of His power, any service or good that we do will be a product of the flesh, and will count for nothing. And when the flesh is in control, sin will have a heyday. God designed and implemented "good" as an outcome of His grace program. Eph. 2:10 tells us He planned our good a long time ago, saying, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." The term "in advance" means "well in advance", implying an occurrence that took place in eternity past. God planned our good long ago.

The abiding questions: 1) What should I do? And 2) What should I look for God to do? Get this: the correct answer to what I should do is NOT, "I should do all I can." The right answer is, "I should find ways to allow God to do what *only* He can." God is God; I am not. In comes the role of faith, which is an acknowledgement of what God has done and will do. Faith is the key to turning over God's work to Him. Faith generates production and service, done in God's energy and by His direction.

Ps. 127:1 describes the process this way: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain." Production and protection rest on God, not on us. He achieves more than we can imagine, as we see in Eph. 3:20-21, which says this:

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.

How can this principle be butchered so badly by Christian institutions throughout the world? The only answer can be the deception of Satan. He wants us to believe that the Christian way of life is executed through our own severe discipline and dogged determination. What a rich resource we refuse, when we choose to depend on our own strength. Andrew Murray described for us the right way to think about this in his discussion of God's power, about which he said, "How glorious [for the believer] to feel nothing in himself and to always live on the power of his Lord. He learns to understand what a joyful thing it is to know God as his strength." (Endnote 33)

We are strong **ONLY IN GOD**! Unless He is the underlying source of our actions, we will be inept and non-productive. God's training is centered on helping us to see that the greatest strength we will ever have will come only through a realization that we have no strength for good apart from

Him. Eph. 6:10 says, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” I will keep repeating this principle until I am sure it has received the emphasis it deserves, which probably means forever.

More on Living in God’s Strength. Believers *have* the nature of God within them, because each one is a “temple” of the Holy Spirit; but not often do they *live* in the nature of God. Even though many do not do it, only those who live in the nature of God participate in the divinity which is housed within them. This is described in one of the most truth-laden verses in the Bible, seen more than once earlier, 2 Pet. 1:3-4, which gives us 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.

This verse always beckons exegesis (content analysis), but my purpose here is to feature God’s nature within us. Verse 4 tells us that we can “participate” in God’s nature through His Word, which means that the techniques, methods, promises, and assets delineated in Scripture show us how to access the very power of God. That is our objective: tap into the Nature; get to the power. Never is the phrase “knowledge is power” more literally understood. By *knowing*, and *applying what we know*, we can live in the nature and power of God. (I really look forward to Chapters 10-12. Just wait...and no cheating by skipping ahead!)

We are told to put on the “new man”, which is the self we become when we participate in the nature of God. Eph. 4:20-24 tells us we are to be “taught” to put on this “new self”; this can be interpreted as a command, as follows:

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

The word “taught” is used twice here, to show that this “newness” is *learned* over time through a learning process designed to implant divine truths for living. Newness is not a condition that is inherent in each of us, just because we have been saved. It has to be “learned”. And what are we taught? We are instructed to put off the old self, the sinful nature, and to take on the new self, which is the nature of God that is already within us. Col. 3:10 confirms this, saying that the “new self” is being “renewed in knowledge”.

When we became saved...born again...we were “created” at that moment with the potential to be like God in “true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24)...not just when we get our “glorified” bodies in the future, but while we are still in these “old” bodies on earth. But we have to acquire the “newness” by being taught. Many teachers of the Bible espouse the notion that the “new man” is acquired at our new birth. The truth is this: What we actually receive at salvation is the *condition* for newness. The “condition” is the OCCUPATION OF OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, who has become available to us as the power and resource for true righteousness (divine good) and holiness (purity).

We are to “put off” the old man (sinful nature) and “put on” the new one (our spirit empowered by the Holy Spirit). We are instructed to “put on” the new man, and then to “walk” IN THE SPIRIT. When we walk in the spirit, the “new man” comes to life. We conclude that the new man is our spirit, not only occupied by the Holy Spirit, but controlled and influenced by Him. He is on the inside, in our hearts, where He initiates righteousness when we give Him access through cleanliness and faith.

Matt. 12:35 says, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.” Who is the good man? The man controlled by the Holy Spirit...who is “stored up” inside of him. And who is the evil man? Obviously, this is a heart controlled by the sinful nature. Our object is to be controlled by the good.

One of the greatest sins we can ever commit is attempting to live independent of God...trying to live without the power of the Holy Spirit. God will strengthen us by His Spirit, as per Eph. 3:16, which says, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...” The Holy Spirit is the power through which we defeat sin and live righteously.

When will we ever get this? Strength and power belong to God! We must stop looking to ourselves as our source for good and cleanliness, and look to God, who is our only resource for spiritual strength. We must acknowledge that all power rests with Him, as per Ps. 29, verses 1 and 11 taken together, which say the following: “Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength....The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.” We give credit to God for power because HE HAS IT!

We must recognize our weakness so He can share this strength with us. This weakness is not marginal or partial, but is ABSOLUTE! Much of God’s dealing with us is to teach us that He is the one with strength, and that He wants to share His power so we can represent Him well. He teaches us that any creditable good we ever do will come from Him. But we do not find this strength in our *a priori* bag of tricks. These will not come from our “best”...because we are weak. We are reminded of a statement that Paul made in a passage we quoted earlier (2 Cor. 12:9); this statement says, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

To punctuate this point that our puny words are trying so desperately to capture, we quote, somewhat at length, from the rich treasures of Andrew Murray. Here is an excellent summary of the dilemma we face, as described by him:

There is almost no word that is so imperfectly understood in the Christian life as the word weakness. Sin and shortcoming, sluggishness and disobedience, are given as the reasons for our weakness. With this interpretation of weakness, the true feeling of guilt and the sincere endeavour after progress are impossible. How can I be guilty, when I do not do what it is not in my power to do? He requires nothing more of us than what He has prepared for us to do in His Holy Spirit. The new life is a life in the power of Christ through the Spirit.

...people estimate their weakness, not too highly, but too meagrely. They would still do something by the exercise of all their powers, and with the help of God. They do not know that they must be nothing before God. You think that you have still a little strength, and that

the Father must help you by adding something of His own power to your feeble energy. This thought is wrong. Your weakness appears in the fact that you can do nothing. It is better to speak of utter inability, for that is what the Scriptures mean by the word "weakness." "Without me ye can do nothing." "In us is no power." (Endnote 34)

The Christian life is not lived by us plus God. It is lived only by the Lord Jesus Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit. "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." Who, after all, is more qualified to be God-like...than God?

More on Living in the Power of the Spirit. To experience the power of the Holy Spirit, we must be filled with, or *controlled by*, Him. As we have shown before, the "control" of the Spirit does not mean that He will remove our choice from us. We can walk away at any time, and—with all the forces that pull us away from God—we frequently do. Once we step back from God, it is easy to stay there, forgetting to confess and neglecting divine assets that alone enable us to move forward again.

The filling of the Spirit is the operation of divine influence and resources that enable us to honor and serve God, especially in the area of our gifts, as we saw in *Spiritual Overflow: Knowing and Using Your Gifts*. When we are filled with the Spirit, we will be productive through our gifts, the primary medium for our glorification of God. When we serve God in the power of the Spirit, we are glorifying Him.

In Acts 6:3 the disciples were shifting some of the tasks that they were being saddled with...to others with gifts who exhibited the spirituality and maturity to exercise them. This verse says, "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." Those chosen to take care of the "tasks" had to be "filled with the Spirit", because that is where the power for service comes from; and they were full of "wisdom", which tells us that a certain level of maturity was needed before service could even begin.

The Spirit is within us to "help" us, which we know means more than just work alongside of us. Rom. 8:26 frames this, saying, "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." Because we are weak, the Spirit must pick us up and carry us, which He will do if we will relinquish control to Him, because we TRUST HIM.

As we have said, again and again, strength for spiritual production comes from God. He is our only source for power. 1 Pet. 5:5-9 tells us what we are supposed to do: be humble, be self-controlled, resist Satan, and so on. Then verses 10 and 11 tell us how this is done, saying the following:

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. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

God alone restores us from carnality and stands us up to meet our foes...the opponents of God who will drag us under: Satan, our sinful nature, the law of sin, and the world. He alone can make us strong, firm, and steadfast.

Murray once again provides a great complement to this message. Here is what he said about living in the power of the Spirit:

Now, we have here a solemn discovery of what the great need is in the Church of Christ. God has called the Church of Christ to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. But the Church is living, for the most part, in the power of human flesh, and of will and energy and effort apart from the Spirit of God. I do not doubt that this is the case with many individual believers. And oh, if God will use me to give you a message from Him, my one message will be this: "If the Church will return to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is her strength and her help, and if the Church will return to give up everything, and wait on God to be filled with the Spirit, her days of beauty and gladness will return. We will see the glory of God revealed among us." This is my message to every individual believer: "Nothing will help you unless you come to understand that you must live every day under the power of the Holy Spirit." God wants you to be a living vessel in whom the power of the Spirit is to be manifested every hour and every moment of your life. God will enable you to be that. (Endnote 35)

To this, Murray adds:

And just so, God gives Christians the Holy Spirit with this intention-that every day, all their life, should be lived in the power of the Spirit. A man cannot live one hour of a godly life unless by the power of the Holy Spirit. He may live a proper, consistent life, as people call it, an irreproachable life, a life of virtue and diligent service. But to live a life acceptable to God, in the enjoyment of God's salvation and God's love, to live and walk in the power of the new life-he cannot do it unless he is guided by the Holy Spirit every day and every hour. (Endnote 36)

This gets my point across very well. The mystery is that, in the 120 years that have passed since Murray wrote these words, this message has been lost...the one I am now trying to revive...that God is God, and we are not.

The Leading of the Holy Spirit. In approaching the matter of our being filled with, and walking in, the Spirit, we must find the beginning point. We have discussed many times before that this process begins with our being cleansed of all sin. We have seen that confession of our sins to God the Father is His method for our accessing forgiveness and restoration. Cleanliness re-engages the power of the Holy Spirit in our inner lives after a time (even a moment) of carnality. The duration of that cleanliness will depend on our maturity, which means that the length of time that we are controlled the Holy Spirit is limited only by the degree of faith that we have "accumulated" (Chapters 10-12).

After restoration we are said to be "in fellowship". Fellowship starts the engine of the Spirit within us, engaging His power. As long as we stay clean, He remains in control, providing the "horsepower" for righteous living and accommodation of God's plan for our lives. Perhaps "control" is not the best

word to use in describing what the Holy Spirit does when we are in fellowship, because this would imply that our prerogatives have been removed and taken over by God, which we have already concluded as NOT being the case.

We CAN say that the Spirit will control and direct our hearts for as long as we turn control over to Him. We have the power to give Him control, and we have the power to remove it. Whenever we hit the button that says DIY (do it yourself), or when the pleasure or lure of sin overcomes us, we shut off the influence and leading of the Spirit within and toward us. He is still there, but He will not impose His power apart from our being prepared to receive it. When we do receive it, we can sustain it by a constant dependency on Him. This is to say that faith will sustain our “walk by means of His power” for as long as we are in “fellowship” with Him.

The leading of the Spirit is the result of a spiritual condition. This does not begin in our thoughts or feelings, but at a deeper level...in our spirit. (Chapter 9 gives more detail on this). Our association with the Holy Spirit is a matter of believing. This occurs first at salvation when we accept the truth of the gospel message and express faith in Christ, at which time we acquire eternal life and the permanent indwelling of the Spirit. After salvation, we have lives to live, and the Spirit is the means for our doing this. He is AVAILABLE within believers to lead them in individual decisions and dilemmas...to guide them through anything that comes their way.

Faith, as we said, is the key to sustaining the control of the Spirit. There is no clearer corroboration for this truth than Gal. 2:20, which says this:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me [from the time of salvation]. The life I live in the body, I live by faith [time of fellowship] in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Christ, in the person of His Spirit, lives within us from the time we are saved; then we conduct our daily lives through faith in Him, which sustains us. As a result, He not only lives IN us, but overlays our entire lives, so that it is He that is living THROUGH us, making the lives we are living...His. Christian living, then, is the living of Christ through us. These depend on the following qualities, all of which are within our jurisdiction: the assimilation of truth, the accumulation of faith, and the leading of the Spirit.

John 15:5b confirms the truth of our dependence on the Spirit of Jesus Christ, saying, “... apart from me you can do nothing.” To have Him do, then, what we cannot do, we must have Him fully operational within us...or ourselves fully operational within Him.

While speaking to the Romans about the management of sin, Paul showed how important the control of the Spirit is, commanding them, “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Rom. 13:14). He was giving this message to born-again believers, calling for those who were indwelt by the Holy Spirit to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”, meaning for them to be covered and protected by Him. As believers we can be clothed (covered) by Him; otherwise, we will be exposed to the powers of the world, the flesh, and Satan.

We are the body of Christ. It is what the Spirit of Jesus Christ is *on the inside of us* that gives life to our spirits. It is His power that gives us motion and directs us toward meaningful activity and purpose.

Faith and Power. Performance in the Spirit requires faith. The cross was God's solution for satisfying His own justice and righteousness, so we can be saved. Salvation depends on Him; we cannot save ourselves. Now once again, as those saved by faith, we must choose to live by faith. It is only through faith that we can participate in His righteousness for daily living. Whether it is for salvation for eternity, or for living in time, God's sole method for accessing Him is always centered on our believing in Him. The wonderful thing about faith is that it does not represent "work", but is instead its opposite. The only "good" work is that of Jesus Christ. No act of man contributes to satisfying God; in fact, human initiative and designs get in the way of God's work.

The RESTING PLACE of a believer's faith is God's power. The actual point of contact for our faith...where we actually touch God...is at the place of His power within us. The Word reveals this power and carries us to it...to the place where faith can rest in God's strength. We are vessels of clay, weak and fragile pots. Faith invites the filling of the vessels that we are, enabling us to be used by God. Paul said, in 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." God's power is the place where faith wants to live.

Next Chapter. We have established that faith occupies a pivotal role in the operation of our hearts within the purview of God's grace system. We talk about "building" faith, but this is a vague and nearly-ethereal idea that needs more-tangible parameters. What really takes place when faith is strengthened? And where, specifically, is faith stored? To answer these questions, we want to review the parts of the "inner man", so we can see where faith can be accumulated.

The next chapter, Chapter 9, describes the location for the operation of truth, the Holy Spirit, and our volition. In this study we will describe our inner, non-material parts, which are the seat for all spiritual functions. This study is taken from our book, *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*.

Chapter 9

Internal Make-up of Man

Opening Comment

Some of the concepts presented in this chapter have been shifted slightly in Chapters 10-12 to accommodate a new model, the “learning cycle”. For example, the “spirit” is seen in the new model as a pass-through to the heart-proper, and is seen as being more closely identified with the soul. Differences are nominal, however, and make no difference to an understanding of either this discussion on the “internal make-up of man” or the one to follow on the “learning cycle”.

The Mind

As we begin a study of our internal parts, it should be noted that this is not a psychological or scientific discussion. We do not feature the studies and views of mental-health theorists and scientists, and are not generally concerned with parts of our bodies, including the brain, in this study. We are interested in knowing more about the “inner-being” categories we see in *Scripture*. We want to see these in the light of the Word, the best source for knowledge on the non-material make-up of a believer.

Heb. 4:12 indicates that Scripture divides soul and spirit, and is a judge of the motivations of the heart. The Bible, therefore, distinguishes our inner parts. 1 Cor. 14:15 says, “So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.” Spirit is spiritual; mind is mental...they are differentiated inner parts of ourselves. Matt. 22:37 shows additional distinctions, saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and 1 Thess. 5:23b adds, “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We want to focus our discussion on those parts of our inner make-up that have to do with our spiritual condition and progress. We will look at four internal entities...non-material parts of ourselves that are at the center of our Christian experience and service. They are the mind, the soul, the spirit, and the heart. Each of these, as a term, corresponds with a specific word from Ancient Greek, and we will identify these as we go along.

The first of these is the *mind*, which is translated from the Greek word *nous*, meaning “intellect” or “understanding”. The mind is not the brain, though it uses the brain as an entry-point for knowledge and truth. The brain processes and stores information, but cannot grasp spiritual truth. The “natural” man cannot perceive the reality of God, and must operate in the dark regarding spiritual matters.

The mind is the part of our inner selves that comprehends the Word, if the conditions are right, but—of course—believers out of fellowship can comprehend truth little better than unbelievers. They can intellectually “perceive” information about God or Christ or faith, but they cannot “internalize” it, meaning it does not process into their innermost parts...the soul, the spirit, and the heart. They “know” it, but they cannot “understand” it.

We want to stick with what Scripture has to say about the mind, and the other parts. The most important distinction we discovered is that the mind—like the soul, spirit, and heart—can be good or bad. Seeing the mind as either spiritually-centered or carnally-driven will give us a picture of how the mind operates in our spiritual lives. We begin with ways in which the mind can be bad, as follows:

- ☐ An unspiritual mind creates delusions of grandeur and lives in a state of pride. Col. 2:18b says, “Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.”
- ☐ Pride, competition, and greed are the result of a “corrupt” mind. I Tim. 6:5 says, “...and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.”
- ☐ An unbeliever or a believer out of fellowship will be corrupt in both mind and conscience. Titus 1:15 tells us, “To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.”
- ☐ A reprobate (depraved) mind is going to practice all kinds of evil. A reprobate mind comes from not believing God and not knowing God. Such is the state of mind of an unbeliever (possibly some believers). Rom. 1:28-29a says, “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness....”

The mind can also be good, as we see in the following:

- ☐ The law of sin battles against the law of a “mind in fellowship”. A “good mind” will be under attack. Rom. 7:23 says this: “...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.”
- ☐ The mind of a believer in fellowship is opened to the truth in God’s Word. Jesus opened the minds of two disciples in Luke 24:45, which says, “Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”
- ☐ The mind can be controlled by the Holy Spirit (in which case one would be in his “right” mind). When this happens, the righteous requirements of the Law will be fulfilled. The mind connected to divine power is a potent force for good. However, if the sinful nature takes over, the mind will be enslaved by sin. Rom. 7:25b says, “So then I myself in my [right] mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”
- ☐ A mind preoccupied by the world will be controlled by the flesh; therefore, God will not be important. A mind can be transformed, however, when it is renewed by the washing of the Word. Rom. 12:2a says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

- When our minds receive renewal by receiving correct information, we can throw away the old self and put on the new. Bible teaching (believed) has the effect of renewing our minds. Eph. 4:23-24 says you can be “made new in the attitude of your minds...” and “put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”
- The mind is involved in prayer. I Cor. 14:15a tells us, “So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind...” (pray with understanding).

When we are spiritual, we will be in our “right mind”. But when we are out of fellowship, we will be “out of our minds” spiritually.

The Soul

When we look at the list of four inner parts that we are dealing with in this chapter, we acknowledge that this list is not comprehensive. There are assuredly other “parts” besides these, such as the “will” and the “conscience”, but we will limit our discussion here to the four we have identified. The exception is the inclusion of the “brain” in the chart at the end of Section E.

We now want to examine the soul. The word “soul” comes from the Greek word *psyche*, which means “life”. The soul is life itself, a living being, but not just an ordinary creature...the soul is a moral being, designed to exist for all of eternity, and is distinguished from—and lives beyond—the life of the body. And like the mind, the soul can best be understood by its relationship to our spiritual condition.

The soul has an adversary in the form of sinful lusts. In fact, all of our inner parts encounter this opposition, which is brought on by the sinful nature. Our natures war against our souls. 1 Pet. 2:11 says, “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” Sometimes the soul loses the battle, and that is when the soul goes “bad”.

Acts 14:2 tells us the soul can become evil, as follows: “But the unbelieving Jews raised up and made malignant the souls of the nations against the brothers.” This illustrates the influence that the world and the sinful nature can have on the soul to prompt it to do evil. The world can be bad, but most evil does not come from the outside...it comes from the INSIDE. Jesus said, “There is nothing from outside the man which entering into him is able to defile him. But the things going out from him; those are the things defiling the man” (Mark 7:15). This would suggest that our greatest enemy is ourselves.

We must be alerted as to what happens when the soul is overcome with evil: It becomes *tormented*. One of the consequences for sin is the anguish it brings to the soul. This anguish does not exist in the life of unbelievers...so, welcome to the Christian way of life. Rom. 2:9, quoted from the *Inter-linear Bible*, says the following, which reads a little rough, but makes the point:

But to those who even disobeying the truth, out of self-interest, and obeying unrighteousness, will be anger and wrath, trouble and pain on every soul that works out evil, both of Jew first, and of Greek.

This trouble and pain comes to the **soul**. Disorientation, confusion, depression, loneliness, and panic...these are the effects of sin on the souls of believers. This is “hell on earth”, which we as believers experience when we practice and hold onto sin. The outcome for a believer who is not living in God’s will is *misery*...also known as *unnecessary suffering*. This will come from “discipline”...and from an inner sense of emptiness and sadness as a result of separation from fellowship with God. What child does not suffer on his own, even without punishment, when he knows he has displeased his parents?

But there is hope for the souls of believers. Heb. 10:39 says, “But we are not of those drawing back to destruction, but of faith, to the preservation of the soul.” As believers we, first of all, have hope because we do not face the eternal “condemnation” that unbelievers do; and, secondly, we have hope because of God’s grace techniques that can remove sin and overpower the sinful nature. There is “hope”, then, that we can avert the anguish. When souls are restored to fellowship, the pain of knowing that we have sinned will stop, and the anguish that results from any “disciplinary” process will cease. Suffering may continue, but the nature of the trouble will change from “discipline” to “testing”, which is designed to bless us and give us opportunities to grow. Grace operations always strengthen our hope.

When souls are restored and are once again enjoying the fruits of fellowship, they become the medium for the worship of, and service to, Christ...and the way to please God and do His will. Eph. 6:6 describes this, saying, “...not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the soul.” Then the soul can live in contentment, rather than anguish.

Jesus used the term “soul” (*psyche*) a number of times, as we see in the following verses:

- ☐ Matt. 6:25—Do not worry about your life [*psyche*, soul] what you will eat or drink...is not your life [*psyche*, soul] more important than food...
- ☐ Matt. 10:28—Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.
- ☐ Matt. 11:29—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.
- ☐ Matt. 20:28—...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life [*psyche*, soul] as a ransom for many.

The important things to know about the soul are these: It is the *seat of life*; it is the *medium for worship and service*; and it is the *place where we agonize* the most when we walk away from God.

The Spirit

“Spirit” comes from the Greek word, *pneuma*, meaning “breath”. The spirit is one of the parts of our inner make-up that we want to understand. One thing that we noticed in conducting this study is this: As we move from mind to soul to spirit to heart—we do not see discrete and separate units from one part to the next. Our inner life seems to consist of a continuum, whereby each of our inner parts is joined with the other parts in fluid connections that begin with the mind, progress through the soul and spirit, and end up at the heart.

The spirit is often used interchangeably with the soul. It has many qualities in common with the soul, but it seems to have a stronger connection with the heart and with “spiritual” matters. “Spirit”

frames the vital principle of life (as does the soul), and seems to be a place where reason occurs, decisions are made, and motivations emerge.

That the spirit performs a function of “perceiving” or “knowing”...and “reasoning”...is implied in several passages, as follows:

- ☐ Mark 2:8—Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts....
- ☐ Rom. 8:16—The Spirit himself testifies with our spirits that we are the children of God.
- ☐ 1 Cor. 2:11—For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him?

As it is with the soul, the body is alive because of the presence of the spirit. James 2:26a says, “As the body without the spirit is dead...” There is so much similarity between the soul and the spirit that they seem almost identical. When Jesus died, He gave up His “soul” (Matt. 20:28), but He was also said to have given up His “spirit” (Matt. 27:50). And as Stephen was dying, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). The spirit is eternal and will be in the presence of the Lord, the same as the soul.

Also like the soul, the spirit can be bad or good. We see both in Scripture. 2 Cor. 7:1b indicates that the spirit can become “filthy”. This verse says, “...let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” When the spirit becomes dirty, it must be cleansed, so that it will be pure. Then we can move toward maturity and God’s holiness...and we will be trusting Him.

The spirit can be “saved”, just like the soul, as implied in 1 Cor. 5:5, which says, “...hand this man over to Satan, so that the flesh may be destroyed [ultimate discipline for believers] and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. ”The spirit will be preserved, even after the body is discarded.

For believers, the spirit is strengthened by the grace of God, when we access that grace through confession of sins and faith in him for provision of our physical and spiritual needs. Paul prayed that the Galatians would continue to access grace for their lives, so that their spirits would be nurtured by the Lord. Gal. 6:18 shows Paul praying that grace would be working for these believers, saying, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.”

When grace is tending our spirits, because we are under the control of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to serve the Lord BY our spirit. Rom. 1:9 describes this, as follows: “For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how without ceasing I make mention of you....” Paul served *in his spirit*, just as he called on us to be “doing the will of God from the soul” (Eph. 6:6b). Once again, we see correlation between the soul and the spirit.

The Heart

In the Bible, the term “heart” does not, as some claim, refer to that vital organ that pumps life-giving blood through our veins. The Greek term, *cardia* **can** be used to refer to the physical instrument within us, but the use of this term in Scripture usually envisages the heart as an invisible real-

ity within our spiritual being. Thayer gives us a rundown on *cardia*, telling us that the heart is the center for spiritual life, as follows:

1. It is identified with the “soul”, or the “mind”.
2. It is the center of understanding...the faculty and seat of intelligence.
3. It is the core of the “will” and character.
4. It can be affected and stirred up in a bad way or a good one.
5. It is the seat of thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, emotions, and endeavors.

The heart virtually subsumes all the other parts of our inner lives...the mind, the soul, the spirit, and more. The heart also contains the sinful nature, and is the site of the “Temple” in which the Holy Spirit of Christ resides. It is as though a corridor runs down the middle of our hearts, separating our sinful natures from the Holy Spirit. This corridor has doors on either side, which we go in and out of as we move across the hall from the control of sin to the control of the Spirit, and likely back again. Sin changes our location from spirituality to sin, and confession brings us back to spirituality.

The heart is a compound with many buildings, all under the direction of headquarters, or “heart-central”, where spirituality generates “good”, or carnality creates “evil”. The heart is the real “...who we truly are. We must use the term “heart” with understanding, and know that the heart is the superintending force for our entire lives, and that everything we are stems from our hearts.

The heart is also a place of intense battles, and a dangerous place, where demons love to visit and solicit our attention and allegiance. Our hearts are vulnerable to attacks from Satan, as well as the world and the sinful nature, and evil can come at us from all sides. Rom. 6:18b says, “...by smooth talking and flattering they deceive the hearts of those who are without guile.” Being “without guile” means to be naïve. When scriptural understanding and wisdom are lacking, the heart will be a target for all kinds of deceptive and evil forces that want to pull us away from God and toward self and the world. And we can rationalize just about anything we want to do, no matter how bad it is.

Most of the time, evil originates from within the heart itself. Here is what Jesus said about this:

“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean’. For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’. (Mark 7:20-23)

When it comes to evil, we are largely self-made men. It comes from inside our beings. This is not because the heart is evil altogether, but because of the presence of evil living there, in the form of our *nature*, which we inherited from our fathers as a result of the fall of man in the garden. We want to see several verses that describe evil in, around, and from the heart, as follows:

- **Unbelief and rejection of Bible understanding are the source of evil**, seen as “uncircumcision” of the heart. Acts 7:51—“You stiff-necked people [refusing instruction], with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always

resist the Holy Spirit.”

- **Unbelief goes on in the heart, and is evil.** Heb. 3:12—“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”
- **The hearts of believers can drift into a dullness of their understanding of truth.** Matt. 13:15—“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.”
- **Things we say come out of the heart.** Matt. 15:18—“For the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean’.”
- **Hearts can resist the truth long enough for them to become crystallized into a permanent state of rejection of God.** Eph. 4:18—“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.”
- **Since we are able to sense God’s reality through His creation, rejecting Him results in an a state of confusion and a refusal of the truth.** Rom. 1:21—“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
- **Honoring God with words means nothing, if the heart is not behind it.** Matt. 15:8—“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
- **The heart is the place where evil thoughts originate.** Matt. 9:4—“Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, ‘Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?’”
- **For good to come from us, our hearts must be pure.** Acts 8:21—“You have no part in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.”
- **When we do not pay attention to God’s Word, and do not know His ways, we will make mistakes.** Heb. 3:10—“That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’”
- **The heart that will not show a humility that prompts the confession of sins will accumulate divine discipline.** Rom. 2:5a—“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself....”
- **The heart can be a dark place of incurable evil.** Jer. 17:9—“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is incurable; who can know it?”

But the heart can also be a good place. When we explore the goodness of the heart, we are entering the study that will take place throughout the rest of this “part” (Part Six). We are trying to learn how to “walk in the Spirit”, because it is only through the Spirit that good can come from us. God is the origin of good, and any goodness exhibited by us starts with Him. Oh, sure, there are “good” deeds that people do all the time in the name of altruism, but we are not talking about “human good”...we are talking about “divine good” that comes from God.

Heb. 13:9 says, “It is good to be strengthened by grace...” 1 Thess. 3:13 adds, “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” Where does the strength come from? God. Where does goodness come from? God. The “truest” heart is one that is humble, and recognizes that God must fill the heart and control the mind for us to be “holy and blameless”. If we try to achieve this without Him, we will do more harm than good.

The heart is the place of opportunity to do “good” and follow God. It is rich and fertile ground for truth and faith. It is the place where we meet God. It is the place where fruit blossoms. It is the actual place where the Christian life is lived, and is the repository for all that God provides for our growth and production. It is the site of the Most Holy Place where we seek mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Unfortunately, we have a sign in the window of our heart which reads, “Sin Nature on Board”.

The heart is good to the degree that it is dominated by the Spirit of God. And it will be bad to the degree that our confidence is placed in ourselves, or that we succumb to our own evil propensities.

More on the Heart, a Chart, and Verses

There are several additional things we want to point out about the heart. The following considerations should help round out our understanding of the heart:

1. Volition operates in the hearts of believers, providing impetus to choose or reject God’s direction. Volition motivates the hearts of unbelievers to choose to accept or reject Christ. When Christ is accepted, the veil between the new believer and God is taken away. After salvation, sin restores the curtain between our hearts and God. He is there, but behind the curtain. When fellowship is restored through confession, that curtain is opened again, so that we can access, or “draw near” to God. (Much more on this in the much-anticipated Part Seven.) Volition is our determiner to seek this closeness to God, or to go our own way. If we *choose* in our hearts to seek Him, we will find him.
2. The heart sets purposes and makes decisions. 2 Cor. 9:7 says, “Each man should give as he has decided in his heart to give....”
3. The heart can make determinations and resolutions, as we see in 1 Cor. 7:37, which says, “But he who stands firm in heart....” This elliptical phrase tells us that the heart is a place where decisions are made, and resolve is set.
4. The heart is the place where reasoning takes place. Mark 2:6 confirms this, saying, “But some of the scribes were sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts....”
5. The heart thinks and plans. Heb. 4:12 says the Word is “able to judge of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
6. The things that we value determine the focus of our hearts. When we seek first God’s kingdom, it is because we value God and spiritual things, as clearly enunciated in Matt. 6:21: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
7. The heart can have joy or sorrow. It is a place where our strength can fail, and anguish

can be felt. Ps. 38:8-10 describes this, as follows: “I am feeble and utterly crushed. I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.”

As we continue to explore the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and our place in Him, we will see how we interact with Him to bring the greatness of God right down to our finite selves, and give the world a glimpse of His beauty.

The next page contains a chart showing the internal, non-material make-up of man.

This table shows additional characteristics of the non-material parts of man that are subsumed in the heart, with distinctions for each. NOTE: A complete list of verses corresponding with these parts can be found on the following page.

Chart on the Internal Make-up of a Christian

Brain	Mind	Soul	Spirit	Heart
Physical Temporal Decaying Sense-oriented Perceives facts/ideas	Perceives truth Base for understanding Spiritual reasoning Sober judge Can be opened May be depraved May be fleshly Can be renewed	Life Self Moral being Eternal Has volition Can love Can be blameless Can be evil Can anguish Can do God's will Can be saved Can be condemned Can serve God	Sustains life Rational Knowing/deciding Base for action A synonym for soul Can be saved Can worship Can pray Can be filthy Can be renewed Can be preserved Can have attitude Spirit speaks to spirit Grace can be with Can glorify God	Spiritual-life center Soul or mind Seat of passion Determines purposes Seat of intelligence Will Character Can be good Can be bad May reason Satan may control Dark when sinful Stores Scripture Deceivable Makes decrees Decision maker Where Spirit resides Shows light of Christ God can influence Sets purpose May be established Lord may direct Source of charity Must be pure to pray Errs if ignorant Center of faith Has thoughts Has intentions Grace stabilizes Must be pure God sees and knows Where "sin nature" is

Scriptures for the Greek Words Translated as Mind, Soul, Spirit, and Heart

The Mind—*nous*: Lk. 24:45; Rom. 1:28; 7:23, 25; 12:2; 1 Cor. 14:15; 2 Cor. 2:18; 2 Th. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:15.

The Soul—*psyche*: Matt. 2:20; 6:25; 10:28, 39; 11:29; 12:18; 20:28; 22:37; Lk. 12:20; Acts 3:23; 14:2; 20:10; Rom 2:9; 13:1; 1 Cor. 15:45; Eph. 6:6; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; 6:19; 10:39; 12:3; 1 Pet. 2:11.

The Human Spirit—*pneuma* (same word used elsewhere for the Holy Spirit): Matt. 26:41; 27:50; Acts 7:59; 17:16; 18:25; Rom. 1:9; 12:11; 1 Cor. 5:5; 6:20; 14:14-15; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 4:23; 1 Th. 5:23; 2 Th. 2:2; 1 Tim. 4:12; Heb. 4:12; James 2:26.

The Heart—*cardia*: Matt. 6:21; 9:4; 11:29; 12:34-35; 13:15; 15:8, 18; 22:37; Mk. 2:6; Jn. 12:40; Acts 2:37; 5:3; 7:51; 8:21; 11:23; 15:9; 16:14; Rom. 1:21, 24; 2:5, 15-16, 29; 5:5; 6:17; 10:8, 10; 16:18; 1 Cor. 4:5; 7:37; 2 Cor. 1:22; 3:15; 4:6; 8:16; 9:7; Gal. 4:6, 18; Phil. 4:7; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:5; Titus 2:2; Heb. 3:10, 12; 4:12; 8:10; 10:22; 13:9; James 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rev. 2:23.

Chapter 10

The Cycle of Learning Presented

The Command to Learn. The command for us to learn is repeated throughout Scripture as something we can't do without. If we do not learn after we are saved, we will return to the world...and never know the difference. Our "new" lives, then, will look no different from all others who are living in the world without Christ, without hope, and without eternal life.

We can ask, "What is the most important commandment?" Most would quote Jesus' answer to this question in Mark 12:29-30, where He said this:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Obviously, Jesus is saying that loving God and loving each other are the most prominent and fundamental of all commands. But there is another command in this passage, which PRECEDES and SUPERSEDES even the commands to love. That command is "hear". It is the first word in verse 29. Before we will ever love, we must first spend time "listening" to the Word, through one of the many ways that we can learn truth. Hearing comes before performing. We cannot apply and follow what we do not know!

Another example of our requirement to learn is found in 2 Tim. 2:15, which commands the following:

Do your best [KJV uses "study" in place of "do your best"] to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman [KJV uses "student"] who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles [KJV uses "divides"] the word of truth.

In this case the KJV translation is more accurate, I believe, than the NIV. The "work" to be done is that of a student who is carefully analyzing Scripture. God approves a believer who gives maximum "effort" (grace-supported "work") to learning God's will and God's ways. When we are progressing in our knowledge of His Word, we will not be "ashamed" and can go boldly before the throne of grace. Knowledge and understanding come from properly pursuing the truths of God's Word; these will prepare us to approach God with confidence. In this case, "knowledge is confidence". Timothy was told to "present" himself as a faithful student.

Paul instructed Timothy in another place to pay close attention to the truths that God was making available. This is found in 1 Tim. 1:12b-14, which says the following:

I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

What does Paul want Timothy to “keep”—to nurture and preserve and guard? It is “the pattern of sound teaching he had heard”. This is God’s Word, which must be *rightly divided*. God’s description of Himself and His systems must be received and kept safe as a precious treasure of great value. God provides His truths so we can know what our lives are to become, and HOW we get them to reach that point.

Peter frames the whole of our lives in one sentence, pointing out the importance of knowing God’s truths and announcing the effects this knowledge can have. In 2 Pet. 1:19, Peter said this:

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.

We must pay attention to our studies of the Word until the morning star rises in our hearts. The morning star is a symbol of Jesus Christ within us, in the person of His Spirit; and when we study and grow, He will rise as an influence, guide, and catalyst for lives of good quality and productivity.

We are staying with New Testament passages that command us to learn (even though the Old Testament is full of them, such as Ps. 119, and the first ten chapters of Proverbs). We see in 1 Cor. 3:1-3 the nutritional value of the Word of God. This passage says the following:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly [fleshly]—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.

Few passages show with such clarity that BELIEVERS can be “worldly”. And what will be needed to make them less so? It is the nutrition which the Word provides for spiritual advancement. 1 Th. 2:13 confirms the value of assimilating truth, saying this:

And we also 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.

When we accept the Word and make it the center of our lives, we will see it work in our lives, because we *believe* it. We cannot live without God’s guide for living. Heb. 5:11-6:3 gives a firm statement as to what we are to do with this guide. Here is what the writer of Hebrews says about our need for a maximum infusion of truth:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 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. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and of faith in God.

If we are going to mature and be effective as God's servants, we must feed on the Word. We NEED TO BE TAUGHT, as per verse 12, and if we want what God has to say, it is available to us. We cannot live on the food of the world alone to sustain us, but must also have the spiritual food of God's Word. Matt. 4:4 quotes Jesus, saying, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

We are told to learn; we are told it will help us. Why would we refuse what we need?

We Learn in Order to Build our Faith. Knowledge builds faith. We will see later that knowledge alone is not enough to finish the job, but it is the beginning. Knowledge provides the raw material by which God builds our faith. Faith is actually provided by God when we acquire knowledge and believe what we learn. We have to be in fellowship, of course, but the process for converting knowledge to faith is begun by believing His words to us.

We will examine this process in detail in the last section of this chapter. For now, we want to establish the importance of learning, as it relates to our spiritual growth. For openers we want to look at Col. 1:21-23, where we see this:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight—without blemish and free from accusation if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven...

Evil behavior (unbelief) prevented contact with God before we accessed Christ's payment for our sins, but when we were saved by believing in His work, we were no longer "alienated" from Him. After salvation, we have opportunities to get close to Him if we do the right thing, namely: absorb the truth. This is possible because we have been "reconciled", which tells us that something has been set up for the "saved", and is available to them. It is this: to be presented "holy in his sight—without blemish and free from accusation". This is cleanliness. But before we can be clean, we must know HOW to be cleaned, and then we must "continue in your [our] faith, established and firm".

So we can move from "alienated" to "reconciled" by being saved, and then we can move from "unholy" (implied) to "holy" (stated), IF we proceed in the "faith" that will establish us and make us firm. Faith can be one of two things: it can be the product of belief, or it can be the truths of God's Word. Usually, when "faith" is used to mean the body of God's truth, there will be the article "the" immediately preceding. The article is missing here, replaced by the possessive pronoun "your", but—regardless—the phrase, "This is the gospel", tells us that "faith" in this passage is *God's message*.

Conclusion from Col. 1:21-23: To be "established and firm", we must "continue" in the "faith", or immerse ourselves in God's Word. It is only then that we can present ourselves "holy in his sight". But you might say, "I thought confession was the way to be holy...to be cleansed." True. But like all other techniques that lead to holiness, we cannot use them if we do not know about them. We cannot master what we do not understand. Learning how to live is our first priority

after we are saved, because it establishes in us the methods God uses to cleanse us and increase our faith.

Heb. 6:1a, part of a passage quoted earlier, says, “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...” This calls for believers in the early stages of growth to move beyond elementary teachings and proceed onward into truths that enable them to strengthen their understanding and refine their use of God’s techniques. Why is this necessary? It is how maturity is achieved.

In order to achieve maturity, then, we must labor in the Word. This is the closest we will come to “working” for spiritual growth...but this work takes place within a framework of grace, where God does the REAL work of cleansing us and building us up. This means that we cannot be LAZY when it comes to studying God’s Word. Verse 12 in the 6th chapter of Hebrews, just cited, says, “We do not want to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith (believing the truth) and patience (perseverance) inherit what has been promised.” Verse 7 depicts those who absorb the truth as “land that drinks in the rain”. These are the ones who receive God’s “blessing”.

Another expression for moving toward maturity is “being rooted and built up”, which we are instructed to pursue in Col. 2:6-7, as follows:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord [were saved], continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

“The faith” here is the truth of the Word, which we are being “taught”, and by which we are being “rooted and built up”. We are strengthened in our faith when we are strengthened in THE faith.

It is clear that Scripture is the key to being strengthened. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says, “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.” To become completely outfitted for the rigorous task of living the Christian life, we must have a full understanding of God’s workings and ways. To get this understanding, we must be taught.

Ps. 86:11 reflects how we are to pray for understanding, saying, “Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” The way to a unified and stable heart is through understanding God’s ways. When we have His truth mastered, we will be able to “walk” in it. No goal or activity of ours will fulfill God’s will and purpose in our lives if it is not governed and guided by God’s instructions for living.

Here are some passages that reflect commands and confirm our need for “instruction” to enable our growth:

1 Pet. 2:2—Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...

2 Pet. 3:18—But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Eph. 4:12-14—...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 in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

2 Tim. 2:15—Do your best [lit., "study"] to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman [student] who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Col. 1:28—We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ.

Truth is needed for growth. 1 Cor. 3:1-3, which we saw earlier, tells us that we should be feeding on the nutrition of the Word. In 1 Cor. 3:6, Paul cited his role, and that of Apollos, in providing the "food" of the Word. This verse says, "I planted the seed [truth], Apollos watered, but God made it grow." Paul gave the truth, Apollos explained it, and growth occurred. How? By God's making it grow! God uses HIS truth to cause OUR growth.

The seed is planted, but until water and sunlight are added, the plant will not form and grow and "bear fruit". When truth is received and believed by the Christian, growth will occur. This is stored as energy, which is released as productivity. (We will discuss this thoroughly at the end of this chapter.) The seed, or the truth, has been given, and "explainers" (pastors and teachers) have been provided so that we can understand it. These are the ones we go to in order to be taught.

When we go to be taught, IF WE WANT THE TRUTH, we will learn. Truth can build us up, as we keep saying. We see this again in Acts 20:32, where told the Ephesians, "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 point is this: An understanding of GRACE causes us to GROW. Any of God's truths help us to grow, but the mother lode of truth is found in the "message of grace"...or truths concerning God's gracious dealings with us.

As we learn truth and build our faith, the truth within us causes us to desire its implementation into our experience. But truth must be believed before it will have a building-up effect. There is something that goes on when we assimilate truth that is deeper than what we have known before. The punch line for this whole book will be the impact of truth in our hearts, as we shall see.

What we must grasp at this point is that there are procedures for absorbing truth that lead to a greater belief in God and His promises. Simply stated, when we hear truth and believe it, and when we take the steps we will describe to fully integrate it into our soul, we will *grow*...with the result that we will *believe* more and more and more.

In this process, we must not forget what we can do for each other. In our book, *Spiritual Overflow: Knowing and Using your Gifts*, we cited the role of our gifts in edifying each other, or building each other up. This part of growth is crucial. Our association with other believers,

done in the right way, will cause us to encourage each other's growth. When our time together is conducted properly, an exchange will take place in which all participants benefit. We can contribute to the growth of others, and they can help us to grow, in turn. Check out the book on gifts! In the meantime, for a snapshot of gifted operations, see Appendix F, "Gifted Operations", which is a snippet from the book.

There is also a process for "training", which God uses to test and strengthen us. He brings experiences, such as suffering, trials, and even discipline, to teach those who want to grow to trust Him under all conditions. If you have not read the book, *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, then you must schedule the completion of this essential link in the growth chain. Growth will include intensive training, and we must know what is going on when it happens.

Our focus in this current book, however, is on the intake of truth as the most-essential component in the growth process. Growth depends on learning, more than anything else.

Accumulating Wisdom. Wisdom plays a huge role in the development of our faith. The sequence for acquiring wisdom is very precise...and little known. Wisdom is often confused with knowledge, but wisdom is actually the end product of a long line of events, all of which must happen before what we hear can become wisdom. And without wisdom, bad things cannot be prevented, and good things cannot happen ("divine good", that is).

We want to comb through Scripture to get a stronger grasp of wisdom and its place in our spiritual walk. For starters, we look into 1 Cor. 1:22-25, where Paul remarked on the message he was giving at the time, which featured the wisdom and power of God. Here is his remark:

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called [the "saved"], both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

We could spend a great deal of time analyzing this passage, but we want to focus on one aspect of it, and that is the importance of God's power and wisdom to those who are saved, as embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. He is wisdom and power, so any consideration of wisdom will not drift far from its source...the Son of God. He is our source for all we need to please Him.

We can use God's wisdom and engage His power, or we can adopt our own self-styled solutions and man-created pursuits. Wisdom will dispel weak faith and doubt, and enable us to trust God, no matter what attacks are pending. It is certain that attacks will come, and because of these attacks from all sides, we must prepare ourselves by incorporating wisdom into our hearts. Wisdom protects us. Prov. 4:6 says, "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you."

Wisdom is the principal thing. It is number one. Prov. 4:7 reflects its importance again, saying, "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."

Give up everything...all your time and resources...to get wisdom. It's that important. Wisdom is the result of learning, an outcropping of absorbed truth, and this truth enables the flow of spiritual energy from God, Who produces divine good in us.

We must devote ourselves to study so that we can get wisdom. Prov. 5:7-8 commands, "My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge." Step one is "paying attention". This is the act of a will that wants more of God, and less of the world. If we pay attention, we will be strengthened. We must learn to get wisdom, and we must have wisdom to be of use in God's kingdom.

Prov. 3:13-18 tells us that wisdom is the source for all good things...viz., for being blessed. This passage says the following:

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. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.

Wisdom yields returns that far exceed any effort made to get it. The value of wisdom is so great, it can only be compared to precious jewels. Wisdom provides long life, along with prosperity...especially the spiritual kind. Wisdom is pleasant, and provides pleasant ways for living, so that we can live in peace, as well as prosperity. Wisdom sustains us out of its abundance (tree of life) and its possession will result in our blessing.

1 Cor. 4:4-9 adds greater understanding of wisdom, as we see in the following:

- Paul's message did not demonstrate the world's wisdom, but the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power..." (v. 4)
- Paul did this so the development of their faith could proceed on solid ground, meaning God's wisdom and power, rather than the wisdom of the world. "...so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." (v. 5)
- He spoke a message intended for the mature (or maturing)...a message from God and not from man or Satan. "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age..." (v. 6)
- Paul spoke of wisdom which is secret to the world, a secret which believers can understand, beginning with the mystery of the church, and continuing with knowledge of God's ways for living. "No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." (v. 7, cf. Col. 1:27-29)

- Those with wisdom will receive much more than they ever expected. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” (v. 9)

Verse 13 in this chapter tells us that Paul’s message was from the Holy Spirit. This verse says, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.” Wisdom is SPIRITUAL TRUTH, given in the form of SPIRITUAL WORDS. These words, once they are understood and processed into the soul can become wisdom, which opens all doors to us...for loving, living, and serving.

There is a command for us to get wisdom in Eph. 5:15, which tells us how we are to live...as “wise”. This verse says, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise...” The phrase, “Be very careful”, shows the importance that God places on this command. Not just, “Do this,” or “Follow this path”, but “This is an alert! Pay attention!” This is our injunction and our charge. LIVE AS WISE! Our imperative is to get wisdom and LIVE BY IT.

Solomon said, “He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers.” (Prov. 19:8) Loving wisdom is an important step in processing knowledge, so that it becomes wisdom. We will see details on this process later...but the point we want to get right now is that when we love wisdom, we are taking care of ourselves and our own well-being. Wisdom is the key to the Promised Land, as we described thoroughly in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. When we get wisdom and reach super-maturity, the blessings that follow are indescribable.

Given its importance, wisdom is something we should ask for. In fact, we are commanded to pray for it. James 1:5-7 tells us to pray for wisdom, and shows how we get it when we ask for it. This passage says the following:

If any of you lacks wisdom [and who doesn’t?], he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 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. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

We should ask...and study...and ask...and study. The growth process is long and laborious, but its inexorable development will happen if we persevere. As we learn more and believe what we learn, faith will get stronger, enabling us to pray with confidence for greater wisdom. Then, with greater wisdom, we can take hold of its accompanying faith and do marvelous things. We cannot, however, move toward such faith and wisdom when we are out of fellowship. The Spirit cannot teach us if we are not giving Him an ear. We must remember to confess our sins before we pray (and before we study, and before we go to sleep, and when we are driving, and...).

Wisdom and Sin. Prov. 29:18 states, “Where there is no revelation [wisdom] the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.” Keeping the law amounts to understanding and applying truth. But before truth can be applied, it must become wisdom. This gives wisdom

a place of importance that it has not occupied as it should. Wisdom is the key to applying what we understand.

A lack of knowledge of God's Word, His love, and His grace system, will result in our decline and eventual destruction. We will remain saved, but we will not please God and we will not have His blessing(s). Hos. 4:6a describes this, saying, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge." A lack of knowledge will result in a life pattern that represents rebellion against God and allows unrestrained sin.

Robert McLaughlin has an excellent series on Psalm 119 that extols the importance of learning. The series is called, *The Greatness and Goodness of the Word of God*, which is available at www.gbible.org. (Endnote 37) Part of his analysis of Ps. 119 includes a discussion concerning the effects of wisdom on sin. We draw from the messages in McLaughlin's series for content in our current study on wisdom, blending our comments with his. Here are some points that were extrapolated from his sermons, with embellishments of my own:

1. "Those who devise sexual wickedness are near, but they are far from the law." (Ps. 119:150) Victory comes through God's Word...through advanced wisdom. (cf., 119:149, 151, 153) Prov. 2:12 concludes, "Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse." Wisdom delivers us from evil.
2. "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me." (1 Cor. 4:4) God is the one who examines our hearts, to determine if we have acquired and applied wisdom. If not, our hearts will be evaluated as unfit.
3. "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) Wisdom protects us.
4. "For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you." (Prov. 2:10-11) Wisdom enters the heart through the metabolizing of truth (more on this coming soon), and from there it can be launched for application.
5. "And do not give the devil a foothold." (Eph. 4:27) "Foothold" is actually a "room"...a place where Satan can set up headquarters in the heart of a believer. This is the place from which he operates in secret and constantly influences a believer toward evil and/or self-induced morality. When "knowledge" rooms are empty, a space is left open for Satan to occupy.
6. "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures." (Prov. 24:3-4) Wisdom builds a structure into which scriptural content is stored. This is held in the soul to be used by us in conjunction with the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's requirements and plans. Without wisdom, we will have nothing to guide us or protect us.

Warming to the Truth. We have already looked at verses emphasizing the importance of loving God's Word, but we want to get more specific about how essential this is.

There are plenty of Christians—and even non-Christians—who live circumspectly and in accordance with all moral standards...but whose hearts are blocks of ice. God looks first and foremost at our HEARTS. This is where God sees the real “us” and knows whether we are following Him, or just going through a drill to “appear” to be following Him.

God wants to see FAITH in our hearts, as we cited earlier in this study. Pr. 3:5-6 makes this very clear, saying, “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.” What is it that trusts? It is “all of our hearts”; this means ALL the parts of the heart: mind, soul, spirit, and heart-proper. The heart—our inner being and the headquarters for all our inner parts—is the location for spiritual activity, especially faith, and it is this aspect of our being that we expect to be impacted most by our treatment of, and attitude toward, the truth.

Wanting the truth is the beginning of “seeking for God”, because it is through His Word that we find Him, first with the good news of salvation, and then with truths for living. Ps. 119:1-8 lays out the steps we go through when we seek for God in His truth. Here is what this passage says:

Blessed are they who are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord [for us, this means “living by the Word”]. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

Based on this, there are the six steps involved in the process of seeking the truth, adjusted for application in the age of grace. They are, as follows:

- ❖ V. 1—Become blameless through confession and cleansing.
- ❖ V. 2—Walk under the guidance of the truths we learn as we are seeking.
- ❖ V. 3—Faithfully apply what we learn, such as the techniques of confessing, praying, studying, enduring, exercising our gifts, etc., in order to move toward maturity, whereby we will “walk in his ways”.
- ❖ V. 4—Advance in knowledge to include a full understanding of what is right and what is wrong (Heb. 5:14).
- ❖ V. 5-7—Achieve a love for God, based on stronger faith through knowledge, and a purity that comes through application of truth.
- ❖ V. 7—Reach a superior level of compliance with grace requirements, and fully implement grace assets, which enables great production.

Loving the Truth. We must develop a familiarity and intimacy with the Word, based on an ongoing love relationship with it. A slight clarification may be needed here: We do not love “the Word” as a collective group of truths, so much as we love EACH INDIVIDUAL TRUTH as it comes to us. We love TRUTHS...plural. This is what we get from Ps. 119, in which all the terms

used for “truth”, or “the Word” are PLURAL...indicating many distinct truths. The specific target for our love is for the particular, separate truths presented in Scripture. We love the Word “one truth at a time”.

We do not start off loving the Word, but we do start off “wanting it”. To get the full value of the Word, we must want EACH TRUTH as it is presented, and when we understand it, we must appreciate and embrace its value. (Much more on this will be given later.) This process actually begins with our wanting God Himself, which evolves into our wanting to know more about Him, leading to our wanting—and eventually loving—His truths. A more complete discussion of this can be found in *Living in the Power of God’s Word: Pathway to Truth and Wisdom*, p. 11 and following.

Ps. 119:165 says, “Great peace have they who love your law and nothing can make them stumble.” The stability that comes through being well-established in God’s truths will bring spiritual fruit, including peace, prosperity, and production. This is disclosed in Ps. 119:104-105, which says, “I gain understanding from your precepts, therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Infusion of truths into our hearts provides illumination for the paths we are to follow...the behaviors we are to achieve and the thoughts we are to have. But notice, this condition begins in verse 103, where we see this: “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” It begins with tasting and relishing the truths of the Word.

As we learn the Word, we don’t just catalog truths to be intellectually recalled and considered...truths must be properly processed by loving them. Ez. 3:3 reiterates how truths are supposed to “taste”, saying, “Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.” This is the appropriate response to the “scroll”. Job 23:12 confirms our need to love the truth, saying, “I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.”

(We will delve more deeply into specific procedures for loving truth when this study plunges into the “Learning Cycle”. For now, we are trying to establish that loving the Word is a crucial step in our acquiring and applying its content.)

There are many scriptures that reflect the significance of loving the Word, and numerous examples of believers who had deep love for truth. We share three quick examples of this. First of all are the Bereans, as seen in Acts 17:11, which says, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” Great “eagerness for truth” discloses the love they had for the Word.

Another example is shown in Luke 24:32, where two disciples had encountered the resurrected Christ, and did not recognize Him at first. Yet His words were having a great effect on them, showing that they loved His truth. Here is what they said after He disappeared from them, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the

Scriptures to us?” When we love the truths we hear, it is as though we are on fire on the inside, showing the intensity of our response to the message of God. This is true love...for truth.

Finally, the apostle Paul is seen as one who loved the Word, and who loved God by loving His truth. Paul’s last request in life was to have his books brought to him in prison. This is because his books contained God’s truths, which he treasured (2 Tim. 4:13).

Lack of Interest in the Truth. Paul recognized that many did not have his enthusiasm for truth, citing them in Acts 28:26-27, where he quotes Isaiah, as follows:

“Go to this people and say,
‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.’
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.”

Most people, believers included, have no interest in God’s message. They do not have time for the deeper things of God. God is the “byline” for their truth, but the body of His text holds no sway over their routines and aspirations. If you asked them, they would say they “love the truth”, but the evidence in their lives does not reflect this spirit. They are largely disinterested and dispassionate about the Word.

Believers who are “cool” toward truth become “dull of hearing”, as per the passage above, and they never get past the “milk” phase of God’s educational program. This is what we see in Heb. 5:11-14, which we have seen before but now want to see in a new light. This passage says the following:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 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. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

God will not give us what we do not want, in terms of His truth and Himself. We have to want it to access it, and we have to love it to receive it.

If we become “dull of hearing” and develop a resistance to the truth, known as “hardness of heart”, then we will be overcome with sensuality and sin. Regarding this, Eph. 4:17-19 says this:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 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. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

Ignorance of the Word leads to dissipation in the life. This means we must get the truth, or else we will be unable to conduct the life to which we have been called. In Eph. 4:22, we see this stated: “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...” To end the sinful pattern that we so easily and naturally follow, we must be “taught” and “made new” (v. 23). If we are deficient in our intake and application of truth, we will come up short and live a way of life dominated by our sorry nature and the world it occupies.

Being Made New. Each of us consists distinctly and separately of a body, brain, and mind...as well as a soul and spirit. The body, brain, and mind are temporal aspects of our existence, and do not have eternal life, at least as they have existed on the earth. The soul and the spirit will exist forever, but we will be “changed” in the eternal state, as per 1 Cor. 15:51. Even though we will change, however, we will still be a familiar form of ourselves, just as Jesus was recognizable in His resurrection body, scars and all, and “we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). So we will be seen as “ourselves”, having some continuous form of recognizability and self-awareness in our resurrected bodies.

If we are not “ourselves”, then it would follow that we would have to be someone else. This would reduce our need to be concerned with our own *personal destiny*, because someone else would take our punishment for never believing in Christ. But we WILL be US. This is what 1 John 3:2 means when it says, “WE” shall be like Him, after we are resurrected and transformed. This will be the time when the “newness” we acquired at salvation finally becomes what it is; i.e., reaches full completion. This ultimate “new self” will operate without all the mental and emotional “dross” that burdens us now, because the sinful nature will die when we die...or when He comes to receive us to Himself at the Rapture.

When we look at people, we should see them, not as bodies and brains and minds, but as living souls. This is important, because each soul exists eternally, and the outlook for each one has eternal implications. Unbelievers will spend eternity *apart from* God, while believers look forward to an eternity *with* God (the quality of which will be determined by their performance on earth). Rewards for believers will be linked to what they have done in the power of the Spirit, which is based on the amount of wisdom and faith they acquire. (See 1 Cor. 3:12-20, for example).

When we see people as “souls”, our attitude toward them is different, because we will see their lives as having an eternal scope, and we will want to assist them and provide messages for them in that framework. When we are functioning at a higher spiritual level, we will be directed by the Holy Spirit to take advantage of opportunities to be God’s messengers, whether it is in the form of “saving” truths for unbelievers, or “strengthening” truths for believers.

For now, we are still in our old bodies, and what we want to do is bring the behavior and attitude of the “old” self to a level of operation that looks more like the “new” body we will have in our resurrection bodies. This does not come automatically at salvation, as some believe, but is the product of extensive prayer and study over time, through which we mature and start to “appear” as what we “are” in the eternal state. What is our resistance to this? It is OUR SINFUL NATURE! This is the potent force we will have in us, that will move against us anytime we are moving toward God.

Our hope is in maturing until we have surrendered to God completely, but the road to that point is long and rigorous...reserved for the few who want God more than anything else. Sin and surrender do not mix, so we must choose to move toward the “new” self, which is like God (this is actually the life of God within us, which enables all divine good). Our objective is to beat sin and yield to Him, as per Rom. 6:11-13, which says the following:

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 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.

We will be showing how wisdom in the soul works to change the patterns of the body, the brain, and the mind. For now we can say that the body and mind are “renewed” by wisdom. Wisdom, as we shall see, is stored in the soul, which influences the mind, which controls the body. The mind is informed and instructed by the soul, and it is the content of the soul that determines the quality of the mind’s performance, and thus the performance of the body.

We have discussed what it means to be “made new”, or to become a “new self”, in previous writings. Problems in the mind, including emotional issues, are human conditions that are influenced by the nature of what is being fed to the mind to confuse it and distract it. The mind has a direct link with the world and the sinful nature, and is influenced by demons who are commissioned to deceive us. But there is hope. We have the potential for a “new” self, a “renewed mind” which will come only through God’s grace and power.

To be “renewed” while we operate in the “old” bodies and minds means that we must have “new information” to help us adopt “new patterns”. Rom. 12:1-2 says this:

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.

Reaching a level where we are fully committed to knowing and serving God will enable us to “offer” our bodies, so that we can proceed to the renewing of our minds. This will enable us to know and follow God’s will. This is not the beginning step for believers, but an advanced one, and one we are working toward. When we grow through applying the detailed methods that God has taught us, we can reach the point of maturity that will qualify us to offer our bodies, renew our minds, and do God’s will.

Eph. 4:22-24 tells us of our need to don ourselves with the “new self”. This applies to cleanliness, first of all, and then to the intake and processing of knowledge. Here is what this passage says:

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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

This summarizes very well what we are saying. We have a “former” way of life, the “old” self, which is corruptible. We want to be “made new” in our “minds”, thus putting on the “new self”, the objective of which is to achieve true righteousness and holiness. Being made new, once again, involves being cleansed...and then being taught. Without these, corruption will overpower us, and our minds will stay divided, troubled, and misdirected.

We will see that a renewed mind is the product of a mature soul, i.e., a mature soul can control the assailable mind. This operates under the good graces of the Holy Spirit, who is Himself our “new self”. It is His power that is behind any change that occurs in us; He is the embodiment of our transformation. All good things come from Him...not from the resolutions of our humanity. Our connection with Him is the key to real change, and we experience Him by knowing HOW to keep our contact with Him strong.

Col. 3:10 frames the process for renewal, saying, “...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” KNOWLEDGE is the key, which we will show must be converted to WISDOM, so it is actually wisdom we want. When we get wisdom, then we can be made new, though the process of an enriched soul supervising the mind.

Satan Opposes Learning. We want to examine briefly Satan’s method for diluting and reducing the power of truth. He knows that truth ingested by believers becomes the means for growth and spirituality, so he does what he can to remove, alter, and distort the truths we learn. The primary method for his reducing the impact of truth is to take it away before it is settled in the heart. Matt. 13:19 describes Satan’s technique for diminishing truth, saying, “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” Satan actually removes the information from our hearts, so that it cannot be digested and its nutritional benefit utilized.

When knowledge is perceived through the mind and acquired by the soul by its being believed, it can move on to the next stage of learning, which is its being processed into the heart by being valued. We must recognize that Satan will attempt to short circuit the flow of knowledge from the brain to the mind to the soul, through the spirit, and finally to the heart. If he can stop the process for refining knowledge at any point along the path of learning, he can prevent its adding power to our lives, and stop our role as those who are designed to glorify God.

We can retain knowledge as simple facts or disparate concepts in the mind, but the gate between the mind and the soul is opened only by believing what was heard. Further processing will take place at a second gate, which leads into the heart. This gate is opened only by loving what has been believed. Until this process has completed all the steps, knowledge will be useless in our minds or dormant in our souls, and will never be applied to our experience. This renders our “knowledge” null and ineffective. This is why Satan wants to “snatch it away” (Matt. 13:19).

Believing the Word...and More. Both phases of our relationship with God depend on our believing His Word. The first phase is salvation, when we believe the good news...the gospel...that Jesus Christ has paid for our sins through His sacrifice on the cross. The second phase, or part two of the gospel, again hearkens to the cross as the eliminator of sin, with faith as the ticket, but this time faith is exercised through confession, which results in the *cleansing* of sins...and through believing the Word, which leads, in turn, to *advanced maturity*, which results in the *control* of sin.

In both phases, we see the role of faith in making things happen. Both phases involve faith in God's Word. Of greatest concern to us now is the aspect of faith that relates to God's techniques and promises whereby we execute His divine plan. We LIVE THE LIFE He wants for us by BELIEVING what He has said.

Where sin is present, faith cannot thrive, so when God comes looking for faith, He will not see it if it is shrouded in the darkness of sin. Faith can only operate in the light of a pure heart, and a pure heart can only be achieved through "circumcision" of the heart. Once again, the application of the principle of circumcision is seen first at salvation, and then again in the Christian life. As believers we are more concerned about life *after* we are saved, so we are looking at circumcision of the heart as a repeated or ongoing event. The emphasis here is placed on the INTERNAL nature of our Christian experience, where we are either clean and trusting...or soiled and indifferent.

Rom. 2:28-29 describes the internal process of "circumcision", saying this:

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Real changes that occur in the believer begin on the inside, and that is where faith will reside. We looked at the internal parts of man, and know that both good and evil are stored in the hearts of believers, with the Holy Spirit on the good side, and the sinful nature on the evil side. Luke 6:45 confirms this condition, as follows: "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks."

To stay in touch with the "good" side of ourselves, namely the Holy Spirit within us, we must have the evil side squelched, which requires divine power operating through grace and mercy, as we have seen. When we are forgiven and cleansed, faith will be free to work, and we will be able to move forward in the strength that God provides. (See 1 Pet. 4:11.)

God's truth gives us a solid foundation for our faith, and we learn about this faith from His Word. This is what we see in Titus 1:1-2, which states the following:

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—a faith that leads to godliness—a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior...

The word “faith” with the article “the” usually means the “body of truth”, or God’s Word. Here, however, I believe it refers to the process of “believing”, or faith itself. Faith plus knowledge brings a settled form of hope with eternal connections, and this leads to godliness. An eternal perspective yields a pattern of “godlikeness”, based on recognition of God as the “not-liar”, or the “truth-giver”. This is the single difference among all of mankind...whether they on one hand acknowledge God and His truth, or on the other reject and discount His reality and veracity.

We can be heartened and strengthened by this “hope” that knowledge plus faith will bring to us. Heb. 6:17-19 says this:

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.

Where does our security and certainty and steadiness come from? It comes from accepting that God is not lying to us. This gives us hope, or faith for the future, which we acquire by accepting His promise(s).

Belief is based on our being convinced of the truth, and our openness to being convinced is predicated on our wanting God. When we look around in our pre-salvation phase, and see God’s creation (Rom. 1:19-20), we are confronted with a self-determined posture toward the Creator. If we yearn for God at that point, He will get the gospel to us, and we will be saved. If not, then we will stay away from truths that lead to salvation. We cannot save ourselves, as Jesus Christ must do this, but we can condemn ourselves, based on our negative response to God.

The same is true in our Christian lives. It is possible for believers to become indifferent to God, but if we want to get closer to Him, we will be open to His truth...we will want to know more about Him and the right way to live in His grace and love. And when we want more of Him, we will be “convinced” of the truths that we learn. On the other hand, if we do not want more, no severe condition or persuasive argument will convince us.

Luke 16:31, Jesus presented the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, as follows: “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’.” The account of the rich man and Lazarus tells of the rich man going to hell and Lazarus going to heaven, because they respectively rejected the truth or believed it. The rich man wanted someone to go and warn his brothers not to fail to repent and thus end up in hell as he had. But they would not have believed, even then, hence Jesus’ conclusion, “...they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” to warn them. The point is that choosing God is so personal and so baked-in that there is NO condition that will change a mind determined to resist acknowledgement or admission of God...and His message.

Belief and Faith. The term “believe” applies to specific promises and truths, whereas “faith” is a state of being in the heart. “Believe” is the drop of water; “faith” is the pool. We believe the truth, and the accumulated effect of acts of belief is faith. When we amass faith, we essentially acquire wisdom, or amalgamate acts of belief into a general and operable condition of “believing”. This is the

essential process of growth: believe the truth...and acquire wisdom. These are the two end-point actions and outcomes that determine the quality of our Christian lives, that gauge how good we are and how much we “produce” for God’s glory.

“Believe” applies to the messages God gives us. “Trust” deals with our response to circumstances that God brings or allows. And “faith” is the reservoir of increments of belief and trust that build up as we continue to feed. The first step is “believing”, which is bringing our positive volition into contact with “content”, or God’s truths. With greater “faith”, belief in the truth and trust for all conditions becomes easier.

Anticipating the Learning Cycle. This building up or expansion of faith takes place through a system which we have coined “the learning cycle”. What happens when we “learn” in the spiritual realm? Do we just hear the truth, comprehend it, and walk away equipped to do God’s will and work? NO! Again, NO!! There is more to learning than intellectual reckoning of facts and concepts. A bridge must be built to span the gap between the cerebral and the spiritual, between the brain/mind and soul/spirit. This little-understood process must be dissected and explained if we are going to see exactly what we must do to reach upper levels of “greater faith”.

There are several steps in taking the truths printed on the pages of the Bible and preparing them for assimilation into the soul. There is much more to acquiring wisdom than we previously knew. The “learning cycle” must be understood in detail, so that we can see what happens when we learn properly, and how we can benefit from God’s gracious provision of instruction. We’re getting there.

Murray on Faith. Murray cited the following passages as underpinnings for his points on faith:

Luke 1:45—Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her [to Mary] will be accomplished.

Acts 27:25—So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.

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. (Endnote 38, except NIV is used here; Murray used KJV)

Murray concluded the following regarding faith:

- Faith always attaches to what God has said or promised.
- God promises—I believe—God fulfills. That is the secret of the new life.
- Num. 23:19: “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” He has said it and He will do it.
- What is faith? Faith is the certainty that what God says is true.

- Faith always asks only for what God has said, and then relies on faithfulness [God's faithfulness] and power to fulfill His Word. (Endnote 39)

Nothing good can come from rejecting the truth, as this is—in effect—rejecting God. John 12:47-48 describes the judgment that takes place when God's message is rejected, as follows:

As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I [Jesus Christ] do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

There is a judgment for those who reject the truth: condemnation for unbelievers, and discipline/loss of reward for immature and carnal believers. Our role is to ACCEPT the Word as truth, leaving only the task of fully understanding what it says, in order to give meaning and power to what we believe.

When we understand what we have believed, we qualify to receive full enlightenment on how it is used. The privilege of understanding truth has been built on solid preparation: confessing, praying, wanting the truth, and so on. We cannot forget that spiritual learning is based on spiritual interest. (Human I.Q. is excluded as a criterion. When we thirst for truth, regardless of "human" limitations, we will get and understand God's Word. This, of course, does not include those with mental deficiencies that prevent meaningful cognition, in which case the condition of automatic salvation—like that which takes place with children—will occur).

When we discern truth, it is because spiritual processes are at work. 1 Cor. 2:14 says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept 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." Unbelievers never grasp truth, because they have no spiritual mechanism for understanding it. Carnal believers are controlled by the flesh, so their spiritual receiver is blacked out. Only believers filled with the Spirit are equipped to learn, as per 1 Cor. 2:12, which says, "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." When all is right with a believer, He will be taught by the Spirit, and will have the disposition to receive spiritual instruction.

God's Word must be received AS GOD'S WORD, in order for it to go to work in our hearts. 1 Thess. 2:13 summarizes this principle, as follows:

And we also 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.

We hear truth and believe it, which builds our faith. We believe the "message" of God so that we can build faith in the Author of the message. We must find the truth, hear it, believe it, love it, and thereby build faith.

The object of our pursuit is greater faith, and the carrier for faith is wisdom. Wisdom is the agent for greater believing, so our first priority is to get wisdom. James 1:5-8 provides a key for obtaining greater wisdom, as we see here:

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 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. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

To believe without doubting means that we must be in fellowship and current in our absorption of truth. Then we can ask for wisdom—which is more than knowledge—and we will get it. A double-minded man cannot receive wisdom, and will not grow. Do you think you are exempt from this condition? You are not. Double-mindedness is not a special malady or defect that just a few have, and others don't. This condition is universal among believers; all believers are double-minded at some point, and most are double-minded all the time.

Being double-minded is the result of being out of fellowship with God. We are separated from His influence, even though He remains inside our hearts. This places us under the control of the sinful nature, when our behavior will be characterized by inconsistency, indecisiveness, and instability. And a double-minded man gets *nothing* from the Lord, which means he cannot KNOW, and he cannot GROW.

Knowledge Must Become Wisdom. There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. This will become clearer as we proceed through this chapter. A hard thing for us to grasp is the uselessness of mere knowledge. Knowing alone, the cerebral act of processing information in the brain, is often assumed in Christian circles as being enough, but it is only the beginning. The misconception is that if we cognate truth, we have done our job and have “learned” what we need to know to become spiritual and do “good”. Not so.

1 Cor. 8:1b-2 says, “We all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.” Knowledge here refers to the standard neural and synaptic configurations that allow the storage, retrieval, and connection of the infinite minutia—and profundities—that we possess in our brains. This makes for good “humanity”, but is meaningless for Christian living, **UNLESS THE KNOWLEDGE WE ACQUIRE IS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING MORE.**

If we are going to “know as we ought to know”, the knowledge we get must be enriched by the Holy Spirit. The process for this is the main point for this book: How can I learn in a way that makes what I am learning accomplish what God wants in me...and from me? The Holy Spirit will do the work of taking what we learn and making it useful to Him and to us in our spiritual operations. He can take the truths we cognate and bring them to life spiritually. But this requires preparation and participation on our part, and this goes beyond fellowship and attending Bible class. There are conditions we must meet in order to see knowledge enriched so that it becomes understanding, and then wisdom. There is a difference in what these mean, and this is what we will examine.

We begin with the parable of the sower, in Matt. 13:19, which we cited earlier. This verse says, “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart”. This is why knowledge that is not “understood” will evaporate quickly and will be of no use to us spiritually, even though it may be stored in our brains.

“Understanding” is an intermediate and essential phase of “knowledge” on the way to becoming “wisdom”.

Each step involved in knowledge becoming wisdom takes place only when specific conditions are met. If we do not fulfill the conditions, even our best intentions will be feckless and powerless. It’s like an attempt to fire an air rifle in a vacuum. It has no “oomph”. If knowledge is not processed through proper spiritual mechanisms, then it will dry up on the vine and will be of no benefit. It is important to complete the procedure, so that the knowledge we get can become the wisdom we need.

What does it take for our knowledge to be converted into wisdom? It is quite simple. First of all, we must BELIEVE the truth we hear for knowledge to become understanding. Then we must TREASURE the truth we understand for it to become wisdom. We have explored the step of “believing the truth” for it to become understanding. Now, we must capture the most neglected step—and the most crucial—which is that of “embracing” the truth we have believed, so that it can be refined into wisdom.

We will spend the rest of this book clarifying, embellishing, and proving the necessity and value of this final step in our receipt of wisdom. The best example of “eager reception” of the Word is seen in the pattern of the Bereans, as we saw earlier. Acts 17:10-15 shows their enthusiasm for truth, as follows:

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

We see the pattern of their attending Bible class every day, and their further examination of Scripture to test Paul’s teachings. But we, like the Bereans, can do all that without benefitting from the truth we hear and examine. Scholarship does not make for spirituality. It is not enough to “study”. Behind the study, there must be more: 1) believing what we learn, and 2) LOVING IT!! Because the Bereans loved the truth...showed GREAT EAGERNESS toward it, they were developing nobility of character (characterized by a growing faith), and were fruitful in their spiritual efforts (“many...believed” as a result of their mature service).

When we come to our encounter with the truths which God’s Word presents, we bring with us some degree of hunger. The question is: How much do we want the truth? Do we CRAVE the truth? If so, we will devour it hungrily, and relish every bite. This is illustrated in Jer. 15:16, which says, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.” Ps. 119:103 tells us how these words taste: “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey in my mouth!” Is. 55:22 adds, “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.” When we crave the truth, it will taste good, we will receive it with joy, and we will love it.

2 Thess. 2:9-12 tells us that we must love the truth, as we see here:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Satan will trick us and deceive us so that we accept his disdain for truth and so we will de-value the usefulness and power of God's techniques and assets. When we follow Satan and refuse to love the truth, we cannot be saved, for starters, and then we cannot become mature, Spirit-led believers thereafter. God cannot bless or benefit those who refuse to love His truth.

Refining our Notions on Wisdom and Faith. Wisdom engenders faith; faith is a product of wisdom. Prov. 9:10a tells us, "The fear of the Lord [faith] is the beginning of wisdom..." Where faith exists, wisdom can grow. The wisdom that comes through faith...through hearing and believing God's Word...started out as knowledge, and then became understanding during its adolescent phase. Wisdom was then enriched through being wanted and loved, thus shifting from understanding to wisdom-with-power.

Inspired information is perceived in the brain, and then becomes conceptualized in the mind. When it is believed, this information becomes understanding in the soul; and finally, if it is loved, it will advance to become wisdom in the "heart". Now here is the tricky part. Once wisdom is developed in the heart, it will percolate back down to the spirit and the soul, lodging in the soul where it can be applied. And how is it applied? This is done through the soul, as wisdom in the soul takes charge of the mind and instructs it, so that the mind can in turn control the brain and the body.

But notice this: The CYCLE, as we will call it, MUST BE COMPLETED! No part of the process can be omitted. We must PERCEIVE (hear), we must BELIEVE (exercise faith), and we must ultimately RECEIVE (enthusiastically embrace)...the truth. The Holy Spirit gives us understanding when we believe the truth, and then He enriches that understanding—refining it into wisdom—when we love what we have come to understand. By the Spirit's power, that wisdom is then carried all the way back down to the soul, so that it can be launched into our experience.

The wisdom that is spiritually transported into our soul becomes faith...so the effects of the learning cycle are GREATER FAITH. This faith frees the power of the Spirit in our hearts, which then translates as production in our lives. Do you see the process? The magnificent workings of grace? We will embellish these as we proceed, and by the time we are through, you will be clear on the methods by which we acquire wisdom.

As always, Spirit-directed activities must begin with cleanliness, making it crucial that we maintain confession as a continuous practice, so that we can operate in the power of the Spirit as we accumulate and apply wisdom. In fact, there is NO REAL APPLICATION, apart from the function of the Spirit within us. And we can never become "smug" about the wisdom we acquire, as pride will certainly cut off any benefit we derive from having the wisdom.

The Real Source of Wisdom. True wisdom comes only from God and through the ministries of the Holy Spirit. There are many forms of “false” wisdom. For example, look at this passage from James 3:13-17, which says this:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

We must be careful. Sometimes, more information and knowledge can result in LESS WISDOM. Wisdom is based on *quality*, not *quantity*! More may be less, because knowledge alone may convince us that we have satisfied our learning requirements, simply because we have acquired *knowledge*. The Word of God is alive and powerful (Heb. 4:12), but not just as words on a page or concepts in our heads...life and power come only through the Holy Spirit, who refines knowledge into understanding, and then prepares it to be used in our lives as wisdom, so that we can glorify Him.

Never forget that all power in the Word comes from the Spirit, and is useless otherwise. It is His own strength behind His words that give them power. Knowledge must be enriched and enlivened by Him to become wisdom in the soul. The difference is in HIS handling of what we learn, when all conditions have been met. So we see how the process for the Holy Spirit giving and building our faith works. When He converts knowledge to understanding and ultimately to wisdom and sets it up for application to our experience, He is, in effect, “giving us wisdom”, and “adding to our faith”.

Human learning depends on concentration, focus, self-discipline, and mental effort, governed by human qualities. The *divine* learning process involves a longing for truth, belief in the message, and love for God’s words. We must distinguish what we learn through human intelligence from what we learn through our spiritual connection. Too often, we want to substitute human wisdom and philosophy for divine wisdom and truth. Human ingenuity will not advance our faith or enhance our relationship with God. Only divine truth will do that.

Gnosis/Epignosis. Without waxing etymological, we want to distinguish between two Ancient Greek words that God used in His Word to distinguish knowledge from wisdom. The Greek word *gnosis* has to do with basic knowledge which enters the mind in the form of words or concepts, and is stored in the memory as cognitive information. *Epignosis* refers to that “knowledge” that has gone through transformation and has become “advanced knowledge”, or spiritual perception.

If gnosis is not processed...enriched and refined...then it will not become epignosis, which means that it will not be useful in the spiritual realm. We may “know” something, and even try to comply with what we know, but if knowledge does not become wisdom, our efforts will be in vain. The key difference is the presence or absence of the Holy Spirit. If we conduct our learning in the correct way, meaning in a state of fellowship and faith, perception will be enlightened so that it will take on spiritual significance and usefulness in our soul. The tidbits of knowledge that we acquire can become nuggets of power if they are processed through the methods that God has designed.

Andrew Murray concurred with the concept of untreated knowledge being useless, as we see in the following excerpts from one of his sermons, titled, “Knowledge...is the Most Dangerous of Enemies”:

The knowledge that occupies and pleases and at length satisfies the mind without day by day leading to the faith, and the actions, and the character, and the true inner life for which God meant it, is the most dangerous of all enemies.

What we are, as humble, holy, believing, devoted children of God, is the only proof that God’s word has in truth entered into us and done its work.

The mind can form a conception of the most spiritual truths, the love of God, the atonement of Christ, the power of the Spirit, can be fully convinced of their truth and value, and so give them a perfect intellectual assent, while the heart does not believe them, does not open to yield itself to their all-controlling influence.

What we are, as humble, holy, believing, devoted children of God, is the only proof that God’s word has in truth entered into us and done its work. (Endnote 40)

Knowing is different from doing, and we have learned that doing must be based on our spiritual connection with God. This is crucial. We can study until we drop, but until that which we hear becomes wisdom, we will not achieve our spiritual objectives...so that *doing* is “God-doing”. Gnosis must become epignosis in order to be meaningful and applicable.

Knowledge without belief plus loving/welcoming/receiving the Word has no power. In fact, according to Murray, knowledge is a dangerous thing, because “knowing” makes us think that we have all we need to do God’s will. To take knowledge from the level of mental cycling to spiritual processing, we must experience the teaching of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This means that knowledge must first *reach* the heart, which is the enrichment chamber where knowledge is converted to wisdom.

Our present mantra is this: To merely know and memorize scriptures is USELESS, if the truth therein is not accepted at a deeper level. We often see the term “knowledge” in the Bible, and fail to distinguish knowledge from “refined knowledge”, or wisdom. As we said earlier, spiritual growth is not an intellectual process, or the mechanical storage of data, as in a computer; rather, it is like photosynthesis, where the leaves of a tree open to the sky in search of energy from the light of the sun. Sunlight will give life to the tree. To receive the benefits of the light, it is not enough for the tree to simply sit in the sun; it must ABSORB the rays of the sun.

Like the tree, we cannot simply be warmed by the Word, or superficially expose ourselves to its benefits. We must RECEIVE it into our hearts for it to cause us to grow. Sometimes, believers spend years studying the Word, either personally or under a pastor-teacher, and cannot understand why they do not experience the kind of growth that the Word promises. It is likely because they do not complete all the steps in the learning cycle, with the result that gnosis cannot become epignosis.

As we have said, intellectual assent or agreement is not enough to cause the kind of growth that leads to maturity. The defect in “over-academization”, which involves rote memorization or academic analysis of words from the Bible, is that it ignores the most important aspect of learning:

the POWER OF GOD. Only when God's power touches the content of our studies will we develop "sincere faith" in the soul.

Once again, Murray embellishes what we are proposing, saying this:

The effect [of knowledge alone] is the blinding of the conscience, and the growth of that terrible folly of self-deception by which a man is satisfied and happy in the knowledge of that which condemns him.

It is possible to be happy with merely "knowing", and be dead wrong in our assumptions. You see, when we follow useless knowledge or engage godless power, we are "playing spiritual", but not "being spiritual". Knowing is not enough. It must become wisdom, so that it will be a part of us...to the point that we *become* it and *live* it.

Scriptures that Highlight the Use and Value of *Epignosis*. We know that *gnosis* is the word used for basic human knowledge; *epignosis* is the word for enlightened knowledge. Yet the word "knowledge" is often used in Bible translations without distinction. The reader doesn't know whether the word refers to human knowledge or higher truths. *Gnosis* is in the world, and we know what that is. *Epignosis* needs a little more elaboration. Here are some scriptures that show how *epignosis* is used...and demonstrate its value. We have included comments with the verses, as follows:

Rom. 10:2—"For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge." Knowledge here is *epignosis*.

Col. 1:9—"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." Knowledge, once again, is *epignosis*.

2 Pet. 1:2—"Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Yes, knowledge here is *epignosis*.

2 Pet. 1:3—"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." Knowledge is *epignosis*.

2 Tim. 3:7—"...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth." "Truth" here is *epignosis*.

Tracking the Progression of Knowledge toward Wisdom. There are other words used for knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. There are five pertinent Greek expressions that represent some form of knowledge, each reflecting a distinct kind of knowledge corresponding with each progressive phase in the learning cycle. Here they are:

1. *ado*—"hearing" truth or "seeing" the truth. This is the perception phase of learning, taking place at the physiological level. (Matt. 13:14)
2. *gnosis*—intellectual understanding of the truth. Understanding of this type is confined to the mind, with no transference to the soul. (1 Cor. 1:5)

3. *genosko*—being convinced that the words that have been perceived and understood intellectually are true. This is the “belief” phase of the process, resulting in spiritual understanding. (1 Cor. 8:2)
4. *epignosis*—full discernment of the truth. This is the place where understanding is converted to wisdom. (In Eph. 1:17, *epignosis* is translated “knowledge”, but means “refined knowledge”)
5. *sophia*—this is maximum wisdom. This is the highest and most powerful divine awareness in the spiritual realm, and is associated with the manifestation of wisdom being applied to experience through the mind and body...in the power of the Holy Spirit. (In Eph. 1:17, *Sophia* is translated “wisdom”, but means “empowered wisdom”)

These different layers of knowledge reflect levels in the structure of the learning cycle, which we will continue to examine.

First Summary of the Knowledge-Refinement Process. Here is the process in a nutshell: Through hearing or reading, the mind receives information, and—because the soul inquires out of interest—the mind introduces the information to the soul. If the volition in the soul is positive toward the truth, it will be believed. This advances knowledge to the level of understanding, sending it through the spirit to the heart for further processing. If the attitude of the heart toward the new understanding is positive—truly embracing and valuing the truth within it—the Holy Spirit will convert understanding into wisdom, and send it back to the soul. The soul will absorb the freshly-refined wisdom and apply it to experience by influencing and even supervising the mind and the body to keep them in line with the standards and practices established by wisdom. This whole process is known as the “Learning Cycle”.

Refinement takes place in several phases, then: 1) Hearing, 2) Perceiving, 3) Believing, 4) Embracing, and 5) Applying. The result: enriched, Spirit-empowered wisdom, which is brought into Christian experience.

Faith from Learning. We looked earlier at the process of “believing the Word” as part of the learning process. We are now looking at an advanced step, whereby wisdom becomes faith. Volition looks first at what we hear (or read) and determines if we will believe it as God’s truth. If there is an absence of belief, the knowledge will stay in the brain, if it even makes it that far. At that level, it cannot perform spiritual acts.

But...if we believe what we hear...knowledge will enter a refinement process which, upon completion, will enable that knowledge to benefit us and equip us to fulfill God’s purposes. (This assumes that what we hear is true, which calls attention to the issue of finding the right teacher, as we explored in *Bible Basics on the Power of God’s Word*, Vol. 2, pages 55-62.) The wisdom that results when the process is complete BUILDS FAITH, and faith enables direct application to our decisions and activities. As wisdom accumulates and faith builds, application increases. Only then can real changes take place within our hearts and in our behavior patterns.

Heb. 4:2b says, “...but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.” For the words we hear to have meaning, they must be mixed with

faith. We must comprehend what we learn, of course, but then we must believe it and receive it, which places it on a conveyor that will carry it through enrichment. As refinement is done for each truth, maturity moves forward one step, and our journey on the “highway of holiness” is steadily advancing (Is. 35:8). (We refer you to *Bible Basics on the Power of God’s Word*, pp. 26-30, “Studying without the Heart Being in It”, and pp. 11-13, “A Love for the Truth”.)

For even more elaboration on “learning” from *Bible Basics on the Power of God’s Word*, check out the following:

The Role of Faith in Learning—Vol. 1, p. 40

Preparation for Learning—Vol. 1, p. 45

Confession—Vol. 1, p. 48

Renewing the Mind—Vol. 1, p. 58

Feeding on the Word—Vol. 2, p. 2

Love for the Truth—Vol. 2, p. 11

Studying without the Heart Being in It—Vol. 2, p. 26

Wisdom Finds a Home. The soul is the resting place for wisdom. It must come full circle, moving up from the brain/mind to the soul, through the spirit, on to the heart, and then back down again to the soul. Along the way, knowledge became wisdom, which developed through the spiritual refinement done by the Holy Spirit, and that is what settles in the soul. The soul is convenient to the mind/brain/body, and uses its enlightenment to supervise them.

The soul is attached to the mind/brain/body, but it is not the same as these. Storing wisdom in the soul is not the same as storing information in the brain, or reasoning in the mind, or feeling in the body. The soul is an eternal, spiritual reality, with no gender, race, wealth, or ethnic identity (Gal. 3:28). And it is where, more than any other place, the Christian life is lived. Our identity—as physical, mental, emotional, and psychological beings—constitutes the parts of us that are disposable...“vessels of clay” (2 Cor. 4:7). But the soul lives forever.

The mind is the seat of reason and decision-making within the realm of our “humanity”, while the soul is the seat of volition for all matters spiritual. Every human being has a soul, and every soul makes decisions about what to do with God. When we decide to accept Him, we believe in Him for salvation, and then for the resources we need to live “spiritual” lives. When knowledge hits the soul, the soul responds with acceptance or rejection of it. If it is believed, it becomes understanding and is sent on to the heart for processing; if it is rejected, it evaporates into thin air and no further action is taken upon it.

When knowledge becomes understanding and then wisdom, is the time when it is returned to the soul. The soul becomes the repository for the wisdom it receives. As long as fellowship is going on, the soul can use whatever wisdom it has acquired to control the mind/brain/body. Without fellowship, the wisdom will not work, because its power—generated by the Holy Spirit—is cut off. Our goal is to build as much wisdom as we can, which will increase faith and keep us out of sin and in fellowship. The significance of building wisdom and faith cannot be overstated...no superlative is adequate to express their importance.

2 Pet. 1:5-9 establishes the bricks in the building we are constructing as we build wisdom and faith. Here is what this passage says:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Belief and cleanliness are the original and foundational conditions on which we are constructing the wisdom/faith complex. All the other qualities seen in this passage feed or contribute to this root or base, and form building blocks for our spiritual headquarters and all its divine operations. The items listed reflect the staples for the growth of faith. These are added to faith in a progressive sequence to make it stronger. Each item adds to faith in its own way, as follows:

1. **Goodness.** This is cleanliness that comes through confession, which enables our believing of Scripture, which in turn causes growth.
2. **Knowledge.** Understanding and wisdom make growth happen.
3. **Self-control.** Self-control comes from the active engagement of the power of the Holy Spirit, who controls the believer in fellowship, enabling activities that promote growth.
4. **Perseverance.** This is endurance of God's training, which directly contributes to growth.
5. **Godliness.** This is godly behavior and production, the product of super-maturity leading to maximum faith, which yields surrender, victory over sin, and contentment.
6. **Brotherly kindness.** This is gifted service done in the power of the Spirit, which helps others grow, while it encourages our own growth.
7. **Love.** This reflects maximum productivity through advanced spiritual progression, whereby faith is strengthened to greater capacity, the greatest expression of which is love .

Notice again what verse 8 says: "If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." If faith is built through *knowledge, training, and growth*, WE WILL BE EFFECTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE. These qualities may be viewed as developing separately in linear steps, but we are actually working on all of these at the same time, as we build our wisdom and faith. We will exercise goodness (staying clean), while we acquire knowledge, walk in the Spirit, endure training, move toward surrender, and serve in love...ALL AT ONCE! We progress on all fronts, but the *perfection* of each quality will proceed step-wise, as we increase wisdom and faith.

Applying What we Learn. This is where the rubber actually meets the road. This is the "doing" part of the Word. There are two basic categories of application: general, and particular. The general application is seen in our daily Christian lives, as we exhibit the character of Christ in our thoughts and demeanor. The particular aspect of applying what we learn has to do with the service-gifts that we are given, whereby we pin-point the fulfillment of our "calling". Each of us has at least one gift,

which we are to exercise for the edification of others. THIS IS OUR GREATEST APPLICATION OF WISDOM!

Our discussion in this section will not try to distinguish so much between general and particular applications, as these are well-covered in previous books. All of our books have included discussion of general applications of Scripture, including topics related to techniques and promises for living. The particular application of gifted service, as seen in Scripture, is an outcropping of a general application consisting of spirituality and maturity. Both the particular and the general application of Scripture are examined in the book, *Spiritual Overflow...Knowing and Using Your Gifts*.

Acquisition of content for application is the goal and outcome of learning. The *sequence* for acquiring this content, which will yield something for us to apply, includes the following steps: learning >believing>understanding>getting wisdom. The final step is *applying* what we have learned. Wisdom *leads to*, and *provides content for*, **application**. With wisdom we can make application.

Without wisdom, we will come up short, and not be productive, because faith is built on wisdom. If we do not have “enriched knowledge”, our faith will be “un-enriched”, and application cannot occur. All our activity will be “deeds devoid of faith” (James 2:20); such a faith is “dead” (James 2:16, 26). Only with wisdom can we satisfy our requirement for becoming “doers” of the Word, and exhibit faith that results in “action”, or application.

Wisdom enables the use of all grace techniques and assets, and engages the power of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who energizes the application of what we have learned; meaning that the principles of wisdom that we accumulate are actually held and implemented by the Spirit.

I believe that, when all spiritual conditions have been met, the application of wisdom will come without our determining to make it happen. It will come through being in fellowship and movement toward maturity, not because we see something to “do” and move out on our own initiative to do it. Learning and trusting are our objectives; when these are fulfilled, we will “do” and “apply”, because God will just work it out that way. We will do it, but He will initiate it and sustain it...if we are operating in wisdom and faith.

The epistle written by James is full of references to wisdom, as we see in the following:

James 1:5—“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.” One of the few specific things in Scripture that we are told to ASK for is wisdom. That is because it is so essential to all spiritual operations.

James 3:13—“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” Good deeds come through a true perspective of ourselves in the presence of an infinite God, which is a product of wisdom. Wisdom generates humility, a form of faith, which in turn generates “good deeds”.

James 3:17-18—“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. [These] Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” The product of wisdom is the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-23), which is evident in this verse. It is by the

Spirit...i.e., through following the techniques for engaging His power...that His fruit is produced through us. Our greatest application of Scripture will come in the recognition of grace and using what we learn to allow grace to operate in our lives by means of the person of the Holy Spirit.

James 3:15—"Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil." The wisdom of the world comes from the devil, and is the opposite of God's wisdom. With more of God's wisdom, worldly wisdom will surely diminish. (cf. Rom. 12:2)

James 4:4—"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 participate in the world's wisdom, and discount the wisdom of God, we will be showing friendship to the world and will be acting as enemies of God.

James 4:17—"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." It is a sin NOT to apply what we learn, which means that we commit a great sin when we refuse to acquire wisdom, because—if we had wisdom—we WOULD be applying it. Insufficient wisdom results in the absence of application, whereas the accumulation of wisdom leads inexorably to application.

We see the importance of having wisdom. At the same time, we must not forget the means for acquiring it. When we truly welcome God's truth into our hearts, so that it can become applicable wisdom, change will take place in our performance (particularly in the exercise of our gifts...our greatest concern and objective). The key to getting wisdom, then, as we have seen, is in embracing understanding with enthusiasm and affection.

The problem with most believers, even those who sit faithfully in church or Bible class, is that they are not DIGESTING what they are INGESTING. They are taking in truth, but it is not sticking, because it is not going through the process of becoming wisdom. A sincere espousing of the truth...adopting it and incorporating it...is the crucial final step in the conversion of understanding to wisdom. If you don't love the truth, you just as well leave it alone.

In Rom. 12:2, we are told, "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." When our minds are renewed, we become transformed. This is to say that—when wisdom resides in the soul—the mind will be influenced and there will be changes in mental attitude and behavior. We will now take one more look at the process, before we move on to the final recap and illustration of the learning cycle.

Here's the process, once again: Truth that is believed enters the soul from the mind, changing it from knowledge to understanding. Understanding can then move through the spirit to the heart, where it can receive refinement, IF IT IS LOVED. If it is not loved, the process will be truncated.

Once understanding is enriched, it becomes wisdom, which can then be sent back down to the soul, where it can rest and await application. The operation of the Holy Spirit will then be able to take the wisdom in the soul and use it to change the mind in ways that transform thoughts and actions, particularly actions related to gifts and specific forms of service. Application is actually the work of

the Spirit, enabled by our wisdom and faith, to enable the mind and body to act in spiritually-relevant ways.

The cycle must be completed for this to work. Remember that truth in the mind alone will not result in change. Change can only come from the influence of a soul empowered by wisdom...operating in the power of the Spirit. What follows after is the soul controlling the mind, moving thoughts in a new and positive direction.

Chapter 11

The Cycle of Learning Recapitulated

Knowing, Leading to Faith and Function. Paul had a clear picture of the interaction between knowledge and faith, and faith and function. He described the process for these in Ephesians, where he said, “I pray that also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you...” (Eph. 1:18a)

“Know” here is *eidonai* in the Greek, which is interpreted as “seeing at one level, enabling a ‘seeing’ at a higher level”. “Know” is seeing at a mental level, which is followed by understanding, which takes place at a spiritual level. This word, “know”, according to Strong’s, is a bridge between intellectual and spiritual “knowing”.

The “hope” to which we are called is FAITH, which leads to God’s power. We have seen that faith is increased through understanding...leading to wisdom...which activates the “power”. Verse 19 says, “...and his incomparably great power is like the working of his mighty strength.” This is embellished by verse 23, which adds, “...which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way,” taken together with 3:19, which says, “...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Knowing begins the process and REALLY KNOWING ends with the fullness of God.

As we get deeper into the weeds of the learning cycle, we need to reset. The general frame for our progress is seen in our spiritual state along the way. All that we do spiritually rests on the premise that we have been cleansed, are in fellowship, and are walking in the Spirit. No part of the learning cycle will operate, from initial hearing to final application, without the empowerment that comes when we are in fellowship. Fellowship restores and maintains the power of the Spirit. That power will then operate at a level commensurate with the size of our faith.

If faith is small, sin will bully and control us; if faith is strong, we will see sin controlled in our lives. The amount of faith we have built up will determine the intensity and duration of spiritual power that enables us to resist sin and perform good deeds. That faith depends on the amount of wisdom we have acquired. The enriched “wisdom” that comes through the learning cycle and resides in the soul is the fuel for faith, and faith is essential for the Spirit’s function of controlling our minds and bodies.

Enriched wisdom translates as “believing God more”. Believing more =’s greater faith. And what do we believe? WHAT GOD SAYS! When we are in fellowship...AND when we have accumulated enriched wisdom...THEN we can resist sin, produce divine good (primarily as fruits from our gifts), and walk by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Truth and the Spirit. The line between the truth in God’s completed Word and the person of the Holy Spirit is hard to draw, but the distinction is an important one. We know well that truth works WITH the Spirit, and not WITHOUT it. The Spirit is the author and implementer of

truth, and He gives it life. It is suitable, however, for us to probe further and to differentiate between the life of the Word and that of the Spirit.

Heb. 4:12 says that "...the word of God is living and active." Here is where confusion comes in: There is a danger that we might place too much emphasis on the "life" of truth and actually treat it as a person. The real "life" behind truth, including whatever power or influence it has, comes from the Holy Spirit. But get this: Truth is *not the same* as the Holy Spirit. He makes truth active and effective, and truth has power, no doubt, but that power COMES ONLY FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT, and cannot operate apart from Him.

But what about John 6:63, which says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit [Spirit] and they are life." Spirit and life are metaphorical here, in that they are not "Spirit" (God) and they are not truly "life" Otherwise, this verse makes it sound as if the words of God are the same as the Spirit of God. We must be careful with this.

The words in the Bible are common words used in human speech. They POINT TO God and His techniques, principles, and promises, but they are NOT THEMSELVES "God". To give them the status of divine personage is to make of them an object of worship that God never intended. We are to treasure and love truth, because it acquaints us with God, but we are not to worship it *as God*.

When John 6:63 says, "...the words I have spoken to you are spirit [or...Spirit]", does this mean that the words Jesus said were actually the Holy Spirit Himself? As we stated above, the answer is "no". It simply means that His words are an *expression* of the Spirit, who is the undeniable source of truth about Himself. Scripture is such an exact unfolding of the Holy Spirit that it can bear His name, "Spirit", but the name is borrowed from the author of the words to show their significance, and to indicate that the power behind them is God Himself. Truth about the life of the Spirit is shared in the messages, but only as *content* for the messages, and not as a substitute for the Holy Spirit of God and Jesus Christ. The Three Persons in One are alone God. There are none beyond these.

Does this diminish the great power of the Word, and the value it is to us as believers? No. Andrew Murray said the following to corroborate what we are saying:

Coming in the Power of the Unseen Spirit, higher and deeper than all thought, they [God's words] enter into the very roots of the Life, they have [not "are"] themselves a Divine Life, working out effectually with the Divine energy the Truth they express into the experience of those who receive them. (Endnote 41)

He then added this:

It is the Spirit that comes from God, the Spirit that Christ came to bring, becoming our life, [while we are] receiving the word and assimilating it into our life, that will make them become the Truth and Power in us. (Endnote 42)

The Spirit must be in us, and He must control us, but there is another aspect that must be accommodated: We must "assimilate" truth into our hearts and lives. Without refined truth, we

will have no wisdom, and the Spirit will be held back from doing what He wants...both for us and through us.

Last Stop for Wisdom. We are making final preparations for the full illustration of the “learning cycle”. Many of the points we are making now have been given earlier, and are being repeated here as the lead-in for the finale.

One point must be made before we give the illustrated summation, and that is this: Wisdom, once it has been produced, must rest on a “launching pad” to await its being catapulted into experience. The destination for wisdom, or the place where it is stored for ready application, is the soul. Wisdom must arrive at the soul, before it can go to work. We must never forget the sequence: Knowledge enters the soul to be considered for belief, after which it is sent on to the heart as understanding (Prov. 2:10). Understanding goes through spiritual refinement in the heart, and is then returned to the soul as wisdom. From the soul, wisdom can be discharged for Christian service.

Activity in the soul is central to our understanding and using what we have learned. Its parts consist of emotion, volition, self-consciousness, conscience, and reason. It has many of the same qualities as the mind, except that the soul has spiritual connections. It is connected with the mind in a supervisory role; if the soul is dark and covered with sin, so is the mind. If the soul is clean and full of light and wisdom, the mind will enjoy spiritual direction from the soul, as the soul receives direct instruction from the Holy Spirit. Without soul-influence, the mind will split...or wander...leaving the body with neither spiritual restraint nor impetus for good.

The soul is, like the spirit, an integral part of the heart. Remember that the “greater heart” enfolds the soul/spirit, the sinful nature, and the Holy Spirit...and generally keeps a “room” for an emissary or so from Satan. The soul is a key player in the learning cycle, since it is the place within us where the volition determines whether to believe what is heard; it is also the lodging place for wisdom. The soul, or *psyche* in the Greek, is related throughout Scripture to the stages of learning and our spiritual practice. Here are some verses, along with comments, that show the place and importance of the soul in our walk with God:

Matt. 6:25—“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life [soul], what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life [the soul] more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” Both the body and soul are to be considered, though the essence of “life” is in the soul. Adam, after all, became a “living soul” (Gen. 2:7).

Matt. 10:28—“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” The soul is seen as a greater loss than the body. The body is actually disposable, while the soul is eternal.

Matt. 11:28-29—“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.” Both burden and rest are found in the soul, the difference being that, by giving our burden to Him by learning *from* Him, and *about* Him, our acquired wisdom will bring rest.

Matt. 22:37—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Heart, soul, and mind are all distinguished here, and—as we have established—each of them is engaged in the learning and growing process, whereby we accumulate sufficient wisdom to maintain constant fellowship, from which comes divine love toward God.

1 Cor. 15:45a—“So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being’...” “Living being” is “soul”. According to the passage from which this quote is taken, Adam had a body first, and then was given a soul. The body had no “life” apart from the soul, which means the center of life is in the soul.

Eph. 6:6—“Obey them [earthly masters] not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.” The point we want to glean from this passage is that we do the will of God from the heart, except that “heart” in the original language is our old friend “*psyche*”, which is the soul.

1 Thess. 5:23b—“May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When we are purified and cleansed, the effects are pervasive, reaching all parts of our lives: spirit, soul, and body.

Heb. 4:12—“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” The Word is alive through the life of the Holy Spirit, and it divides each part of our inner selves, sometimes in subtle ways, such as the distinction between the soul and the spirit, which is so slight that they are often treated as one. I believe the spirit blends with the side of the soul that is most involved in spiritual matters, and is the first part of us affected by our connection with the Holy Spirit. Our spirits are so closely engaged with our souls that changes in the spirit prompt a corresponding change in the soul.

1 Pet. 2:11—“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” The sinful nature knows his greatest enemy: the soul. And what is there about the soul that makes it potentially deleterious to the sinful nature? It is the location for believing Scripture, for storing wisdom, and for building faith. It is also the launching pad for the application of wisdom. These stymie the sinful nature; otherwise, it will rise to war against the soul.

The soul is central, providing instruction and correction for the mind and body from the wisdom which it has amassed. This is “self-control”...the application of wisdom from the soul, performed in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

In Spirit and in Truth vs. in the Flesh and in Deception. John 4:23b says, “...the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” Verse 24 adds, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” This means to worship “in fellowship” and by immersion into the truth. Fellowship (filling of the Spirit) is the conveyor; truth is the content. The divine power which these enable is the force and cause for change.

We will conform to God's ways or we will conform to the world. If we choose the world, we will focus on it, draw from it, love it, value it, pursue it, and trust it...or we will be transformed—changed—by the renewing of our minds. It is then that, through proper inculcation of truth, we can reject the world.

Truth begins as mere information, picked up in the brain (a material part), and made part of the mind (a non-material part). It is then shared with the soul by the mind, where a decision must finally be made whether to accept the truth, or refuse it in favor of other "wisdom", namely, that of the world. If the soul accepts and believes the truth, it becomes understanding, which is sent on to the spirit/heart, where it will either be loved or encounter indifference. When indifference exists, understanding may flash up briefly, but then it will fade quickly. If it is loved, the Holy Spirit will give it the badge of wisdom and send it back to the soul for application through the mind and body.

There is no other medium for growth, for victory over sin, for the life that is real life, and for meaningful service. Our decision to grow is not grandiose; it is simple. We are deciding to get correct information TODAY. We start each day with an opportunity to get information, so freely available in this "information" age. By doing this, and processing what we hear, we can do the great things to which we aspire. But the forces that oppose this process are the strongest on earth...supernatural and irresistible. As a result, there are many pitfalls along the way that prevent our learning and growth, as we see in the following. These prevent the processing of truth:

1. **Not Hearing the Word.** This means not spending time being exposed to the truth through listening, watching, reading, or independent research and study.
2. **Not Believing Truth when it is Heard.** We can be exposed to the truth, but when we refuse to believe it, it cannot become viable as understanding. To graduate from knowledge to understanding, it is necessary to believe the truth when we hear it.
3. **Not Treasuring or Highly Valuing the Truth that has been Believed.** For full empowerment to occur, truth must be *loved*. (Ps. 119:140, 165) It must be wanted, welcomed, received, and enthusiastically embraced. Only then will it become wisdom.
4. **Not Praying.** If we want wisdom, meaning that we want the cycle to be complete and for truth to come home, we must *ask* for it...but we must ask in faith, without doubt, which means we must be in fellowship.
5. **Not Being in Fellowship.** Without the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit, no learning can occur. Anywhere in the process, sin can break the cycle, causing the truth that is being handled to disintegrate and become useless. Without fellowship, NO STAGE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS can continue or be of good effect.

If sin is confessed along the way, as we are going through each stage of the learning process, Spirit-enlivened truth will end up in the soul, and the Spirit can move us forward.

As the learning/empowerment cycle is working, and knowledge flows upward to the heart and back down toward the mind, a deposit is made to the soul in the form of wisdom. Carnality may

weaken and eventually erode this wisdom, but once wisdom is in place, it is durable and will function as long as we stay in fellowship. Wisdom becomes faith, which allows a sustained walk that keeps us under the Spirit's control all the time. This is the result of "super-maturity", discussed in our four previous books.

Not only can we live in victory and contentment while we perform meaningful service, we can also learn more and more. Mark 4:25 says, "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." In context, the thing we have more or less of is TRUTH...especially truth that has been processed.

In conclusion, the actual steps in the learning cycle include the following:

1. **Hear it.** This takes place in the body.
2. **Consider it.** This takes place in the mind.
3. **Be convinced and believe it.** This takes place in the soul.
4. **Embrace it.** This takes place in the heart.
5. **Apply it.** This takes place in the soul and affects the mind and the body.

The soul has double duty, facing two directions. It faces our humanity, and it faces our spirituality. From our "humanity"...body/brain/mind...the soul receives the truth that has been heard, and can at that point accept it or reject it...pass it on or kill it. If it is accepted, it will become understanding. The "spiritually-oriented" aspect of the soul is looking toward the heart, coupling with the spirit, serving as the liaison between God and us. This aspect of the soul sends understanding to the heart, and receives wisdom back from the heart...if all goes according to plan. Negative volition and/or carnality can, of course, kill the process at any time.

A word can be added about the time frame for the learning cycle. It does not take days or weeks for the cycle to be completed for any given item of truth. It only takes seconds to hear it, believe it, and love it. Wham-O! It's done. The soul just picked up another grain of wisdom! Now we can apply it.

That is the learning cycle, which we will illustrate and further elucidate in the next chapter.

Chapter 12

The Cycle of Learning Concluded and Illustrated

The Learning Cycle and Faith. This book is about faith. So why is so much time being spent on the way we learn? It is because learning is so crucial to the advancement of our faith. Our discussion will soon hearken to charts, for which we are setting the stage.

Faith in the Word begins the process of learning, as we perceive each new truth for the first time. When we believe what we hear, that truth enters the refinement process that we have been discussing. Our belief enables the Holy Spirit to take the knowledge we obtained through hearing, and enlighten it with understanding. At that time, we can love it or let it go. If we embrace it, the Holy Spirit will enrich our understanding so that it becomes wisdom. So what do we have then? Wisdom. And is that all we need? No.

Wisdom, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, is nothing. It is the Spirit's energy, added to wisdom, that is effective. Here is what works: the Holy Spirit using His own words to enable us to do what His Word calls for. Following His Word allows us to participate in His power by 1) believing His truth, and 2) loving His truth, and 3) having faith in the Speaker of that truth. It is the FAITH that comes out of this that allows the Spirit to work in and through us to perform His divine work.

This is a major point that we must not miss: God uses *His* words and brings them to *our* experience in ways that complete *His* will. Using His words in us, God works His will through us, completing His plan by His own hand. The most important condition for enabling God to complete this work takes place in the final sanctification, or imbuing of divine significance, to His words. This is the final phase of learning: the enrichment of knowledge, to give us more than copper, more than silver...yes, to give us pure gold.

Ps. 19:9b-11 says this about the value of the Word:

The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

A phrase from 1 Pet. 1:7 concludes that strong faith, which we know is dependent on accumulated wisdom, is "of greater worth than gold." Enriched wisdom is like refined gold, having gone through the Spirit's crucible, where it has been transformed from knowledge and understanding into pure wisdom.

It is important to know that a small amount of refined learning is worth more than great amounts of unprocessed knowledge. An ounce of gold is worth more than a half-ton of pennies. Small amounts of wisdom generate much faith, and even a tiny faith can move mountains. To get such wisdom means that THE LEARNING PROCESS MUST BE COMPLETED...over and over! It is important to carry knowledge to a level of full refinement, so that its work can be fulfilled.

As wisdom builds up in the soul, faith increases, and from the soul, stronger and stronger faith will have tremendous impact on the heart, the church, the world, and the kingdom.

If we want wisdom, it will come. If we seek it, we will find it. Prov. 2:1-8 virtually summarizes everything we are saying about wisdom and faith. This passage says the following:

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord [faith] and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless [cleansed], for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

Notice several key terms in this passage:

- **“Accept my words”** conveys the idea of REALLY accepting the words, or fully “embracing” them.
- We want to **“store up”** wisdom, by turning our attention, “our ears”, to it.
- We also want to **“apply our hearts to understanding”**, meaning that we want our hearts to be prepared to receive the understanding that the soul is sending.
- **“Look for it”** reflects positive volition; then you will “understand”, leading to the “knowledge of God”, which is “wisdom”.
- **“The Lord gives wisdom”**: wisdom comes only from God, which we can get when “knowledge” graduates to “understanding”.
- As all this goes on, our walk must be **“blameless”**, which means we must be in fellowship and operating in the power of the Spirit. He will then give guidance and protection to the faithful, who walk along “the way”.

The learning cycle is completed when we believe the Word, love it, and use it. This is the key to maturity and usefulness in God’s kingdom. If we want what we do for God to count, we must do it right.

Fullness of Faith Reference. For a complete discussion of the general process for growing our faith, please see Appendix G, “Getting The Fullness of God”. We cited this doctrine earlier, but offer it here as an appendix, to give it proximity to the learning cycle.

The Charts. There are three phases illustrated in the charts, with one phase given per chart, as follows:

- The **first chart** shows knowledge moving upward, processing through the soul to become understanding, and then moving toward the heart, where it can become wisdom.
- The **second chart** shows the flow of wisdom back down toward the soul, mind, and body, where it will be stored for application.

- The **third chart** illustrates the process of storing and applying wisdom, bringing God's knowledge into lives that are being renewed and transformed...by His Spirit...in His truth.

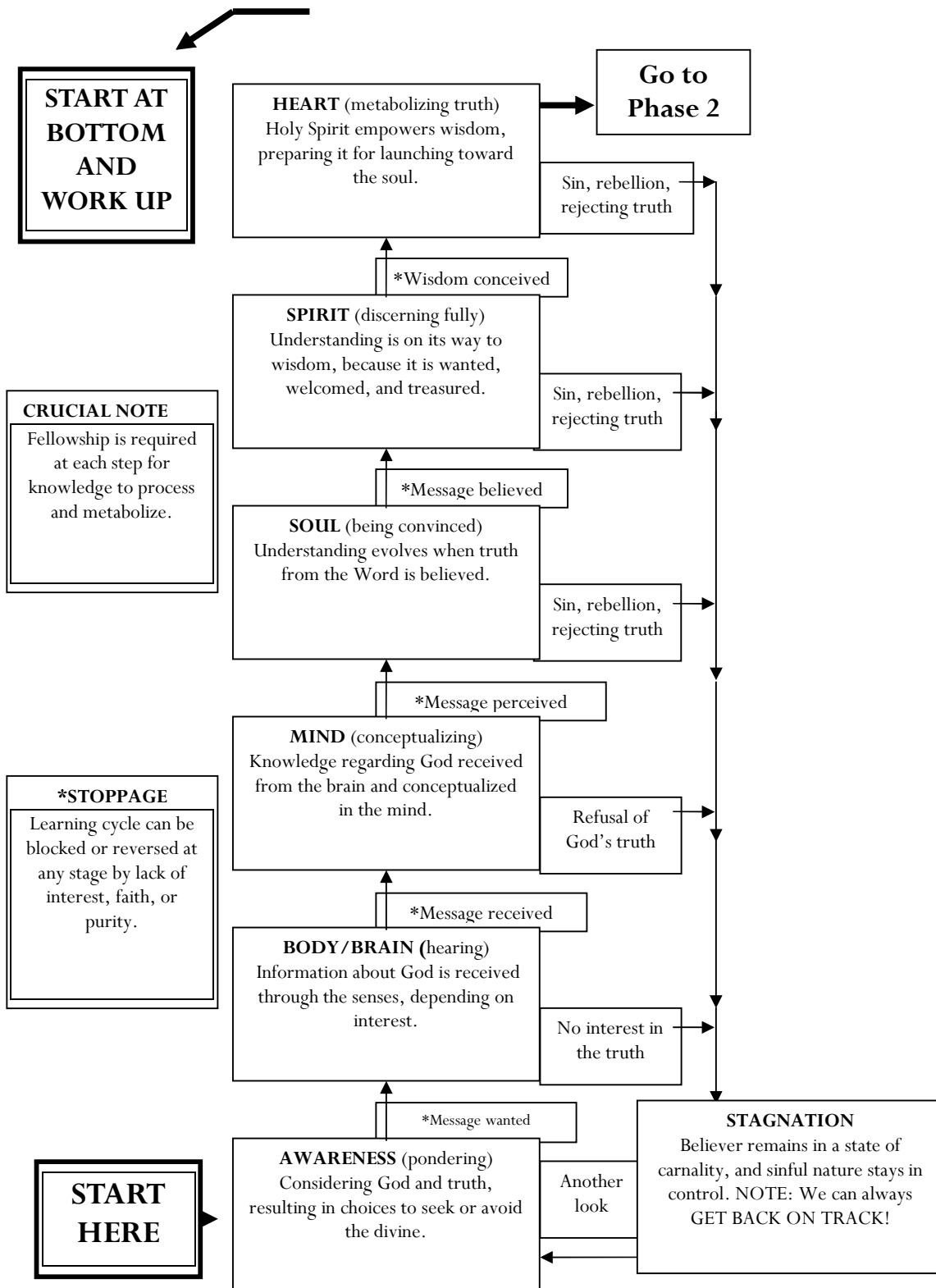
As you look at the charts, try to pin-point the exact spot where your own learning cycle may be stalling out. Here are some possible locations where road blocks may appear on our path toward wisdom and faith:

1. Body/Brain: Do I have little interest in pursuing God and His truth?
2. Mind: Am I spending time hearing, studying, and absorbing the truth?
3. Soul/Spirit: Do I believe what I am learning?
4. Heart: Do I love what I have believed?
5. General for all stages: Am I in fellowship; i.e., am I confessing my sins and operating in an attitude of humility?

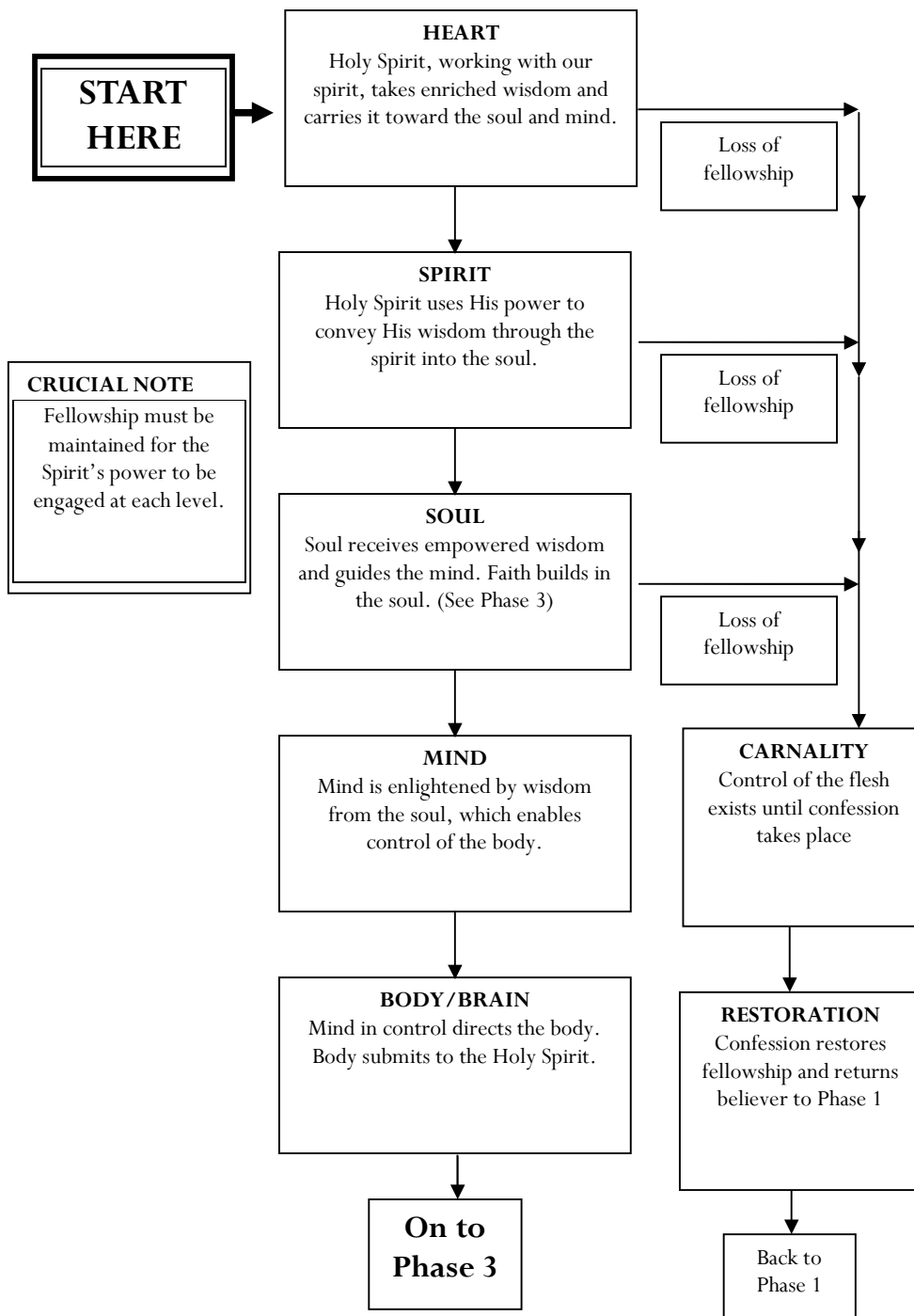
Failure at any of these junctures can lead to a stoppage in our growth and spiritual effectiveness. We must let the process be completed, so that we can have wisdom in the soul that will advise the mind and control the body. Our minds and bodies need supervision! When the learning cycle is completed, we will advance spiritually...and faith will increase. The moral of the story in a nutshell: Faith will be strengthened when knowledge goes the distance.

The charts begin on the next page.

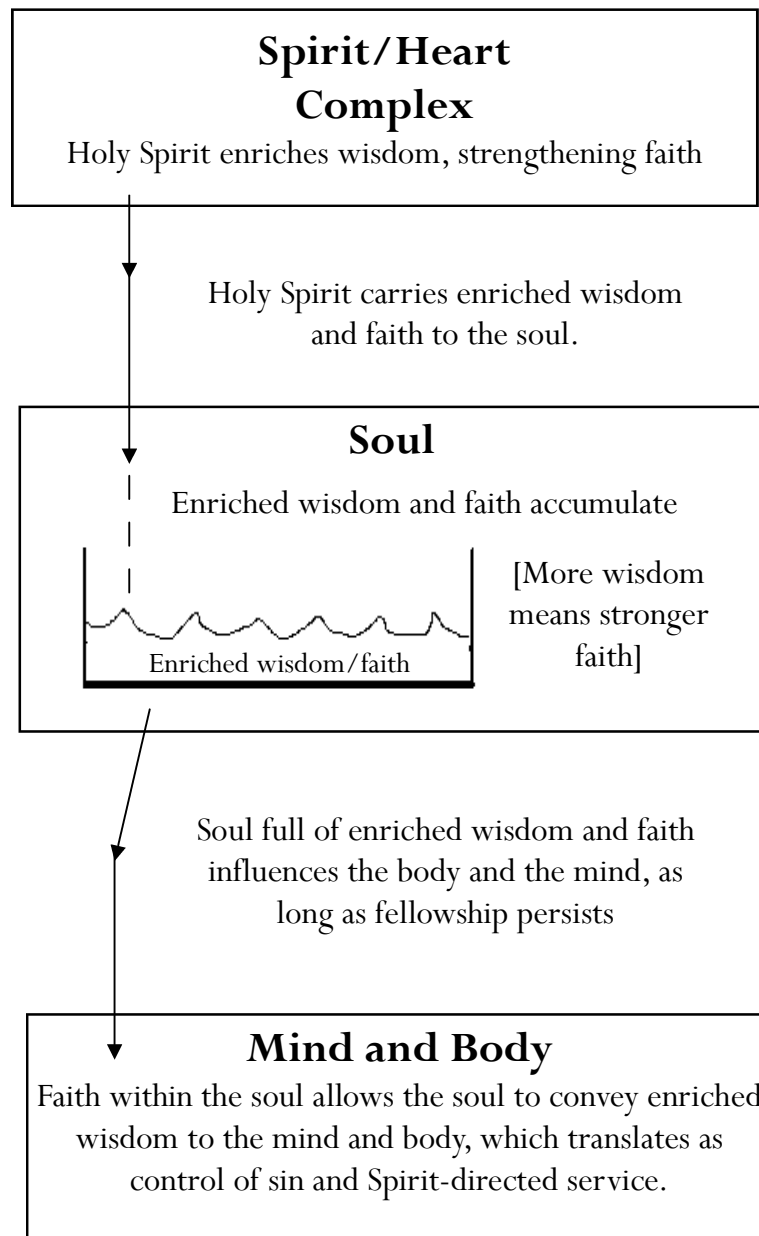
Phase 1: Knowledge Headed for the Believer's Heart



Phase 2: Wisdom Headed for the Believer's Mind/Body



Phase 3: Accumulation of Enriched Wisdom and Faith in the Soul



Take This with You. The thing we want to take from this study is that knowledge alone is not enough to give us what we need in order for us to do what God wants. Those of us who acknowledge God understand that our purpose is to glorify Him in our lives. We give weight and value to our responsibility to Him...not as a drudgery, but as a privilege. To fulfill His requirements and to share in the life He gives, we must take the knowledge we get as we are learning, and allow the Holy Spirit to finish His enrichment of it, so we can apply it.

We know that we must believe what we learn, and then we must love and treasure what we have believed, for it to have its full effect in our lives. Then faith can grow, as nuggets of wisdom are being produced. What a rich and wonderful thing the Word of God is. What a privilege to live in this time when maximum exploration of it, and understanding of it, is possible. We love the Word, because it points to Him...to our Savior and our God...and acquaints us with His ways and His grace.

As we know Him better, we believe Him more, and—even more than that—we love Him more. It is this love component that marks our arrival at the place of wisdom and faith. Greater wisdom and greater faith lead to the fulfillment of our greatest requirement, which is to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds. Wisdom and faith enable this, but without them, try as we may, we will not have the love in our hearts that God is looking for.

Whatever else we become in life, or whatever service we do, the ultimate achievement for us is to love God. This comes as we understand grace and mercy and His lovingkindness toward us. Our appreciation for His patience and forgiveness grows into pure love, as we come to know that we are miserably undeserving of such generosity.

Because it is so important for us to know and love this wonderful God, part of our coming to fully recognize His grace and mercy will—for most of us—involve failing at some point. Few will learn how great God is without first seeing how incompetent we are.

We don't intend to fail or really want to fail. We just will. And the more mature we become, the more bitter that failure pill will taste. When we fail, if we are also growing, we will come to see in ever-increasing measure how much what we are depends on His making of us what we cannot be on our own. Perhaps the greatest discovery we will ever make is the way that God's love has made a way for "failers" to become "winners".

Closure. It has been our custom to sprinkle in with the main body of the text we are writing a certain amount of appended material to embellish the concepts we are presenting. We depart from that practice here, by providing some additional reading beyond the main body to help us conclude this book. The value of these appendices will be seen in the title for each. It is highly recommended that you take time to read these excerpts from former studies to refine your understanding of the concepts we have provided in this book. Here is a list of what has been added...for your edification:

Appendix H, "Importance of Wisdom"

Appendix I, "Praying for Wisdom"

Appendix J, “The Faith Perspective”

Appendix K, “Loving and Welcoming the Truth”

We look forward to continuing our studies into the great richness of God’s Word. What a joy it is to learn and share the things He offers to us!

Appendices

Appendix A

The Solution for Sin

In This Appendix...

- A. Confession of Sins*
- B. Alternative Forms of Confession*
- C. Fellowship as Seen in 1 John 1*
- D. The Holy Spirit vs. the Sinful Nature*
- E. Discipline for Unconfessed Sin*

A. Confession of Sins

One of the big surprises for many new believers is that evil is still part of our lives. The Holy Spirit comes to live within us at salvation, and never leaves us as long as we are alive. But we still have a sinful nature, and we showed earlier how the powerful forces of the world and the devil conspire with our nature to perpetuate sin in our lives.

Keep in mind that Christ paid for all our sins on the cross. They are paid for, but not necessarily forgiven at the moment. At salvation, the slate is wiped clean, but soon after that time, we commit one sin or another, thus beginning a life-long struggle with sin. It is easy to sin, and the requirements NOT to sin are so exact and stringent that it is almost impossible not to stray. The battle rages around us, so we must *give priority* to addressing sin in our lives, or we will not be successful and effective as Christians.

We have already seen how some believers try to beat sin by keeping the Law. Others address sin by assuming a “holy” appearance and posture once or twice a week, gathering with other “aspirants to holiness” to exchange approval and assuage spiritual failures. If others around us periodically acknowledge our spiritual “worthiness”, we may remain content with hiding the sins we know we commit...and we might even hide them from ourselves. But the result? Not acknowledging our failures to ourselves begins a process of denial that extends to God, thus preventing God’s forgiveness, because we are concealing our sins. Hiding sins from God is always disastrous. We will explain.

When we honestly examine ourselves and identify the things we do and think, the bad things, we can lay these out before God, so He can forgive them. He knows about them already, of course, but He wants us to come before Him...with our sins in our hands...so we can present them to Him, in full recognition of His love and grace and mercy, whereby **he can forgive them**. If we hide them from God, they will remain our personal cache of evil, and fester inside of us...unforgiven.

We will study the first chapter of 1st John shortly, but for now we want to see the process for our getting forgiveness in a key verse in this epistle. 1 John 1:9 (NET) says, “But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” Keep it simple. Faith in and use of God’s method for forgiveness will bring forgiveness to us. When we believe this technique and exercise it, we will be forgiven...and cleansed. The technique...is confession of our sins.

According to Vine, the word “confess” comes from the Greek word, *homologeō*, which means to “speak the same thing”, or to *agree* with God by identifying an act, thought, or condition that we know He considers “wrong”. When we *confess*, we are virtually reflecting God’s view of our sin, thus acknowledging His love and mercy in forgiving that sin. Ultimately, this is an acknowledgement of the work of His Son on the cross, where the sin was paid for.

Notice the phrase in 1 Jn. 1:9: “all unrighteousness”. When we acknowledge the sins we know and remember, the sins that we *don’t know*, or that we *can’t remember*, will be cleansed, along with the ones we know and identify.

We need to insert a parenthetical note here to clarify that the epistles of John were addressed to *believers*, which means that the process of confessing sins is NOT part of the salvation experience, and is effective for BELIEVERS ONLY. We should also interject that confession is to be given to God the Father only, and not to an intermediary, such as a priest or other confidant. There is no evidence that confessing to others contributes to our forgiveness.

We want to see some examples of confession in this section, and will complement these with a list of additional passages at the end of Chapter 28. That list contains over 60 scriptural references dealing with confession. For now, here are some instances of confession for your immediate perusal:

- Lev. 5:5—“When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.” This has changed a little for us in the “Church Age”, in that no priest is involved in our forgiveness. The concept of confession, however, is the same.
- Ps. 32:5—“I confessed my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.’ And you forgave me. All my guilt is gone.” In verse 6, David adds, “Therefore, let all the godly [believers] confess their rebellion...that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment [or discipline...more on this later].”
- Ps. 51:5—“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 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 that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

- Prov. 28:13 (NET)—”The one who covers his transgressions will not prosper, but whoever confesses them and forsakes them will find mercy.” “Confess” is, essentially, to name, and “forsake” implies a change based on that identification. That does not mean we will never commit the sin again, because we probably will, but it shows a *true agreement* with God about the sin, indicating that we share his disdain for it. It should be noted, as we anticipate a future study on the topic of “change”, that confession can *never* be an excuse to sin. Confession is not a license, as many have discovered, much to their chagrin.

When we confess our sins, we can have CONFIDENCE that God is forgiving us. And there is no need for guilt after we are forgiven, no matter how far we have gone astray, or how long we have been there. To confess and not accept the covering made available through the work of Christ is to deny grace and insult God. After confession, we must accept forgiveness and move on.

When we understand the loving and tender nature of God’s forgiveness, we cannot refuse to thank Him, amazed at His mercy. And when we are in a mode of thanksgiving and worship, sin will not find a landing place in our hearts. When we access His forgiveness, and *walk close to Him*, as we shall see, we can perform good acts in His power...and live in a spirit of adoration for Him.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the sole method for believers to get forgiveness for the sins we commit?

Question 2. Why did I not mention the part about standing barefoot in the snow for three days to atone for our sins?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 65:3—When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.

Is. 16:18—Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

Is. 6:6-7—Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Ps. 103:11-12—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.

B. Alternative Forms of Confession

We have established the centrality of confession as a key to our Christian walk. Since confession is so important, we must make sure that we have the full picture of what confession is and how it works.

There is a tendency for us to rationalize our own behavior, to excuse our own mistakes, and to justify our own actions. Sometimes we want to wrap ourselves in a cloak of self-righteousness and convince ourselves and others that we are really okay, and that we deserve God's favor and blessings. But we are mistaken if we think that we are not sinful, or that somehow we can manage our own cleansing.

Jer. 2:22 confirms the futility of self-cleansing, saying, "Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign Lord." David understood the correct process for cleansing, and expressed it in Ps. 32:5: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin." David knew to do the following: 1) confess directly to God, and 2) be aware that God is the only one who cleanses. We confess *only* to God...the *only* forgiver.

Identifying specific sins directly before God is the primary method for confessing our sins, but we want to isolate and briefly describe several alternative forms of confession that Scripture indicates are acceptable for forgiveness. We see these in the following:

- **Asking for Forgiveness.** If we can't remember all our sins, or if we are in the heat of battle on the job, or driving in heavy traffic, or fighting through some health crisis, or experiencing relationships that are strained, and so on...we may have to resort to a streamlined version of confession, seen as a simple request for God to forgive us for our sins. Jesus used the phrase "forgive us our sins" in a prayer that He taught to His disciples (see Lk. 11:4). And David used confessional shorthand occasionally, as seen in Ps. 51:2, in which David pleaded: "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." **God sees our hearts**, so He is well aware when a shorter version of confession is actually an "honest" confession...or, conversely, when it is an effort to keep our sins under wraps. Forgiveness will *never* occur unless the heart is involved in the confession.
- **Pleas for Forgiveness.** The key component in confession is a true spirit of humility toward God, and an admission that we have failed. A "plea" for forgiveness is an intensified form of "asking for forgiveness". In Ps. 25:17-18, David was looking for forgiveness and relief, when he prayed, "The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins." In verse 11 of this same passage, he pleaded, "For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great." A sincere plea for forgiveness will be heard.
- **Daniel's Prayer of Confession.** Daniel 9 presents a great prayer of confession, in which Daniel uses some "bulk" terms for sins. Sins are often "lumped" or "bundled" together in confessions, seen with such labels as "my sins", "my weakness", "my not obey-

ing”, “my rebelliousness”, “my turning away”, and so on. Sometimes, as in Daniel 9, these bulk terms are mixed with specific sins. When we approach the “throne of grace”, God looks first at our motives and the condition of our hearts. Words can help us relate to the process, but God does not want specific words, *unless the heart is genuinely behind them*. We will quote Daniel 9: 18-19 here, to show the heart-felt nature of Daniel’s prayer of confession:

Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.

□ **Additional Forms of Confession.** Daniel’s prayer was answered following his confession, which meant that the confession worked, but there are still other forms of confession that God honors. We will compact these into the following, for the sake of brevity:

- **Being Sorry for Sins.** In Ps. 38:18, David showed regret over his sin, saying, “I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.” Paul also suggested that sorrow for sins can play a part in confession, saying, “...yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance....Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation [of the temporal kind, meaning “deliverance through restoration”] and leaves no regret...” (2 Cor. 7:9-10, in part; cf, James 4:8-10)
- **“Turning Away From” or “Forsaking” Evil.** The idea of “turning away” from and “forsaking” sin is seen in Is. 55:7, which says, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”The process of turning away is first and foremost an internal event in the heart...tantamount to confession.
- **Lifting up Our Souls to God.** This is wordless submission to God’s mercy and grace, as expressed in Ps. 86:3-5a, which says, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. You are forgiving and good, O Lord...”
- **Showing Humility.** This is expressed very well in Lk. 18:13-14: “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Humility is always a key component in the confession process.
- **Repentance.** 1 Ki. 8:46a, 47a, 48a, and 49, quoted together, says, “When they sin against you...if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and

repent and plead with you...and say ‘We have sinned’...and if they turn back to you...then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause....And forgive your people.”“Repentance” is a form of confession, meaning to “change our attitude” toward our sins to match God’s view of them.

- **“Generic” Naming of Sins.** Sometimes we can have a specific sin in mind, but name it only as a generic sin, without articulating it categorically or semantically. An example of this is seen in 2 Sam. 12:13, which says, “Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’” He actually had more than one sin in mind, involving adultery and murder...but he handled them generically and in bulk.

The main point we want to establish in this section is that confession, and real change, take place first on the **inside**. As we learn about God’s techniques and promises...and mature...we will refine confession, and see more clearly the connection between self-disclosure and *heart attitudes* that reflect God’s view of sin. The objective of confession is to align our assessment of our own sins with God’s assessment. That is the heart-view that God wants to see in us.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Who can we confess to and get cleansing?

Question 2. Name three alternative forms of confession.

Question 3. Will God accept a reasonable explanation for a sin, and forgive us because we faced unusual or extenuating circumstances?

Question 4. When God evaluates the quality of our confession to determine acceptability, where does he look?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 51:9-10—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.

Ps. 79:9—Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name’s sake.

2 Sam. 24:10—David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.”

C. Fellowship as Seen in 1 John 1

We want to be “clean”, meaning that all our sins are forgiven, not just so we can be sparkly and shiny, but for a very good reason: It is only when we are cleansed of all sin that we can fellowship with God. This means many things, as we shall see, but—for now—we will see fellowship as having God nearby to help us in every way.

The first chapter in John's first epistle presents confession as "naming" our sins, but that does not negate the positive effects of the other forms of confession. A condition of contriteness in the heart is the most important component in the confession process, as we have seen.

To reduce the size of this section, we ask you to use your Bible to follow our analysis of this chapter. We used the *Interlinear Bible* to study the truths found in this chapter, but almost any translation will serve to unveil the concepts this passage teaches. We will present this passage with as much conciseness as possible, as we explore it verse-by-verse.

1 Jn. 1:1-3 indicates that John was an eye-witness to the life of Christ, and enjoyed first-hand fellowship with Jesus. He says he is reporting what he had "seen and heard", and then he presents to them the basis for their fellowship with each other. The fellowship bond they had with each other was predicated on their mutual fellowship with God, and, if either they or John broke their fellowship with God, their fellowship with each other would also be broken. The *prerequisite* for fellowship with each other is fellowship with God.

Fellowship with each other is a *byproduct* of our fellowship with God. This is desirable, but the primary objective of fellowship with God is an end in itself, and is the paramount goal of John's epistle.

1 Jn. 1:4 presents John's reason for writing this epistle, which is to give them "full joy". We will see later that love, joy, and peace are outcomes and indicators of fellowship. He is telling them that his purpose is to give them the pathway to fellowship with God.

1 Jn. 1:5 reports that God is pure, holy, perfect, and totally above wrongdoing of any kind. This refers to God's perfection and glory, also known as "the light". This is the perfect God we want to approach...we want fellowship with His perfection, in which no blemish or darkness exists.

1 Jn. 1:6-7 tells us that—if we claim to have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness—we lie. In other words, it *is not true* that we can have fellowship with God and still be operating in darkness. Darkness, easily recognizable as sin, prevents fellowship. From this passage, we learn that "walking in the light" precedes Jesus' "cleansing us from all sins". It is in the light of His perfection that our sins can be seen. When we bring our sins to His light, they are **exposed**, so He can forgive them. If we refuse to bring our sins to His light, they will not be forgiven, and *we will not have fellowship with Him!*

Living in the light is not "living perfectly", because we can't; rather, it is facing our imperfection in the light of His love and grace, which bring forgiveness. **Light is the key to cleansing, and cleansing is the key to fellowship.** And the process is instantaneous, since light immediately dispels darkness. Restoration to fellowship at confession is *immediate*.

1 Jn. 1:8 lets us know that we cannot hide our sinfulness. When we refuse to acknowledge our sinful state, we are deceiving ourselves, on the basis of a lie (from Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature). This is normal human psychology, but it works against us spiritually. When we look into our spiritual mirrors, we must see the truth about our sin, and realize how much our cleanliness and worthiness for fellowship depend on the mercy and grace of God. When we truly see ourselves, we will be ready to confess.

1 Jn. 1:9 gives us the heart of this technique, which is to acknowledge or identify our sins before God. This is the specific act of bringing our sins into the light. This is naming our sins AS SINS, saying the same thing about them that God says, agreeing with Him about them, and acknowledging that only He can correct our errors through forgiveness. Faithful admission is then greeted by faithful forgiveness. He is FAITHFUL to forgive us...it works 100% of the time, when we confess.

1 Jn. 1:10 concludes by reminding us that we—as believers—commit many acts of sin, which is why we must confess them often. We can't correct our sins on our own, so we must depend on God to forgive them...and then to give us help in changing our sinful pattern (more on "changing" our sinful pattern will be provided soon).

The implications and outcomes of fellowship with God are wonderful and amazing. We will see these clearly in upcoming studies. Honest, humble confession of our sins is the means for regaining our fellowship-walk with God, and—as we shall see—unlocking His power within us. Fellowship is the difference between "living in the light" and "living in darkness". Without fellowship, a power outage will occur, and we will be operating in the dark.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What does it mean to be "cleansed" of our sins? **Question 2.** What is "darkness", as seen in 1 Jn. 1?

Question 3. Why did John write this epistle? (Hint: See 1 Jn. 1:4)

Question 4. When fellowship with God is lost, how is it recovered?

Other Scriptures

Amos 3:3—Will two walk together unless they are agreed?

Eph. 5:13—But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Jn. 3:20—Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

D. The Holy Spirit vs. the Sinful Nature (Pivotal study. Read carefully...twice.)

We receive the Holy Spirit at salvation (Gal. 3:2; 4:6). This begins a relationship that continues until we die or until Jesus comes back. But the sinful nature stays with us and a contest is set up between our nature and the Spirit of God, and both of them reside inside of us. We are no match for God, so it seems He would just eliminate any efforts to go against Him, but *God has given us choice*, so we can choose the forces of evil and sin over Him...and we do it all the time, vows and resolutions notwithstanding.

So the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit are in conflict. Gal. 5:17 says, “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.” This verse follows verse 16, which instructs us to “live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Verse 18 then adds this: “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” So living by...or in the power of...the Holy Spirit enables us to avoid the trap of gratifying sinful desires. And being led...or controlled by...the Holy Spirit keeps us from operating “under the law”. As we shall see later, living under the law is the same as being under the control of the sinful nature.

Living in the power of the Holy Spirit...being controlled by the Holy Spirit...gives us the ability to produce the “fruit of the Spirit”, which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23a). On the other hand, the works of the flesh (sinful nature) are “sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Gal. 5:19-21).

We will classify being controlled by the Holy Spirit as “spirituality”, and being controlled by the sinful nature as “carnality” (from the word “carnal”, or “related to flesh”). What, though, determines whether we are controlled by the Spirit or by the sinful nature? Obviously, if we are *not* “living in the light” and are thus “living in darkness”, we will not be controlled by the Spirit. This means that the control of the Spirit is related to our being “in the light”, or *in fellowship*. **If we are in fellowship, we will be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and not by the sinful nature.** This is central, and is why it is so important to stay “in fellowship”.

Sin disrupts fellowship and puts the sinful nature in charge, a condition that will last until we confess our sins and are restored to fellowship. Keep in mind that restoration is “immediate”, but so is loss of fellowship, which can happen in the blink of a wandering thought. Sin happens quickly, and with devastating effects that have been largely underestimated. Fellowship means control by the perfect God, while its absence means control has been passed to the sinful nature...in league with its insidious pals, the world and the devil. This is why confession must be a perpetual practice, because the margin between spirituality and carnality is so narrow, and these can change so quickly.

Control is crucial. Rom. 8:6b says, “...the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” Gal. 5:25 admonishes, “...keep in step with [meaning “walk by”] the Spirit.” When we are controlled by the Spirit,

and “walking by Him”, we will be “living in the “light”. Eph. 5: 10 links *living in the light* with *walking by the Spirit*, showing that the fruit of the light and the fruit of the Spirit are the same.

To confirm this, compare Gal. 5:22-23, quoted earlier, with Eph. 5:10, seen here: “...for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.” Then compare Eph. 5:11-12 (deeds of darkness) with Gal. 5:19-21 (works of the flesh). See the connection? “Living in the light”, which we saw in the last section as “being in fellowship”, is equated to “walking by the Spirit”, or “being controlled by the Spirit”. “Living in darkness” is the same as “being controlled by the sinful nature”.

Maybe we’re getting bogged down, here. But the conclusion is simple: Being in fellowship results in spirituality, or the control of the Holy Spirit, while being out of fellowship is tied to carnality, or the control of the sinful nature.

Later in Eph. 5, we see a clear reference to the “control” of the Holy Spirit in verses 18 and 19, as follows: “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” That which fills us, such as alcohol, controls us. When the Spirit “fills” us, He controls us...and all of this is hinged on fellowship.

So which will it be: the sinful nature or the Holy Spirit? Which will we choose to control us? If it is the sinful nature, we do nothing...the sinful nature will do its dirty work all on its own. If it is the Holy Spirit, we must *confess* to stay in fellowship, to qualify us for the Holy Spirit’s control and leadership.

We will see over the course of our studies many benefits that emanate from the control of the Holy Spirit. We will cite a few of them here:

- The Holy Spirit teaches us. (Jn. 14:25-26)
- He teaches us about the deeper things of God. (1 Cor. 2:10-11)
- The Spirit gives us competence. (2 Cor. 3:4-6)
- The Spirit provides and activates gifts that enable us to help each other. (1 Cor. 12, especially verses 7-11).
- The Holy Spirit produces fruit through us. (Gal. 5:22-23)
- He works miracles among us. (Gal. 5:3)
- He even prays in our place because we do not know what to pray for. (Rom. 8:26-27)

There is much more to this...and we’ll get to it. For enrichment or clarification of this pivotal study, refer to the chart, “Spirituality/Carnality Flowchart”, at the end of Chapter 28.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. A great internal battle goes on inside of us between the _____ and our _____ .

Question 2. What breaks fellowship?

Question 3. What condition must exist for us to be controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Question 4. Living in the light is equated with control of the _____

_____ .
Question 5. Living in darkness is equated with control of the _____.

Other Scriptures

Rom. 8:5—Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Rom. 5:8—Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

1 Jn. 1:9 (NET)—If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.

E. Discipline for Unconfessed Sin

A good parent will use discipline to correct and guide a child, not to satisfy his own anger. The term “wrath” has been used in the past to describe God’s response to sin and rebellion, but this is a “human” quality that makes God’s plan sound like a campaign for vengeance or rage. The opposite is true. God uses divine discipline, based on love and grace, to bring us to “repentance”, or *confession*. Everything He does regarding us is designed to draw us closer to Him, where He can energize us, protect us, and fellowship with us...without forcing us to act, and without taking away our freedom of choice.

God deals with us in *love*, not in anger or disgust, even though His discipline can be quite painful. Since the objective of discipline is to get us to use the *techniques* we are learning, then the *condition for discipline* is that *we are not using them*. At the present time, we have only seen one of the techniques, which is confession of our sins, so we are examining discipline as a means for God dealing with “unconfessed sin”. He wants to TEACH us to confess, and then prod us, as needed, to make sure we follow through.

In Rev. 3:19, Jesus told the apostle John, “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 him, and he with me.” This is a perfect picture of the sequence of God’s discipline. Here is the normal order for discipline: 1) God loves believers, 2) God gives discipline or rebuke for unconfessed sins, as needed, 3) repentance or confession takes place, and 4) forgiveness is given and fellowship is restored.

Because God loves us, He disciplines us so we will honestly reflect on our sins and repent...i.e., change our minds about our sins, so that our view of them will match His. But we must be clear, God does not approve of sin, and will not ignore it. Sin will incur discipline, if left untended, and this discipline can be severe, up to and including physical death. We must not take it lightly. 1 Cor. 10:8 reports an occasion in the Old Testament when sexual immorality resulted in the death of twenty-three thousand Jews in one day! Ouch!

Even if discipline reaches an extreme point, we must recognize that discipline is for our good. Prov. 3:11a advises us, “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke....” Job 5:17 adds, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.”

We should be thankful for discipline, because it teaches us and makes us *better*. Prov. 15:32 says, “He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.” Therefore, we should actually “love” discipline, as called for in Prov. 12:1, which says, “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.” If we accept the discipline...and respond to it...we will benefit from it. And get this...if the discipline is being administered because of unconfessed sin, and we *confess*, the *discipline stops*!

Discipline is an opportunity for us to make correction. This is why Heb. 12:5-11 encourages us strongly to endure the discipline with gratitude. This passage, quoted here in part, says the following:

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son....God disciplines us for our good, 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.

When the outcome of discipline is our return to fellowship, we will regain the control of the Spirit, or “share in His holiness”, so that His fruit can be produced through us...a “harvest of righteousness and peace”. Are you beginning to see how this works? God wants us to stay in fellowship, and He will pressure us (not force us) to confess and stay there. It’s that simple.

We should also distinguish what happens with believers who sin, as compared with unbelievers, who are totally under the influence of their sinful natures. God disciplines believers because we are His children. Unbelievers, on the other hand, will not be “corrected through discipline”, but will ultimately “stand judgment” for not believing in Christ.

1 Cor. 11:31-32 sheds light on the judgment of *unbelievers*, as opposed to the judgment of *believers*. Verse 31 says, “If we [believers] would judge ourselves [confess our sins], we would not be judged.” This particular “judgment” refers to the discipline of believers, not the eternal judgment that unbelievers face. Verse 32 adds: “When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.” The consequence for the sins of believers is *discipline*, not *condemnation*.

Finally, we want to give a brief preview of future studies by indicating that not all suffering is “discipline”. If all our sins are confessed, any suffering we experience is not for discipline, but for testing and training. God is teaching us to “trust Him”, a subject we will cover thoroughly in future studies. We will study suffering, testing, training, and growth...down the line.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Even in discipline, God is dealing with us in _____.

Question 2. According to what we have studied so far, when we are being disciplined, what is God trying to get us to do?

Question 3. What does it mean to “judge ourselves”?

Question 4. If we see a fellow believer suffering, can we just assume that person is being disciplined?

Other Scriptures

Ex. 34:6-7a—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....

Ps. 39:11a—You rebuke and discipline men for their sin.

Heb. 12:7-8—Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Appendix B

Ways to Confess our Sins

- Naming or citing our sins to the Father. 1 John 1:9
- 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

Appendix C

Verses on Confession

One of the major doctrines in the Bible is “Confession of Sins”. The steps for confession are simple and straightforward...just name your sins. Shame, guilt, remorse, and sorrow can be part of confession...but these are not required for confession to occur. What *is* required is “humility” and “sincerity”...or a keen awareness of the difference between the sins that have been committed and the standards set by God. This is also known as “humility before God”. When we know God’s standards, and honestly admit our failure to meet them, confession is taking place...and forgiveness will follow. God promises to forgive our sins *every time* we confess them, so—since we sin a lot—confession should be a common occurrence in our Christian walk.

Here are selected verses that reflect either the procedures for confession, or examples of confession, as seen in the Bible:

Lev. 26:40-42	Ps. 38:3-5	Jer. 3:25	Matt. 23:25-27
Num. 21:7	Ps. 38:18	Jer. 4:14	John 13:1-17
Deut. 4:29-31	Ps. 40:12	Jer. 14:7	John 15:2-4
Deut. 30:1-10	Ps. 41:4	Jer. 14:20	Rom. 2:4
2 Sam. 24:10	Ps. 51:1-4	Jer. 18:8	2 Cor. 7:9-11
1 Ki. 8:33-50	Ps. 51:7-17	Jer. 31:18-19	Eph. 5:14
2 Chron. 7:14	Ps. 69:5	Lam. 3:39-42	1 Tim. 2:25
2 Chron. 30:9	Ps. 106:6	Ezek. 14:6	James 4:8-10
Ezra 9:6-10	Ps. 119:176	Ezek. 18:27-31	1 Jn. 1:9
Neh. 1:6-7	Ps. 130:1-4	Ezek. 20:43	Rev. 3:1-3
Neh. 9:2	Prov. 28:13	Ezek. 37:23	Rev. 3:19
Neh. 9:33-35	Is. 6:5	Dan. 9:5-7	
Job 33:8-12	Is. 38:17	Dan. 10:12	
Job 36:10	Is. 44:22	Hos. 5:15	
Job 40:45	Is. 55:6-7	Hos. 14:1-2	
Ps 32:5	Is. 59:12	Joel 2:12-14	
Ps. 34:14-18	Jer. 3:12-13	Micah 7:9	

Appendix D

Walking by Faith

Part One: What is Faith?

Defining Faith

We have studied several techniques: confession of sins, prayer, and studying the Word. We have mentioned the technique of “trusting God”, or faith...but now we want to examine it more deeply to see exactly what it is and how it is applied. And we want to introduce “Faith” as Technique 4. The thing we have recognized already is how all the techniques work together; they are inter-dependent and symbiotic (they give life to each other). The techniques are *not* God, but they *point* to Him, and *give access* to Him...to His power and grace...and that is what we are searching for.

The question is this: What is faith? Heb. 11:1 says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Faith is, most of all, *being sure* of something, even if we cannot see it. We cannot see God, but we are *sure* He exists, and we know that His existence is far beyond anything we can find in our “experience”. Having faith in God means that we have been totally convinced of His existence and essence, without experiencing Him through our senses. We believe, because we choose to believe, and our choosing to believe comes from our wanting God.

All conduits for interaction and interplay with God are based on faith. We are saved through faith, and—as believers—we walk by faith. The Christian life begins and ends with faith (Rom. 1:17).

Faith is believing. Faith is trust. Faith is accepting something as *true*, even if others don’t. When we speak of faith in Jesus Christ, that faith is expressed toward the *message* about Jesus. When we speak of faith in God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, that faith is expressed in His Word, which teaches us *truth* about Him. We *relate* to God because we *believe in His Son*, and we *know* Him, because *we believe what He tells us* about Himself.

Faith is not a *constant* for those who have been saved, because it fluctuates from one day to the next within each believer. Faith is dependent on the amount of wisdom that is being acquired, which can be more...or less. And it varies from one believer to the next, based on comparative growth and maturity. Faith can get stronger, or it can get weaker; it will not stay as it is. Faith will grow, or it will fade. We are all at various levels of completion, and all of us are headed up or down on the faith scale.

Faith has connections with all parts of our Christian lives...it connects with confession, prayer, and study, and with many other “sub-techniques” that we will study later, such as “gifts” and “surrender”. To use any technique in the absence of faith will negate its effectiveness, which makes faith *central*, but—after all—every one of the techniques is central, and will not work without the others. For example, we cannot learn without confessing and praying for wisdom...and believing what we hear. And we cannot pray unless we have confessed and are following the methods for conducting our prayers. In addition, we cannot build our trust without confessing and studying. And—of course—

we cannot confess without knowing we need to. Any technique we learn will be interwoven with the others to make *each* of them operational through the interaction of *all* of them.

Faith is a mark of God's genius. The problem God solved in eternity past was this: His *created* being (man) decided to follow a "fallen" Satan, which caused man to fall as well. Man was then no longer qualified for communion with God, so something had to be done to make man acceptable. God wanted to restore His fellowship with man, but His own perfection could not accept the imperfection of man. Therefore, God designed a way for His own justice and righteousness to be satisfied by reversing man's fallen condition. He decided to send His Son to perform an act of self-sacrifice to take on man's penalty for being "fallen", thus allowing man to be "forgiven"...and thus coating him with righteousness to make him acceptable to God.

This forgiveness is not automatic for mankind, though it is *available* to everyone. God knew that His plan could not depend on any act or quality of merit that man might produce...so the design to correct man's "fallenness" had to exclude any "work" or effort generated by imperfect man. Here's the ingenious part: God presented faith as the means for man's participation in God's recovery program; faith is not "effort", and draws no merit to the participant. By choosing to *believe* in God's Son, man can access the benefits of Christ's work on the cross, without *being* anything or *doing* anything himself. His only condition is to *believe*, in order to be saved.

We must be clear on this: Faith is *not* effort. Faith has no intrinsic value, requires no action, and exhibits no skill. Faith is worth nothing by itself. Faith draws attention to its object, and the value of faith is vested entirely in that object. By faith, we accept the work of Christ, and then God accepts us. This is true at salvation, and it is also true in our Christian lives. "Works" play no greater part in our daily lives, than they did in our salvation. We bring nothing to the table that God needs. We need Him; He does not need us. Every day is an opportunity to trust Him...to walk each step along the way with an awareness that God is with us and that the work He does is trustworthy.

God solved the problem of eternal condemnation for us. How much more can He solve the day-to-day problems that we face. He will do it, if we will trust Him.

Hope is Faith

Faith for the future is called "hope". We have "hope" for our salvation, because, either we "expect" to be lifted into the sky to be with God forever, or we expect to be "resurrected" in the future. We have "assurance" that we have eternal life, as we see in 1 Pet. 1:3-4, which says the following:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade—kept in heaven for you.

We have God's Word that we have an inheritance that is *eternal*, and we believe it. That is our hope...our faith. This is an example of hope as a *firm expectation* of the future.

The same hope that we have for our eternal lives, we can have for the empowerment of God for our temporal lives. Rom. 8:23b-26a states this clearly in the following:

...we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

Our hope related to salvation began when we were saved. This hope continues now as patience (also a kind of faith) as we wait for our *final* salvation, when Jesus comes for us. Until then, we have “help” from the Holy Spirit. This is the “grace to help in time of need” that we saw in an earlier study (Heb. 4:16). This grace gives us faith for now and hope for the future.

Hope is not seen as something expressed toward a contingency...or a possibility. Hope, like faith, is *certainty* that things are—and will be—exactly as God says they are, even though we cannot see them in front of us. Hope that is weak is not hope at all, but some kind of stiff upper lip about things we fear or wish for...a kind of lilted “hanging-on”, believing that “maybe” things will turn out good. Hope related to God can be *strong*, if we KNOW God and His Word, UNDERSTAND His power and control, and BELIEVE that He is moving and acting in *our best interests*...for our good.

Here are some additional comments on hope, and verses that support them:

Our faith, hope, and expectations are directed toward God, Who raised Christ from the dead. 1 Pet. 1:21 says, “Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

Endurance and the encouragement of Scripture give us hope. Rom. 14:4 declares, “For everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Suffering (to be studied later) produces perseverance, character, and hope, as per Rom. 5:3-4, which says, “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Hope does not disappoint, which means we can *count on it*, as we see in Rom. 5:5, which follows: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

We have faith to endure and grow, but it is our hope that gives us joy, as we look forward not only to God’s provision in this life, but to our life with God. This is where we get relief from the trials of life...looking forward. As we get closer to God, joy increases because hope gets stronger; we anticipate the change from these bodies of death into perfect bodies that cannot decay or suffer. And we give thanks for the hope we have in God’s grace now for living. It will work for us...and through us...when we believe it.

The Object of Faith

The object of our faith is God. Our God is rock-solid. He is caring and faithful and reliable. His love for us never changes...though what we envision as “love” may not be the same as what He has in mind. We may be thinking in terms of “body comfort”, while God is more concerned with spiritual conditions. God created living *souls*, and the bodies we occupy are more like hotels than

homes...they are temporary. God is focused on the heart. His provisions are more clustered around spiritual qualities, than material ones. Our faith in Him is for *spiritual* supplies, but do not despair...He also promises to meet our physical needs (to be discussed thoroughly in Part Seven). His care ultimately extends to all aspects of our lives, and He is there to support us.

The object of our faith...our God...is deserving of our trust, for the following reasons:

God is our refuge. Ps. 18:2 says, “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn [strength] of my salvation, my stronghold.” We are outmanned, outgunned, and outnumbered in the world, where Satan is loose and on the prowl...and our sinful natures are rubbing their hands together, ready to get us into the sin game. We need God’s strength to withstand the evils that surround us. It is good to know that we have a helper, a refuge, a place of safety and provision. We can say with the Psalmist: “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. Salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” (Ps. 62:5-8)

God is our helper. “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:2). He is our only “help”. Ps. 121:5-8 paints a moving picture of God’s protective care, as follows: “The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.” God helps us now, and certainly in eternity. In Ps. 86:2a, David says, “Guard my life, for I am devoted to you,” which is similar to Rom. 8:28, which assures us that “all things work together for good for those who love God.” God is there to help us and protect us.

God Cares for Us. God is watching us...wanting to provide, waiting to empower, and willing to help. But we have to be *with* Him...*near* Him...to be within range to receive what He offers every day. When we are in the *place of provision*, feeding on His Word, praying, and staying in fellowship, we will see His help. And we will know that we are safe. But without the perspective that wisdom, prayer and spirituality offer, we will not be able to recognize—and express faith in—God’s care. When our condition is right, we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.” (Heb. 13:6b) God helps us, because He cares for us, but for His care to be engaged, we must be in a condition to receive it.

Because of God’s love for us, and His promised care, we can have confidence that He is going to watch over us. We can count on it! We have to do our part, of course, but why wouldn’t we? He has told us exactly what we need to do to have the greatest protection possible. All we have to do is trust Him. If we do this, we will know that we are safe, wanting nothing. If we move away from Him, however, we will have needs that will not be met; we will ask but not get answers; we will

hunger, and not be fed. God helps those who move constantly toward Him, and those whose eyes are on Him.

Part Two: What Faith Isn't

Faith Isn't "Self-trust"

In speaking to the Corinthians about his persecutions, Paul reported in 2 Cor 1:8-9 that he had been close to death at the hands of his persecutors. He felt that the death sentence has been pronounced, and the moment of his death was now at hand. He was comforted by his belief that God could raise him from the dead, but resurrection was not on his mind...it was his helplessness. Paul wanted his readers to understand that every single thing in their lives, and now in ours, is within the scope of God's power, will, and purpose. Conversely, it is ludicrous that we should believe in ourselves, instead of in Him. But most of the time, we choose our own way...and our own judgment...over His.

Here is a phrase from verse 9 that confirms what we are saying: "...this [near-death suffering] happened that we [Paul] might not rely on ourselves but on God...." Paul is clear that our very existence depends on God...every breath...and that we cannot sustain ourselves without Him. So it is inappropriate for us to trust ourselves, but—get this—it *is also a sin!*

Rom. 14:23b says, "...everything that is not of faith is sin." Anything you do or think or say that operates outside of faith in God is a sin. When faith is absent, you are in a *state of sin*. Heb. 11:6a adds this to this notion: "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]." When faith is not active, we are in a perpetual state of not pleasing God.

But what about "self-care". We have to work and take care of practical matters all the time, because we live in the world. If we don't take care of ourselves, we will starve. Self-awareness and self-care are principles of life that assume that we will take care of our responsibilities for the common-sense maintenance of our well-being. The most important principle here is, "Don't be lazy!". But even principles of self-care are subsumed within a larger, over-riding reality, which is what we find in God and His Word. No one would ever suggest that we should do *nothing*, but what we must understand is that every thing we do, even in the area of self-care, or recreation, or taking care of day-to-day business, or whatever, must be cast against a backdrop of God's will, a life of prayer, faith in God the controller of everything, and a reliance on the truths of God's Word to govern our lives.

The techniques we are learning have to do with our trusting in God and relying on His power to accomplish *His will* and do *His work...through us*. I am convinced that there is no area of our lives that will not be improved, no matter how mundane or corporeal, if our faith is growing, if we are staying in fellowship, and if we pray constantly. God never leaves us, and we should never leave Him. God and His Word must always be with us, and—no matter how much confidence we have in our "real-world" skills, we must never see ourselves as sufficient in ourselves...without God.

When our attention shifts from ourselves to God, a new priority arises that recognizes the superiority of God's provision over the unreliable sustenance of self-dependency. When our focus is glued to ourselves, we will stumble and fall, whereas—if our consciousness is affixed to God—we will move out on a divine path toward meaning and purpose. This is because faith in God, rather

than ourselves, gets results. Jer. 10:23 says, “I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.”

One thing is certain: We cannot live the Christian life...only Christ can live that life, and He does that through us. But the most compelling tendency of our flesh is to trust ourselves...to operate independently of God, until we get into trouble. This is why we can go days without praying, why we ignore our need to confess our sins, why we open God’s Word only once every week or so. This is why we spend our thinking-time dreaming about what we want, or what we don’t have, or what we want to do, rather than in a reverent acknowledgement of the all-powerful God.

When we encounter life’s problems or pursue our own aspirations, we tend to be focused on ourselves as the solver of all problems, and the creator of our own blessings. In reality, what we can provide for ourselves, including material/physical provisions, and especially spiritual assets, will not compare with what God wants to give us. The harder we try to solve our problems *apart from God* and His resources, the more we get in God’s way, and prevent Him from blessing us in His superior way.

Somehow, we have to get the message that God is God...and we are not. This sounds familiar...maybe even a little cliché, by now...but we too often live our lives as though we have no clue as to the veracity of this truth. When we begin to understand Who it is that determines the outcomes of all events in our lives, we will be on our way toward a faith that is aimed at Him. We must get closer to God than we are to ourselves, which is not natural, and will take a lot of training. Arrogance does not go down easily.

We close this lesson with a clear message from Jer. 17:5: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.’” Faith in ourselves does not bring blessing, but cursing. Faith in God brings His best to us.

Faith Isn’t “Works”

We have established the smallness of man and his inability to please God on his own, and the bigness of God and His unique ability to please Himself through us. But there are those who insist that works play some part in the process of our being saved and in living the Christian life. This flies in the face of grace and its provisions, which do not rely on the puny resources of man, but on the power of God. It is the quintessence of arrogance for us to think that something *we* do can impress an infinite God.

Phil. 2:12b-13 says, “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” The phrase “work out your salvation”, means to accomplish or complete our own “deliverance”. The deliverance referred to is escape from the control of the sinful nature, and all the forces of evil that it invites. This deliverance applies to our temporal condition here on earth, not our eternal salvation. In the Christian life, our “work” is “trust”, which is why the next phrase says, “for it is God who works”. He does the work, not only the actual carrying out of His plan *through us*, but actually assisting us in our “willingness” to go along with it. We will explain.

Here is what this means, as I see it, from the verse just quoted: As we are “completing our deliverance” by obeying His Word through the use of His techniques...including being in fellowship and growing in faith through study...God puts into us the *will* to do something, and then enables us to *act* to accomplish it. This outcome is based on complete preparation and maturity, which is what is achieved when we “work it out”. He puts a will into us to act, because, 1) we want it, 2) we ask for it, and 3) we qualify for it.

2 Cor. 3:5 reminds us that any good thing we do, any “righteous” thing, comes from Him. This verse tells us, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves [NET has “from ourselves”], but our competence comes from God.” It is hard for us to let go of our own control, and our assumption that we are truly the center of the universe. This will not stand before the true and living God.

The late J. Hampton Keathley made the following observation concerning our efforts, as compared with God’s:

Because of all we face in the enemies of God who are arrayed against Christians, the world around us, the flesh within us, and the devil against us, the Christian life and ministry is an absolute impossibility apart from God’s supernatural ability which must be appropriated moment by moment through faith. The nature of these forces and our weakness necessitates the need for nothing short of the divine power of God. To think that we can live the Christian life is the height of ignorance or pride.

The Holy Spirit is within us. Christ dwells there. We have every divine resource in God’s arsenal at our disposal. The life God wants us to live is not one we fabricate or generate, but one that is given to us. It is by the Spirit alone that real service gets done. Rom. 7:6 says it this way: “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” It is not our commission to learn the rules of good behavior, but to become familiar with ways that the Spirit performs God’s work in and through us. The do’s and don’ts of Scripture apply, but these will be done only by the power of the Spirit, and not by self-effort.

Salvation is not by “works”, but by grace, and the Christian life is not lived by “works”, but by grace, which will produce the “work”. Here are some verses that confirm that we shouldn’t attempt to keep the law in our own strength, because we are too *weak* to make it happen:

Matt. 26:41—Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

Rom. 3:27-28—Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

Rom. 6:19a—I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves....

Gal. 3:2—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?

Gal. 2:16—Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Gal. 3:3—Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

If we are in fellowship, studying, and maturing, we will be motivated properly and energized supernaturally by God's power. Self-discipline is NO substitute for faith. Our efforts truncate God's power. We started with Him, and we must walk with Him...or we'll be walking alone, the song that says we never will...notwithstanding. We will either believe in God for our minute-to-minute walk, or we will not.

If we believe right now, as we write or read these words, we must also believe five minutes from now, and in the middle of the night tonight, and at our first blink in the morning. We must keep on believing. Nothing short of ongoing, unflinching confidence in God will suffice. We must understand how fruitful faith in the true and living God can be, and how futile is the faith that is directed toward ourselves, and our abilities.

We close with this oft-repeated precept, found in Prov. 3:5: "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 we trust Him, we reject our own works as a means to serve, and embrace Him as our life, "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" (Rom 8:4).

Isn't it ironic that righteousness comes, not by our trying harder, but by our trusting more? This is why we must be "re-trained" in our thinking, because it is counter-intuitive to believe that we can do more...by doing less; and that we can get more work done by letting Someone Else do it.

Part Three: Strengthening our Faith

Walking by Faith in Christ

We use the names ascribed to members of the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) almost interchangeably, because they are all parts of one Being: God. They have divine "roles", but they are one Person. We mention this because this section deals with the person of Jesus Christ, Who is revealed as one "indwelling" us. But then we say the Holy Spirit also indwells us! There should be no confusion here...these are one and the same. The Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit can be distinguished, but when we speak of "Jesus Christ" in our hearts, we are also speaking of what we call elsewhere the "Holy Spirit". They are God.

We are in Christ, and He is in us, and our spiritual lives are governed by the degree to which we allow Him to "be alive" in us. If we are controlled by the Spirit, rather than the sinful nature, Christ empowers us to become like Him. Eph. 3:16-19 mentions all three members of the Godhead, and shows what the indwelling Christ is supposed to be doing in our hearts:

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.

This passage calls for us to be strengthened with power through the Spirit of Christ...in our hearts...so Christ can “dwell” in our hearts through faith. The mystery is solved. The Christian life is lived by being strengthened by the Spirit of Christ, so that He is alive within us...made operational there by our trusting constantly in Him and His Word.

But notice the word “dwell”, which is the translation for the Greek word *katoikasi*, which can mean “dwell or occupy”, but which can also mean “to pervade, prompt, and govern”. This is a perfect picture of the filling of the Holy Spirit, Who prompts and governs the heart when he “pervades” (or fills) it. When the Person dwelling in our hearts is doing so with a sense of ownership and supervisory authority, He will strengthen us with His power. He will be at home, fill the space, and control everything in the area He occupies...inside our hearts.

Observe this power at work in verse 20 (still Eph. 3), 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...” Christ does so much that we cannot measure it, IF His power is “at work within us”. This means that His working within us **DEPENDS ON** His power. This is a contingency: If His power is working, through His “filling” and control, then the effects of that power will take place in our hearts, with the result that He can live His life *from the inside out* through us. And the condition for this (as per Eph. 3:17) is **FAITH**.

Faith leads to strengthening and spiritual receptivity to enable us to experience the love of Christ and to be filled with His completeness. Faith and fellowship lead to His filling, and when He fills us, He controls us, and when He controls us, He is managing the place He calls home, so He can direct our lives and produce His character within us. The character He produces is love...His love...expressed in many ways, but always originating with Him.

Gal. 5:5 says, “...by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.” This righteousness will be produced through us by the Spirit, while we wait (a form of trust, as we shall see in Part Seven) and hope (also a form of trust). When we are exercising our faith, it will be because we are in fellowship and are growing in the Word (repetition...repetition). Without faith, there will be no righteousness, either at salvation, or now in our lives as His children. Gal. 2:20-21 describes it this way:

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!

The lives we now live are lived “by faith” in Jesus Christ. And it is His life that gives us strength, as per Phil. 4:13: “I can do everything through Him that gives me strength.” We are engaged, and working until we are exhausted, but it is Christ that gives us the strength to do it. Col. 2:6 adds this: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live [walk] in him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

When we walk by faith in Christ, we will be given his “fullness”, and—being filled—we can live our lives in His divine power. Col. 2:9-10 concludes it this way: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” He is the source of our work, our good, and our lives, because He has the power.

It may be a little confusing that we have cited confession of sins leading to fellowship as the means for the control of the Holy Spirit, and we have specified in this section that faith is the condition for this control. We will discuss this in more detail later, but—in a nutshell—confession *restores* the filling of the Spirit after we have been out of fellowship, and faith *sustains* that filling, once we have been restored. One gets us there; the other keeps us there (preview of Part Six).

Building Stronger Faith Through the Word

We have learned from Scripture that faith can be weak, or it can be strong..or somewhere in between. Faith can grow, or it can regress, depending on our intake of God’s Word. Learning Scripture strengthens our faith, and when we are not learning, our strength will be in decline. When faith weakens, we fall into either sin or some kind of “law-keeping” (also known as legalism), both of which are destructive. An example of weak or diminishing faith can be seen in Hos. 4:1-3, which gives us the following:

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; their beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.”

This condition follows a verse we have seen before, which says, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” Their destruction is associated with the fading of faith, fellowship (“love”), acknowledgement of God, and wisdom.

The solution for diminishing faith is to get it growing. 2 Thess. 1:3 says it well: “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.” When we grow, fellowship is more consistent, and the fruit of the Spirit can be borne.

This is why Paul was committed to teaching the Scripture...so believers could grow into spiritual maturity. This is indicated in Col. 1:28, where Paul says, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [complete or mature] in Christ.” God has given us all we need to know in order to grow. In Acts 20:32, Paul states this again, saying, “And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” What builds us up? The *message of grace*! Remember this: It is the message of grace that builds us up!

There are so many passages calling for us to grow by studying the Word that we can’t cover them all in this brief study, so we will give a sampling of them in the following:

1 Pet. 2:2—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.

2 Pet. 3:18—But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Eph. 4:12-14—...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.

Jude 1:20—But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Jer. 9:23-24—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.

The most important catalyst for growth is *study* directed at the topics, principles, techniques, and promises of the Word. When we are enthusiastic about this, as expressed through faithful study routines, we will see changes in ourselves, and in our lives.

Building Stronger Faith Through Training

The terms testing, training, and trials lead into a consideration of suffering. Suffering does not come to us for its own sake; every experience God brings to us has a purpose. Suffering always happens as part of a guiding experience from God, Who is always loving, but not always gentle...always directing experience toward our growth, but sometimes having to cut us down to size to keep us standing tall in His grace. Grace is better, as we shall see completely in Part Seven.

We have seen two distinct reasons for suffering: 1) discipline for unconfessed sin, and 2) pressure to get us to return to our studies. But there is a third reason for suffering, which we have only cursorily mentioned in the past, but that we want to explore further in this section. This additional cause for suffering is found in God's purpose for testing our faith, or "trying our patience", which is to prompt us to learn to use grace and trust God...even when training causes us discomfort. The experiences that come under the category of testing and trials are designed to refine us and to build our endurance and faith, and give us confidence that "all things work together for our good".

If we are consistently confessing our sins and taking in the Word of God, then we can know that any suffering we are going through is designed to spur our growth as maturing believers. This kind of suffering leads directly forward. Because this "suffering for growth" is designed for our direct benefit, we can be "joyful" that God is bringing it to us, as per James 1:2-4, which we see here:

Consider it pure 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.

These verses tell us that trials build patience (a perspective of faith), so that we can grow until we lack absolutely nothing. The prospect for that kind of advancement can only please us, and make us welcome the trials...because trials lead to *maturity*. It is a relief to know that suffering is for our elevation and the enhancement of our faith. This gives us an understanding that what is happening is “good”, and He assures us that He will not test us beyond what we can bear. That is, if we are confessing and studying.

1 Pet. 1:6-7 adds to our understanding of this process, saying the following:

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.

Our faith is purified through the refinement of suffering...the “fires” we must endure when we are being trained. Technique 5 can be called, “Enduring God’s Training”. This training is a privilege and an honor for us, and will bring glory to God through our increased maturity and capacity for service. There is a “heavenly-rewards” implication in these verses that we won’t go into (covered in previous books), but the application for us now is that suffering for growth is good, and leads to purification and wisdom.

We see this concept once more in Rom. 5:3-4, which gives us this:

Not only so, but let us rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Perseverance is the maintenance of our faith, even when difficult, trying, and even painful times come. Perseverance is both a sign of our faith, and the way our faith grows. We persevere through faith, and when we endure this way, perseverance grows, building “character”, which means grace assets are imbuing the character of Christ into us. The result is “hope”, or faith for the future.

Very often in Scripture, perseverance is associated with hope. As we mature, hope strengthens, which allows the Holy Spirit to do His work through us based on a strong and perpetual faith in Him. The outcome is “love”, or the production of the Spirit’s fruit through us. It all leads back to that, doesn’t it? Fruit. We *grow* to be *fruitful*, yet we must remember that we are “branches”, not the tree itself. It is God Who produces the fruit.

When we experience physical, psychological, or other discomfort, we know that it is given to us so we can be developed and promoted. 1 Pet. 4:12 states, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” This suffering has a purpose. One thing we can count on is that *we will suffer as believers* (perhaps not a good selling point), but we can know that tests and trials are to train us and bring us to GREATER FAITH.

In Acts 9:16, Paul was told that he would suffer. Ananias was told to deliver a message to Paul, saying, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” And Paul did suffer. In 2 Cor 11:24-32, we see a list of things that Paul endured, as follows:

In prison frequently.
Exposed to death again and again.
Forty-lashes-minus one on five different occasions.
Beaten with rods three times.
Stoned and left for dead.
Three times shipwrecked.
Spent a day and night in the open sea
Always in danger.
Labored and toiled without sleep.
Went hungry and thirsty.
Cold.
Naked.
Pressured with the responsibility of all the churches, on top of everything else.

But did Paul mature? Yes. Was he productive? Yes. Did he bring honor to God? Yes. Is his commitment still benefiting Christians? Yes. Can we do this, as well? Yes. Will we get through all this without suffering? No. God's training is effective, but it may not be easy. That does not mean we will not find joy in such suffering.

We are destined for suffering as part of our training. This may not sound like good news, but there is also "blessing" that is promised, even in our suffering. (We will look at the promises for blessing in Part Seven.) But suffering will come. 1 Thess. 3:3 says, "...so that no one would be unsettled [surprised] by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them." Our role is to surrender to God's will and God's grace during suffering, as we see in 1 Pet. 4:19, which says, "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." Stay in fellowship; study as much as you can; pray for grace to endure and for relief within the framework of God's will; and wait on the Lord, confident that He is good, and that He is caring for us.

Finally, remember the time when Paul's suffering exceeded even his remarkable endurance, which we saw in 2 Cor. 1:8-9, and which we re-quote here:

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.

Suffering is not just a word, or an academic concept...suffering hurts! And sometimes it even mounts up, it seems, and we might even "despair" as Paul did. But there is purpose behind our suffering...a purpose of grace and love that we must seek to understand. We can have confidence that God will deliver us from suffering, and will protect us through it. "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Is. 41:10). Hold on to this promise.

Living by Faith

As we mature, and our faith strengthens, we will log more time “switched on”, or in fellowship, because we will be using grace assets to improve our spiritual condition. Mature believers can be “carnal”, just like baby believers, but they will likely log more time in fellowship...they don’t “live” in carnality, or in an ongoing state of sin and self-righteousness. They live in the power of the Spirit, which is a “walk” achieved through consistent confession, prayer, and study...all of which build *faith*. And this leads to “clean living”, as well as a “clean condition”, with the result that confession is less needed, because deviations from God’s standards are less frequent.

When faith is weak, or absent, God will not be able to teach us, bless us, motivate us, strengthen us, or guide us. We will have effectively cut off the divine supply for all our needs, especially those of a spiritual nature. When God looks at us He expects to see faith in full operation. In Heb. 3:12, we are warned against a lack of faith in these words: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” The Word speaks strongly and directly against unbelief. When our faith is weak, sin will come, and we will be destroying ourselves, along with everything and everyone around us.

On the other hand, when our faith is strong, we will see good results. Rom. 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.” We were saved by faith in the beginning, and now we are instructed to live by that same faith. We are to “live by faith” the same way we are to “live in the Spirit” or “walk in Christ”. We looked at Gal. 5:16 previously, which says, “So I say, live by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Walking in the Spirit overpowers sin and allows God to produce fruit through us. And now, we must learn to “live by faith”.

2 Cor. 5:7 tells us we “live by faith, not by sight.” “Live” should actually be translated “walk”. This means every step we take should be by faith...every thought, every incident, every decision, every encounter, every moment of our lives should be executed by faith in Jesus Christ. We walk trusting in God and His Word...every second of every day.

We saw in an earlier study how Paul advised Timothy, saying the following:

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, holding on to faith and a good conscience. (1 Tim. 1:18)

This verse contains two of the pillars of God’s grace system that Paul wanted Timothy to observe: faith and a good conscience. The “good conscience” comes from having all sins confessed, which means we are in fellowship, and controlled by the Spirit. “Faith” is the condition that sustains that control, once we are restored to fellowship. Paul said, “I give you this instruction...that by following them you may fight the good fight” (v. 18). And the good fight is fought through holding on to faith, which provides a sustained walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We initiate fellowship by confessing, and we sustain the resultant spirituality by trusting in God...moreover, we build that trust by *staying focused* on God and His Word. This encapsulates all we are studying: fear of the Lord, occupation with Christ, acknowledging God, surrender, submission

to God's will, and God-consciousness. Some of these we have covered; others we *will* cover. But these will all converge at a single point called "faith". Faith is turning ourselves over to God.

Part Four: Results of Faith

Faith Sustains Grace

Rom. 5:1-2 discloses that faith gives us access to God's grace, the source of "rewards" for those who "seek him". Here is what this passage says:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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.

This passage shows us how salvation is carried out in three phases, all by faith, as follows:

Justification—We have been justified through faith, receiving the righteousness of Christ when we accept Him as our Savior.

Access—We now have access by faith into the grace that saved us and through which we currently "stand"...or *live*. A "standing" life is the life of a believer living by faith.

Glory—Our future consists of glory, which will come to us in the form of glorified bodies and eternal life with Him in heaven.

When we are saved, we are given access to grace, which takes us from being condemned to being justified before God. After salvation, grace becomes our true north, as we seek guidance and provision as believers on the sea of life. Access gives us the privilege to approach God's throne to "receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need." (Heb. 4:16b) When we receive mercy, we get forgiveness of our sins (through confession). This qualifies us to "find grace".

So confession opens the door to grace, but Rom. 5:1-2 tells us that "faith" is the criterion for accessing grace. Which is it? It is both. Confession establishes our readiness to access grace, and faith is the medium by which we access it. We have already seen that faith is the basis for perpetuating our "walk in the Spirit", which is making ourselves at home in God's grace. Both confession and faith are conditions that must be fulfilled for grace to be accessed.

Without confession, faith would not be operational, and access would not be possible. With confession, faith can operate, and grace will be found. Following the initial event of confession, grace can be perpetuated by the *continuation* of our faith. Once again, we see the interaction of techniques. Confession kick-starts faith, and faith sustains fellowship, which keeps grace active. If faith is strong, due to maturity, fellowship will be consistent, which means we will live in the light of God's grace. Until then, fellowship will be spotty, and access to grace will be sporadic.

When we are in the presence of grace through fellowship and faith, we will "lack nothing", as per Ps. 34:9-10, which says, "Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." This is confirmed in James 4:6, which says, "But he gives us more grace. That is why the Scripture says,

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” When we “fear him”, implying faith...and are “humble”, implying confession...we will be exalted and “lack nothing”. The operation of grace means **lacking nothing!**

Eph. 3:12 seals the concept by saying, “In him [in fellowship] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” Confidence is faith. Heb. 4:16a says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence [faith].” When we approach the throne in faith, we can obtain mercy and find grace. We will have much more to say about “approaching the throne of grace” in Part Seven, which is titled, “Drawing Near to God”.

Faith Brings Rest

The faith that brings rest is focused on God’s power. 1 Cor. 2:4-5 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.” We shall see that, when we trust God, we will *rest*, because we believe in His power. If we do not trust Him, and instead depend on ourselves and the world for solutions and sustenance, we will not rest, but will live in uncertainty. Ps. 62:5-8 expresses it this way:

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. God most High is my salvation and my honor; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

There is rest when we trust Him for today (faith), and for the future (hope). This rest can be found in God *alone!* And when we rest, we will not be shaken, because He is the rock on which we stand, the fortress that protects us, and the refuge we seek. When we trust Him, we will pour out our hearts to Him...open up to Him, and submit to Him for protection and care.

The concept of rest (or the lack of it) is illustrated by the Jews in the desert, after they left Egypt. They wandered for forty years, because they were unable to enter the Promised Land. Their entry was refused, due to a lack of faith. The writer of Hebrews discusses this in Heb. 3 and 4. In Heb. 3:1, the writer makes it clear that he is addressing believers, by acknowledging them as “holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling”. So we know immediately that the “rest” he is talking about is not “salvation”, but something that *believers* can have. We will explore in the following this writer’s description of the heart-condition of these Jews in the desert, and see what it means to us.

In Heb. 3:8, the writer says, “...do not harden your hearts as you [speaking to Jewish converts] did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert.” In verse 10, he points out what God said about the Jews in the desert. “Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways...” These Jews were being reminded of the time when their “fathers” (v. 9) had been delivered from slavery, but were turning their backs on God.

We have seen before that failure to learn hardens the heart and creates distance between God and us, and the heart that moves away from God becomes hardened even more. The result of a hardened heart is that God’s ways are not learned. Of these Jews whose hearts were hardened, God said, “So I declared on oath in my anger they shall never enter my rest” (v. 11). The passage in Heb. 3 goes on

to say that these Jews *disobeyed* God...they sinned, did not acknowledge or fear God, stayed “out of fellowship”, did not study the Word (as it was given to them), and were in a perpetual state of “unbelief”.

Unbelief was the biggest cause of their not being able to enter God’s rest, as we see in verse 19: “So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.” So they missed their opportunity to enter the rest, and never made it to the Promised Land. Heb. 4:1 continues the narrative, 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.” They received God’s message, but did not accept it, as per verse 2b: “...those who heard did not combine it with faith.” They did not *believe* God’s Word, and this prevented them from entering the “rest”, or *accessing God’s grace*.

So who can enter this rest? We see the answer to this in verse 3a, which says, “Now we who have believed enter that rest...” This belief is not the belief of salvation, but the ongoing faith that believers can express toward God’s power and truth. We know that this faith is not “saving faith”, because of verse 1, which says, “be careful that none of you have fallen short of it”. These are “holy brothers”, so this is talking about BELIEVERS who may “fall short”. This “falling short” pertains to Christian living, wherein we will enter God’s rest...or fail to enter it. Evidence that this rest is for believers is also seen in verse 11, which calls for these believers to “make every effort to enter that rest”. This rest is for those who have been saved, who can now enter God’s rest, if their hearts are attuned with God. The Promised Land is not heaven, or the place of salvation, but a place where *believers* find rest in God’s grace. It is a place of FAITH.

Because they rejected God’s grace and the promises of His Word, the Jews in the desert were saddled with staying there. Lack of faith prevents entrance into the place of “rest”. On the other hand, when we keep on believing the Word, we will enter this rest. Verses 9 and 10 say, “There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.” Here we begin to see what this rest is. It is a place of “not working”. When God completed His creation of all that exists, He rested. And that is what we are to do: rest, as God rested.

Rest is the absence of work. When we rest, because we trust God to do His work, we stop trying to be “good enough” to please God, and learn to “trust enough” to be at ease while He works. When we rest, we turn our hearts, our lives, and all our outcomes over to God. We submit to His will and surrender to His power.

Jesus said this, as recorded in Matt. 11:28-30:

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.

When we come to Christ as believers, we are coming to find “rest”. The yoke of Christ is easy for us, because He does the work. And the burden He asks us to carry is light, because it is He Who carries it. That leaves only the command to “learn” from Him. When we learn from Him, we will end up carrying enormous loads, but they will seem light, because our work *for* Him is to rest *in* Him. This is the “work” of faith.

Faith Gets Results

Heb. 11:6 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.” Absence of faith prevents anything we do from pleasing God. Conversely, *with* faith, we *can* please God. Faith enables us to access the power of God, as we see in 2 Thess. 1:11-12 (NET), which lays it out, 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.

By God’s power our desires to achieve good things for Him can be fulfilled; works are made possible through faith, which provides access to God’s power.

The results of faith are numerous, and more than we can enumerate here. The following will give a brief survey of some of the results that faith produces:

Love. 1 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. Eph2:1 contrasts with 1:19 in the following: “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” (2:1); but notice what we have now as believers, which is “...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength” (1:19).

Protection. 1 Thess. 5:8b—“...putting on faith and love as a breastplate...”

Strength for resisting Satan. Eph. 6:13a, 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....In addition to all this, 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. 1 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.”

Faith provides many results, many that we have already seen, and others that we will continue to discover. Faith gives us confidence and certainty. When we believe, we are *sure*, as we saw in an earlier study. When we are sure of God and His grace and His power and His Word, then many other assets open up to us. We will be sure of the following:

Christ will strengthen us.
Everything works together for our good.
Nothing is impossible for God.
His grace is sufficient for us.
His Word is alive and powerful.
God's peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
He will never forsake us.
We can cast our anxiety on Him, for He cares for us.
He will protect us from the evil one.
We do not need to be afraid, because He is with us.

Part Five: Faith in the Promises

Introducing the Promises

We have studied, and will continue to study, techniques for living. A second major aspect of living, and an essential component in developing faith, is understanding and believing the promises God gives us in His Word. We will refine this concept, and show the blessings inherent in the promises, in Part Seven. For now, we can know that promises are comforting, restorative, reassuring, strengthening, and instructive, and we must make them part of our spiritual portfolio.

Faith is the place of rest. We access God's rest by 1) confessing our sins, 2) praying, 3) learning God's Word, and 4) trusting in God's promises. We saw earlier how the failure of the Israelites to believe the promise of God resulted in their not receiving the substance of the promise, which is entry into the Promised Land. They could not enter God's "rest", because they did not believe God's Word. **Failure to accept and trust God's promises for our lives now will prevent us from getting what is promised, and cause us not to enter His rest.**

We must not fail to enter this "rest". As we begin our walk of trust, we must make sure our feet are touching the bedrock of our faith...the guarantees of God's Word. We present in the following a sample of God's promises, specific truths that we are to believe (more in Part Seven):

Matt. 10:30-31^a—And even the hairs on your head are all numbered, so don't be afraid.

I Pet. 3:4—Through these he has given us 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.

2 Thess. 3:3—But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

Rom. 8:28 (NET)—And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

1 Jn. 1:9—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 Jn. 5:14-15—This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Matt. 7:7—Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Luke 17:6—He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

Luke 1:37—For nothing is impossible with God.

Heb. 4:16—Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

James 4:8—Come near to God, and he will come near to you.

James 4:10—Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

John 15:7—If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

1 Pet. 5:7—Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Matt. 6:25a, 33—Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Phil. 4:12b-13—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 everything through him who gives me strength.

Phil. 4:6-7—Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

James 1:5—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.

2 Cor. 4:7—But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Cor. 12:9a—But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Is. 41:10—So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

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....

Prov. 21:31—The horse is made ready for battle, but victory rests with the Lord.

Ps. 37:4—Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Jer. 29:11-13—For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Ps. 91:9-10—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.

These are the provisions of grace. When we believe these and other promises in the Word, we will be able to do what Eph. 3:12 describes: “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” Through faith we can enter God’s rest and open the supply line for our mission.

Encouragement in Our Faith

Faith is under attack. Doubt is an opening for Satan, and a condition that invites the world in for a party. This might titillate the sinful nature, but it does not please God, so we must keep our faith strong. We must follow the lead of Abraham, about whom the following was reported:

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God. (Rom. 4:19-20)

It easy to trust our eyes and our “reason” more than we do the Word. But it does not matter what we see, there is no circumstance in our lives that is not allowed or orchestrated by God. We can be confident that He is always in control, and our relief and comfort are found in Him. This is what we see in the promises, and this is what we access by trusting Him.

Is. 41:10, listed above with the “promises”, says, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Will frightening things happen? Yes. Is this a problem for God? No. But it is a test for us, so we better have this promise loaded up and ready to be launched when threats appear. The promises provide armor against the wiles of the devil, and buoyancy against the inexorable downward pull of our own emotions.

The promises also remind us of Who it is that provides our victories. Prov. 21:31 says, “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” God gives the victory in our battles; He gives solutions for our problems; He gives the energy for our service; He provides the will and plan for our lives. When we understand and believe His promises, fear will have no place in our lives. Jer. 29:11-14a confirms this, as follows:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you.”

God plans our good. And He has woven the universe together in such a masterful way that, even though there is sin in the world...some internal or external attacker always out to get us...and even though suffering comes, God works everything for our good. All the time! And we can hang on to that. Deut. 1:29-31 gives us a wonderful encouragement in the following:

Then I [God] said to you, “Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the Lord carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.

He will carry us, when we trust Him. Ps. 34:7 continues in this vein, saying, “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” We can choose to accept the promises and use the techniques, or we can reject them. We can choose to believe, or we can ignore and reject God. If we choose to believe God’s Word, as we did at our re-birth, and if we continue to grow, the power and grace of God will be opened up to us, and our hope will cause our strength to be renewed. Faith will enable us to soar to new heights, as we see in Is. 40:29-31:

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

God will hold you up. He will sustain you. He will forgive you. He will keep you supplied. He will enrich you. He will love you each and every day, and—as we shall see in Part Seven—He will bless you in ways you can’t imagine. As 1 Cor. 2:9 says, “However, as it is written, ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him....’”

Verses on Faith that Back-up the Promises

Understanding Scripture activates faith, and a thriving faith engages the promises. To encapsulate the concepts regarding faith, we will quote some verses dealing with a number of them, to affirm the backdrop for believing the promises. The following verses provide truths concerning faith...and its development and operation...separated into categories:

Faith is the only thing that counts. “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love” (Gal. 5:6).

“...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” (II Tim. 1:4).

Faith protects us.

“...putting on faith as a breastplate” (1 Thess. 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, 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” (1 Tim. 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).

Appendix E

Law Contrasted with Faith

When we see conformity to a system of do's and do-not's as the way to achieve righteousness, we choose the law to save us or to make us right before God, and our faith is directed toward the very thing that will cause us to be judged. This will bring condemnation to unbelievers and discipline to believers. Law and faith are exclusive sets; there is no overlap whatsoever. If you are practicing rule-keeping, you are "under the law"; if you are exercising faith, you are out from under the law and under "grace", or God's system of righteousness. Gal. 5:4-5 addresses believers who are trying to live their lives under the law, saying this:

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from [or "failed"] grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

God does not bless us for keeping the law, even though we perpetually think that if we keep the rules by "not sinning", we will get God's best. This is backwards. God's blessings do not come because we keep rules, but because we access his grace techniques and assets by faith. Nothing good ever comes from trying to keep the law. We see this once more in Rom. 3:21-22, which concludes this:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Notice that righteousness comes AWAY FROM THE LAW. There is no righteousness anywhere near the law. When we depend on the law for "goodness", we negate faith. But when we exercise faith, we give the law its place, which is to show our weakness and our need for God's strength and righteousness.

Ironically, by rejecting the law as a system of righteousness, we "uphold it". In Rom. 3:31, after a lengthy advisory about the dangers and pitfalls and uselessness of law-keeping, Paul asks an ironic question: "Do we then nullify the law by this faith?" He then answers: "Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." When we operate in the grace/fait h system, the law is "upheld". This means that it fulfills its purpose, which is to serve as a mirror to our inadequacy. Do you see what this is saying? By choosing faith as our means for pleasing God, we fulfill the law, or uphold it. On the other hand, trying to meet the requirements of the law, or "trying hard", will have the effect of placing us under the law as its slaves, and we will perpetually fail to meet its standards.

Law-keeping is attractive, because it gives us something concrete that we can "do", but this is not the way to the full life that God has in mind for us. This will come only through faith, as we shall see.

Rom. 3:27-28 gives an apt contrast between faith and law-keeping as the way to acquire and exhibit righteousness. This passage says the following:

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

A clear contrast can be seen, then, between “believing” and “following the rules” for justification and cleanliness. Rom. 9:30-32a adds this:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.

Neither salvation nor the Christian life involves “doing”. They involve “receiving”. We receive salvation through faith, and then we live the Christian life by faith. Faith enables us to receive what we cannot acquire by what we do.

Further contrast between faith and law-keeping is seen in Gal. 3:10-12, which says this:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them”..

The believer who lives by rules must live by them perfectly for them to be of value. This has not happened in all of human history, excluding Jesus Christ, of course. We are saved by faith, and we must live by faith. Gal. 2:17-21 gives affirmation to this truth, saying this:

But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in 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. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

The Christian life is not rule-keeping. It is the life of Christ! He lives *through* us; otherwise, the life we are living is not His, even though His Spirit indwells us. Believers can live and think independently of God, seek their own pathways in the world, and trust in the law, the world, and themselves for fullness in life. But the complete life, the life that is “real life”, will not be found, apart from the saving life of Christ operating through them. If we could do it on our own, Christ would not have died. He died because we CANNOT do it without Him. The key to His living through us is faith, and this faith is strengthened by using God's grace techniques and assets, which we have seen many times before, and which we will certainly see again and again.

Appendix F

Gifted Operations

Two Kinds of Operations. When it comes to gifted service, there are two kinds of operations in a church: one formal, the other informal. Formal service is pastor-led, scheduled, structured, and largely instructional. Informal service is more unplanned (in human terms) than formal service, and is a time for connecting abilities with needs...largely outside the formal operations of the church. Time is allowed for both of these, and believers should be aware of their need to serve each other *outside* the church setting, as well as within.

A third type of service might be seen in large-group initiatives, such as an effort to feed large groups of hungry people, provide medical services to specific areas where concentrated needs arise, and so on. Our focus in this study is on formal and informal operations within the purview of a local church. The way that individual gifts fit in with *all kinds* of projects make a survey of the practice of “group” efforts—inside or outside the church—non-essential to our current topic.

1 Cor. 14:20-40 provides guidelines for “formal” service, explaining how “services” are to be conducted (please read the passage). For the sake of brevity, we condense Paul’s description of properly-conducted formal operations into one word: ORDER. He calls for *structure* and *organization* as protocols for coming together for worship, instruction, prayer, singing, and spiritual focus. He instructs that all these should be done in a manner that allows for concentration on the message of the day, so that collective learning and participation can take place, without the disruption that would be caused by overt, individual expression.

This is worth noting: Formal “worship” is not a *social* event. It is a time of disciplined focus. The need for orderliness is the reason that Paul says tongues are *permitted* during formal services, as long as their use is not disruptive. And, for the sake of efficiency and “staying on topic”, he instructs that a “prophetic message” that is burning within someone’s heart will need to be held back until a time is allotted for it to be spoken. There is no “blurting out” or spontaneous eruption of verbal expression, in a “tongue” or otherwise, as this would detract from the message being delivered by the pastor/teacher, and/or others. There should be NO INTERRUPTIONS during the structured service; otherwise, a kind of chaos will emerge and there will be no meaningful instruction...and therefore no opportunity for growth.

“Informal” service includes any operation of gifts outside the formal service. This avenue for edification and help comes in several forms: 1) private, such as the gift of prayer, ordinarily being conducted in isolation from others, 2) one-on-one, such as practical helping or giving between individual believers, 3) small-group, such as home gatherings for study and prayer, and 4) individual support for formal meetings or other gatherings, such as making a facility comfortable for participants, and/or removing unnecessary impediments to planned activities.

Discussion of “informal” gifts claims a lion’s share of attention in this book, more so than gifts engaged within formal services, though we will touch on these to see how they are supposed to

work (such topics as pastor, evangelist, prophet, etc.). The major distinction between the two kinds of service are, as follows: Formal operations are usually directed by the pastor, whereas informal service takes place outside the pastor's direction, in the form of gifts being exercised by spiritual believers.

Both formal and informal services are important. Informal gifted service pertains to most of us, but formal service, especially that done by the pastor/teacher, has the greatest impact on the church. This makes it crucial that we know what to look for when we select a pastor.

Selecting a “Formal” Service for Yourself. We discussed the topic of “picking a church” at some length in *Bible Basics on the Power of God’s Word*, Vol. 2, pages 49-60. Picking a church amounts to picking a pastor. When you look for a pastor, you want to know that he is *prepared* to teach the Word, that he has the *gift of teaching*, that he actually *teaches* his flock, and that what he teaches amounts to *truths for living*!

You don’t need someone who focuses on social events, funerals, weddings, and hospital visits. These can be done by those with specific gifts for such requirements. (See Acts 6:1-4.) You want the pastor to spend his time STUDYING so he can TEACH. If he organizes his church and delegates tasks to church leaders, he can direct traffic as a pastor, and still have time to study. This will enable his people to be fed with truths that foster their growth, as his teaching will consist of more than “morality” or “prosperity” messages. He will feed them with *meat* from the Word. It is also worth stating that believers who are sitting at the pastor’s feet to learn do not need to be entertained or titillated or stirred up...they need *correct information* that tells them HOW TO GET CLOSER TO GOD!

Once you pick a pastor, it is VERY important to avoid a common error: making the pastor the only “gifted” operator in the house. Service must be de-centralized, to some degree. ALL believers are gifted, and all who have passed infancy should be engaged in service. It is easy for us to become spectators and observers, rather than active participants in God’s holy work. No one gets a pass on service; we are all obligated to grow and serve. If the pastor is doing his job, all those in his congregation will be learning about gifts, and will be mastering all doctrines relating to spirituality and maturity that enable gifts to work. This will prepare believers in his care for great and significant service.

Appendix G

Getting the Fullness of God

INTRODUCTION. The final step on the ladder to spiritual maturity is getting the fullness of God. There is nothing greater than God's fullness, so getting it must be the ultimate experience a human being can have on earth (after salvation). Like most things in the Christian life, there are conditions that must be met for this fullness to be obtained, and these need to be examined. We want to learn what is required to receive this extraordinary blessing. The exact content and nature of the fullness of God will be reserved for a future study, but for now we want to understand the means for acquiring it. Whatever it is, it has to be grand.

All of the techniques and methods we have examined in the past play a significant part in this process, to which we will add some things that we have recently extrapolated from Scripture. We give the "old" concepts first, and then we will explore the new things which have been added. Both the old and the new are essential. Our objective is to understand what it takes to get the fullness of God.

Some of the studies which will come into play as part of the pathway to God's fullness includes the following: the ineffectiveness of law-keeping to save us or make us right; the importance of faith for salvation and the Christian walk; how believers can deal with sin; the roles of mercy, grace, and love in our salvation and growth; the place of Christ and the Holy Spirit in our living the Christian life; and the existence and place of God's unfailing love. Using these as foundations for understanding and causing our spiritual refinement, we will see what God has designed to enable us to get His fullness. Our goal is to get the "whole measure of all the fullness of God".

THE FUTILITY OF EFFORTS TO KEEP THE LAW. Believers are people, too, which means that self-awareness, self-care, and some measure of self-trust is inevitable, even among the children of God. Customarily, we see ourselves as responsible for the direction and outcomes of our own lives, and assume that anything good that happens will need to come from our own efforts. This assumption is not entirely misplaced, except that it omits the most important component in our lives and ignores the ultimate power and reason for our existence: God. When our efforts are self-generated and self-propelled, they will have no significance on the divine, infinite scale of God. Yet we cannot shake the sense that WE can do it, and we even embrace the idea that we SHOULD do it. Thus it is that we operate within an illusion that we can please God with our achievements, and that His blessings will flow if we just follow legal guidelines and adhere to what we understand as godly standards. This is our biggest error.

We have written about the futility of our efforts to keep the "law" in virtually all of our writings, and have clearly delineated the folly of a finite being trying to perform acts aimed at impressing an infinite God. The odd thing is that the very actions we think are pleasing God have just the opposite effect. They cause God to be *displeased* with us, and He has stated this clearly in His Word. Perhaps the most poignant statement of God's attitude toward "rule-keeping" is found in Gal. 3:1-5, which we quote

here entirely:

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. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.

Circumcision is a sign of commitment to the law. Committing to the law is all or none. If you are in, you are all in. There is no such thing as split commitment between law-keeping and other systems for godly living. At any given moment, we cannot be somewhat legalistic and somewhat spiritual. These are mutually exclusive. So if we are going to keep the law just “a little”, we have to keep it all. And if we are going to walk in the Spirit, WE CANNOT CLING TO ANY ASPECT OF “GOOD BEHAVING” AS A PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL CONNECTION AND OPERATION!! Put simply, human effort is disqualified and discarded as having any spiritual value whatsoever in God’s system of grace. This is why we are told to “stop trying” (see the earlier article by that name).

We look at life from the inside out, and what we see...all we see...is the world right there in front of us. And since all we see is the world, how can we not see ourselves in it and not think that we alone are the ones who must make good things happen, believing that the world will cooperate and reward us? Applied to the Christian life, we are influenced to assume that good things come from us, and therefore we seek to establish our own righteousness. Rom. 10:3-4 says this:

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This verse reflects the tendency we have to see ourselves as the manufacturers of good. But our best is as “filthy rags”. We need God’s righteousness. The righteousness of Jesus Christ comes at salvation when we initially believe in Him. Other righteousness comes after that time whenever we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit and He is producing His righteousness within us. But the point we are making presently from this verse is that we must not try to establish our own righteousness by attempting to keep the law. Even our best efforts will not enable us to fulfill the law, as per John 7:19a, where Jesus told the law-keepers of His day, “Yet not one of you keeps the law.” James explained how hard it is to keep the law in James 2:8-10, where he said the following:

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Even keeping the new “Law of Love” which Christ brought is impossible, because human beings cannot produce divine love. This means we can’t rely on the law as a system for making us righteous.

Adherence to any set of “rules” will not contribute to our salvation or to our Christian lives. Gal. 2:15- 16 says this:

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Eph. 2:8-9 adds, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Law-keeping cannot save us, and it cannot enable us to live righteously. It can make nothing perfect, according to Heb. 7:18-19a, which says, “The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect).” The law has no power to give us the eternal perfection we receive at salvation, and makes no contribution to our growth and maturity afterwards.

The law also creates a kind of slavery for believers. Gal. 4:9 puts it like 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 [the law]? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again.

We are enslaved by attempting to keep the law. We are buried by its avalanche, and will live “under” it. Gal. 4:21 challenged the Galatians with this question: “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?” To be under the law is to be obligated to all it requires, and no one can do this. Yet being “under the law” means that the legal system of law-keeping is the way we have chosen to live our Christian lives. And we never give up, because we think that if we try long enough and hard enough, we can be successful, and then God will be pleased with us. The lesson we want to learn is that it is the *grace system*, and not the *system of law-keeping*, that gives us what we need and pleases God. Paul, a former Pharisee, said in Phil. 3:6 that he had achieved a kind of “faultlessness” in the area of law-keeping, saying, “...as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” Then in verse 9, he contrasts his own human righteousness with true righteousness, or the righteousness of Jesus 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 Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

So under the law, we get slavery; under grace, we get the righteousness that comes from God. The law is used to make us aware of our weaknesses and failures. This has the effect of causing us to see our need for salvation before we believe in Christ, and then prompts us after we are saved to continually confess our sins. Rom. 3:19-20 makes it clear that righteousness will never be achieved through law-keeping, as follows:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin.

When we break the law, we sin, but the key to not sinning is not accomplished through efforts to keep the law. Rom. 2:12b says, "...and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." We see that being "under the law" will result in judgment, rather than the achievement of righteousness. Rom. 4:13-15a confirms this, saying the following:

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath.

LAW CONTRASTED WITH FAITH. When we see conformity to a system of do's and do-not's as the way to achieve righteousness, we choose the law to save us or to make us right before God, and our faith is directed toward the very thing that will cause us to be judged. This will bring condemnation to unbelievers and discipline to believers. Law and faith are exclusive sets; there is no overlap whatsoever. If you are practicing rule-keeping, you are "under the law"; if you are exercising faith, you are out from under the law and under "grace", or God's system of righteousness. Gal. 5:4-5 addresses believers who are trying to live their lives under the law, saying this:

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from [or "failed"] grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

God does not bless us for keeping the law, even though we perpetually think that if we keep the rules by "not sinning", we will get God's best. This is backwards. God's blessings do not come because we keep rules, but because we access his grace techniques and assets by faith. Nothing good ever comes from trying to keep the law. We see this once more in Rom. 3:21-22, which concludes this:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Notice that righteousness comes AWAY FROM THE LAW. There is no righteousness anywhere near the law. When we depend on the law for "goodness", we negate faith. But when we exercise faith, we give the law its place, which is to show our weakness and our need for God's strength and righteousness.

Ironically, by rejecting the law as a system of righteousness, we "uphold it". In Rom. 3:31, after a lengthy advisory about the dangers and pitfalls and uselessness of law-keeping, Paul asks an ironic question: "Do we then nullify the law by this faith?" He then answers: "Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." When we operate in the grace/fait h system, the law is "upheld". This means that it fulfills its purpose, which is to serve as a mirror to our inadequacy. Do you see what this is saying? By choosing faith as our means for pleasing God, we fulfill the law, or uphold it. On the other hand, trying to meet the requirements of the law, or "trying hard", will have the effect of placing us under the law as its slaves, and we will perpetually fail to meet its standards.

Law-keeping is attractive, because it gives us something concrete that we can "do", but this is not the way to the full life that God has in mind for us. This will come only through faith, as we shall see.

Rom. 3:27-28 gives an apt contrast between faith and law-keeping as the way to acquire and exhibit righteousness. This passage says the following:

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

A clear contrast can be seen, then, between “believing” and “following the rules” for justification and cleanliness. Rom. 9:30-32a adds this:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.

Neither salvation nor the Christian life involves “doing”. They involve “receiving”. We receive salvation through faith, and then we live the Christian life by faith. Faith enables us to receive what we cannot acquire by what we do.

Further contrast between faith and law-keeping is seen in Gal. 3:10-12, which says this:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them”..

The believer who lives by rules must live by them perfectly for them to be of value. This has not happened in all of human history, excluding Jesus Christ, of course. We are saved by faith, and we must live by faith. Gal. 2:17-21 gives affirmation to this truth, saying this:

But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in 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. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

The Christian life is not rule-keeping. It is the life of Christ! He lives *through* us; otherwise, the life we are living is not His, even though His Spirit indwells us. Believers can live and think independently of God, seek their own pathways in the world, and trust in the law, the world, and themselves for fullness in life. But the complete life, the life that is “real life”, will not be found, apart from the saving life of Christ operating through them. If we could do it on our own, Christ would not have died. He died because we CANNOT do it without Him. The key to His living through us is faith, and this faith is strengthened by using God's grace techniques and assets, which we have seen many times before, and which we will certainly see again and again.

CRUCIAL TECHNIQUE: DEALING WITH SIN. God does not condone sin, and will punish it in some way and to some degree, as long as it remains on the sin record of a believer. It is

important to understand that sin must be cleared from our record for us to have fellowship with God and enjoy the benefits of His presence within us. The stain of sin on our ledger negates our peaceful walk with the Father, and truncates His power within us. We always remain His children, but we are not in His “good graces” when sin goes untended in our lives.

When we sin, we can anticipate God’s discipline. The purpose of discipline is to drive us back to grace, where we will find mercy and forgiveness in God’s grace. And when sin is great, grace stretches to match the kind and size of the sin, if we exercise our privilege of confessing them for forgiveness. So is this a ticket to sin freely without repercussion? Of course not! Paul said, in Rom. 6:1-2: “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” The purpose of “increased grace” is to show that no sin is too great for God to forgive, if we follow His method for availing divine mercy.

John indicated that his purpose for writing the first epistle of John was so that his audience would no longer sin. 1 John 2:1a says, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will no sin.” But then he turns around in the second half of this verse and says, “But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” He had just said in 1 John 1:8 and 10 that we ALL sin, without exception, so the phrase, “if anybody does sin”, as seen in 2:1b, must mean, “if anybody sins, and we all will”. And what happens when we do? Jesus Christ intercedes for us, and He has never lost a case yet, because He appeals to the Father with His finished work on the cross.

We will sin! John knew it. God knows it. And every believer *should* know it. We will never achieve sinless perfection. Knowing that we will sin leaves us with a need to address the sins we commit, which takes us to 1 John 1. This chapter talks about accessing God’s cleansing of our sins through confession, which restores fellowship with God. Verse 9 tells us that confession will expunge and remove the sins we commit, and completely clear our sin record. Then and only then will we be in communion with the indwelling Holy Spirit, and have His control and energy restored within our hearts. And only at that time will we have the benefit of increased strength to manage and reduce the practice of sin in our lives. This, as we have said many times, is the product of the control of the Spirit, complemented by a steady progression toward maturity.

Jer. 2:32b, with Jer. 2:35, tell us it is not good to say we have not sinned, which is a refusal to acknowledge our sins in honest confession. This passage says, “Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number....you say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned’.” God will discipline the kind of pride that will not admit sin. What is it that God wants from us? Self-generated good deeds? No. He wants us to realize our inability to manage sin by ourselves, and He wants us to acknowledge His grace in forgiving our wrongdoings. He wants us to see that our imperfections are not as great or important as His love and forgiveness.

Ironically, by *admitting our sins*, we are strengthened against sin by being *restored to fellowship* with God.

To confess our sins, we must recognize them. Fortunately, as we move toward maturity, we have a better discernment of good and evil. Heb. 5:14 says, “But solid food is for the mature, who by

constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Evil is often disguised as good, and can be hard to see, especially given the daunting urges of the sinful nature, which is blind to evil and its effects. But growth and maturity enlighten us, so that we can see evil for what it is. And when we SEE evil within and without ourselves, we will be able to confess it and maintain our fellowship with God.

Discipline is designed to prompt us to see our mistakes and confess them, so that we can return to service to the Lord fully empowered by His Spirit to perform the work of His Kingdom of Light. But discipline is not our greatest motivator for confession; it is love. Rom. 2:4 says, “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” God’s love and mercy and kindness lead us...urge us...to confess our sins. And when we confess, forgiveness comes. Ps. 51:1-4 confirms the involvement of confession in forgiveness, saying the following:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin 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.

1 Cor. 11:31-32 conveys the same concept, saying this:

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we [believers] are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Our being cleansed and no longer “judged” is not a matter of “stopping” the sin, so much as it is acknowledging it, and seeing it as God sees it. Over time, sin will subside, when we use God’s method for dealing with it, and we will increasingly fulfill John’s goal, which is that we “not sin”.

When our focus is on God, sin will be reduced. If our focus is on “not sinning”, some changes might occur, but they will be spotty and inconsistent, and will probably just become more subtle, but no less deadly. The ultimate outcome of self-effort in trying to battle sin will be an eventual *increase* in sin, and when this happens, spiritual production will be minimized, or halted altogether.

When we sin, what should we do? Agonize at length, vow never to do the “thing” again, do penance, hide? No! We are to CONFESS our known sins to God with the assurance that He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). And then we should RESUME OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES WITH CONFIDENCE AND COMMITMENT TO GROWTH AND A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD! Move on! When God forgives, we should accept this by faith and keep on going. We don’t have time to pine away in guilt over our failings...just confess and get up and go.

1 Sam.12:20 encapsulates this very well, saying, “Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. ‘You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart’.” To hang on to guilt and remorse AFTER we have confessed is to discount the grace and power of God. It is fine to be ashamed before we have confessed, but to do so afterward is a repudiation of grace and a

hindrance to our service. The amount of time we should spend before returning to service after we confess...is NONE!

When Samuel indicated that we should not “turn away from the Lord”, but “serve”, he implied that something can happen when we do evil that can prevent us from entirely “walking away” from God. That something bridges the gap between “doing evil” and being qualified to “serve”. That something is forgiveness, and from what we see repeatedly in Scripture, this comes to believers only through confession in some form. I believe the base condition seen in confession is humility, a sort of perpetual awareness of God’s greatness and bigness. This allows us to confess openly, and keeps us from “turning away”, even when we sin, because the attitude of confession is constantly present. The result is constant cleansing.

With constant cleansing comes the unbroken control and power of the Holy Spirit, without which no good can be accomplished. When the condition of our “being” reflects a connection with God, our “doing” will follow, because the Holy Spirit will be performing His work through us. Grace will correct our “being” when we operate in humility and faith. Only then will what we are “doing” have any impact. Correct *being*, then, precedes correct *doing*. Walking in the Spirit comes before the production of divine righteousness.

As we learn to walk in humility, and confess as often as we pray (non-stop), we will grow into greater maturity, and spirituality will become a constant in our lives. With greater growth and fellowship, even our choices will be shaped by the Word and the indwelling Spirit. God is the focal point of all growth and spiritual connection, and our attention to ourselves should be limited to an attitude of humility and an abiding thirst for Him. When we seek God because we know we have no life without Him, the rest will follow. When our eyes are on Him, we draw on His strength. When our eyes are on ourselves and our own needs and abilities, sin will easily dominate. To deal with sin, we do not look at the sin, for any longer that it takes to confess it; we look always toward the One who has the power to forgive it. (See Rom. 3:20, compared with 1 John 1:9.)

Gal. 5:16-17 (NET) says the following:

But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want.

When we confess our sins continually, and build our faith through study, prayer, and God’s training, we will be able to “live by the Spirit”, or “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25, NET). This is our singular goal: to walk by the power of the Holy Spirit, so His divine good can be produced in and through us. When we mature to the point that we can do this, sin will have no place or power in our lives. When we can walk in the infinite power of God, the character of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ will be formed within us, and God will be glorified. Gal. 4:19 says, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” When this happens, His character will displace ours, and we will shine with His light.

THE UNDERPINNING FOR RECEIVING GOD’S FULLNESS: GOD’S MERCY, GRACE, AND LOVE. We could go on and on about all the features of God’s divine essence, but we are currently reviewing principles that will help us understand how to receive the fullness of God, so we will look primarily at God’s mercy, grace, and love, since these divine qualities contribute most to the process of God dispensing His fullness to us.

GOD’S MERCY. God’s mercy is rich and full, as are His love and grace. We will look at each of these individually, and see how they contribute to our becoming eligible for the fullness of God. Without these qualities, we would not have a relationship with God, let alone be qualified for His fullness. Eph. 2:4-10 describes the operation of God’s mercy, in conjunction with the other qualities of God that we will note: grace and love. Here is what this passage 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. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

As a result of the qualities of God, and His perfect plan, we are able to have a relationship with Him by a simple act of believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He rose from the dead. God shows mercy and forgives us when we believe (salvation) or confess (Christian living), not because we deserve it, but because of His mercy—generated by love, enacted by grace.

God’s mercy is extolled throughout Scripture. For example, we see His mercy cited in the Psalms. Ps. 106:1 says, “Praise Jehovah! Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever” (*A Literal Translation of the Bible*). Ps. 103:17 says, “But the mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting, even to everlasting, on those who fear Him...” (*A Literal Translation of the Bible*). James 5:11b adds, “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”

The word “mercy” is often translated “love” in Scripture, but we distinguish mercy from love, because we want to see the nuances of difference between them. God’s love is the underpinning for everything, and mercy is an extension of that love. The function of mercy is to spawn forgiveness. This is what we see in Acts 2:38-39, which says this:

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you
and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

We have discussed in previous studies several topics embedded in this passage, and will not use space to review them here, except to say that “repent” is changing one’s mind about the gospel; “be baptized”

means to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, which places us into union with Christ; the “gift

of the Holy Spirit” is His coming to dwell within all believers; and the “calling” is the process of God recognizing those who have a desire to have a relationship with Him, with the result that He gets the gospel message to them. The main point we want to glean from this passage is that the primary event at salvation is the “forgiveness of sins”. The work of Jesus Christ is completed, so He is now sitting at the right hand of His Father, while the Holy Spirit is completing the work of God’s plan on earth. All of it is a labor of love, and the product of mercy. And forgiveness is the outcome.

Rev. 1:5b (NET) gives the right perspective of the work now completed, which has enabled our salvation, saying, “To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood.” The labor is one of love, the outcome is forgiveness, and the product is freedom...or deliverance from condemnation. Matt. 26:28 fleshes this out further, declaring, “This is the blood of my covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (See also Heb. 9:22 and 1 John 2:12.) Mercy brings forgiveness, which makes us the beneficiaries of eternal life. This forgiveness is completed through the blood of Christ, a benefit we did not work for.

When forgiveness is completed, it is absolute. There are no residual stains that remain after forgiveness is enacted. The removal of sins, once conditions are met, is unequivocal and eternal. This applies to forgiveness through salvation, and the forgiveness we receive when we confess our sins as believers. God will not remember our sins after they are forgiven. Jer. 31:34b says, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Heb. 10:17b echoes this declaration, saying, “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” And Rom. 4:7-8 adds, “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” There is no cleansing like God’s, and it comes to every penitent believer.

Forgiveness is crucial. We cannot count on being “good”...we will sin, even when we are generating “human good works”. This means we must count on being “forgiven”. Ironically, it is through our acknowledgement of our “not-goodness” that this forgiveness comes (1 John 1:9). God alone forgives (Ps. 85:2), and He alone causes “goodness”. He will never hold our failings against us, but WE MUST SEEK FORGIVENESS for His mercy to operate and bring this about.

God’s infinite mercy has us covered, regardless of the duration or intensity of a carnal state of either depravity or self-righteousness (both are equally bad). And He doesn’t groan when we come to Him for forgiveness, saying something like, “Oh, it’s you again. I’m beginning to think you are hopeless. But alright, I’ll overlook your mistakes this time, but my patience is running thin.” This is the typical view people have of God. But the thing we will learn is that God’s patience, mercy, grace, and love are tireless and endless, as long as we COME TO HIM for forgiveness. In fact, God LOVES to show us mercy. Micah 7:18-19 says the following about God’s mercy and forgiveness:

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.

Instead of perpetual anger, God shows consistent mercy, but what is more: God LOVES to show mercy. I believe this is because He is satisfied with His plan for mankind, and is greatly pleased (I might even use the term “proud”) of His Son’s completed work. So He delights in showing

mercy to those who come to Him for forgiveness. Forgiveness features and highlights the work of Jesus Christ, because it is the primary effect of His sacrificial work.

Paul himself was a good example of the operation of God's mercy. This is what we see in 1 Tim. 1:15- 16, which gives us the following:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

Paul was the “worst” of sinners, yet he found forgiveness. God shows mercy to the worst of us, so that the patience of Christ will be shown to those who believe in Him. “Eternal life” begins when we are saved, the first phase of which will be lived out here on earth. During this initial period of our eternal lives, we will be looking for God's continued mercy, because we continue to sin, even though we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are children of God. Because we sin, we need forgiveness, which is why God has supplied believers with confession as the means to receive it.

GRACE. Our job is not to keep the law, as expressed in both the Old and New Testaments, but to participate in the completed work of Jesus Christ, so that the *law* can be fulfilled by *grace* methods. As we learn how to operate in grace, we must be aware of how deficient we are to meet any of God's standards, many of which are expressed in the old law. This awareness helps us see and cite our sins to the Father, which amounts to confession. There are some who seem unaware of the sins they commit; they glide gleefully along with no concern that they are stained by their own sin. But as we refine our understanding of God's character and methods, we will see more clearly the enormity of our errors, and the greatness of His grace.

God's standards are pure and exact, and as we grow and see what sin is and where it comes from, we will refine our sin-filtering process to detect sin's presence more readily. This will make us conscious of the stringency of God's requirements and our own inability to meet them. We will be left with the distinct realization that more is required of grace than we have understood...grace must forgive and overcome the sins we continually commit.

Grace in the Christian life is accessed through humility. Humility is our response to a view of God as perfect, and ourselves as imperfect. It is a clear view of our inadequacy to meet God's standards by ourselves. Humility is an accurate assessment of our abilities, which bake down as unmitigated insufficiency. Humility reflects to God our own admission that we are inadequate to please Him in and of ourselves. This is the attitude that God looks for, first of all because it is appropriate, but also because it venerates His superiority. Humility is the core of confession, and the essence of God's condition for our forgiveness. Humility brings forgiveness. Forgiveness brings purity. And purity results in performance. James 4:4-10 describes this process very well, as follows:

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: '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.

With humility, we are in an attitude of surrender and confession to God. He looks at the heart and sees when we are sincere and contrite...when we acknowledge our helplessness to Him. He does not need our strength, ability, or beauty...and shallow words mean nothing to Him. He sees our motives. God needs us to see Him for what He is, and to recognize what worms we are by comparison. Yet He loves us, and when we acknowledge Him, He will purify us and lift us up. That is the grace of God at work.

There will be no greatness coming from us that does not come first from Him. The whole notion of how great we are, just because we are His children, is totally misleading. We are what we are ONLY by His grace (1 Cor. 15:10), and we can quit with all the bravado and breast-beating over what mighty warriors we are, and how Satan and the world and sin don’t stand a chance against us. This is exactly the attitude Satan wants us to have, because we are easy take-downs when we stand and fight with anything we have or are...apart from God’s grace and power.

Once we have reached a point of humility, we are ready to move forward in the grace system...through faith. Our participation in grace begins with “purity”, or being “cleansed”, as we have said. Then it is sustained by faith. Rom. 4:16a tells us, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace.” Faith is the key to accessing grace. Rom. 4:4-5 contrasts faith with other systems for accessing God’s favor, such as “works”. This passage says this:

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

This tells us we should stop trying and start believing. When we do this, we can expect “greater grace” to operate. Cleanliness restores fellowship; faith keeps it going. These work in tandem to keep us plugged in to the power of the Holy Spirit, who will then provide instruction and impetus for growth. The Spirit will then strengthen us against sin. Grace alone can do this; not determination, resolve, or self-effort.

We are invited to come to the place where fellowship with God is readily available...which is at His throne of grace. Heb. 4:16 tells us what we will find there, saying, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Notice the sequence: Come to God, receive mercy and forgiveness, and walk away with the help of God’s grace, which will MEET OUR NEEDS. This “boldness” is not self-confidence, but confidence in God’s mercy and grace, assured that He will forgive us and restore us. And this is where grace is found: at the throne. Several principles can be given concerning grace, as seen in the following:

We are saved by grace. Eph. 2:8a—“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...”

Grace is the basis for production. 1 Cor. 3:10—“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.”

Grace generates service. Rom. 15:15-16a—“I have written you quite boldly on some points, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles...”

Grace leads to proper conduct. 2 Cor. 1:12—“Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.”

Grace works through God’s power. Eph. 3:7—“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.”

We are what we are by God’s grace. 1 Cor. 15:10a—“But by the grace of God I am what I am...”

God’s grace is sufficient, but we are not. 2 Cor. 12:9—“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in [your] weakness’.”

God’s power is aimed directly at us, and grace tempers it to make it operable in our lives. Grace gives benevolence to God’s power, because His strength is overshadowed by His love. Grace has designed an entire system of operations in which we must function in order to claim its benefits. This system is about relinquishing our will and our agenda to God, so He can do through us what we cannot do alone.

LOVE. We are aware of God’s righteousness and justice, and yet we see a different side of Him in His love, especially His love for us. God’s standards for His created beings will never change or diminish, yet we do not meet them, so how can God refrain from addressing us exclusively from the side of His character that reflects righteousness and justice? How can He love us, since we fall so far short of what He requires? The resolution between the polar states in God’s character has been studied and stated completely, and we know the story: God planned for resolution to take place through the cross. God satisfied His justice by letting His Son pay the penalty for our sins, and He placated His perfect righteousness by imparting to each believer the righteousness of His Son. When He looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Christ. This opens up God’s love, to make it the prevailing protocol for His dealings with His children. He loves all of mankind, but He does not “adopt” those who reject Him and His plan. Those who believe have *special* love from God.

We are adopted...children of God...recipients of His fatherly love. This places us in a special position of privilege which enables us to associate directly with the Spirit of God, and draw directly on all the assets He makes available. Because God has provided a way for us to relate to Him, we have His unfailing love in our lives. Ps. 33:22 says, “May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.” Ps. 33:18 parrots this, saying, “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.” There are twenty-six verses in Ps. 136, and every one of them ends with the phrase, “His love endures forever.” We are recipients of God’s boundless, unchanging, unflinching love. As unfitting as it seems, we have great value in the eyes of the infinite Creator of this universe. (There are reasons that God notices such

infinitesimally small creatures on this tiny speck of a planet called “Earth”, but that is a topic for discussions offered elsewhere, especially those offered in the book, *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*. See especially the chapter titled, “The War Against God”.)

God loves us. And every doctrine or truth that we study and understand is based on this reality. When we understand God’s love, we have in hand the most important truth in all of Scripture. All of His plan and His dealings with us emanate from this love. Ps. 103:8 says, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” Ex. 34:6-7a adds this:

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.

Here’s the plan of God: He love us, so He has found a way to forgive our “wickedness, rebellion and sin”. And because His love includes “faithfulness”, or a kind of immutability, nothing will ever separate His children from His love. Rom. 8:38-39 spells out the kinds of things that *cannot* remove God’s love from us, as follows:

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.

We are surrounded and kept safe and secure forever by God’s love. He has devised a way for our failings not to disrupt or block the flow of His love toward us, by providing forgiveness for our sins. Ps. 103:9-12 states it this way:

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.

We get a mere glimpse of the immensity of God’s love for us. The closest we can come is the love that a father has for his children. There is nothing like it, yet we can multiply this love by infinity; that’s how great God’s love is. Notice that God’s love is focused on His children, but also notice that some of His children receive extra-special favor; these are the ones who “fear God”. Fear is awe, respect, reverence, acknowledgement, and trust. When a believer matures to the point that these qualities occupy His attitude toward God, then a special love will be operating to sustain and bless that believer. Fear of the Lord, then, is desirable, and we want to highlight it briefly. We see this fear in many passages, a few of which are included here:

Prov. 3:7-8—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.

Job 28:28—And he said to man, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”

Ps. 34:7—The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

2 Cor. 7:1—Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Prov. 16:6—Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.

Ex. 20:20—Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

Prov. 3:6—In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

We participate in God’s love for Christians by “fearing” Him, or by trusting Him intently. The love we get from ongoing faith in God will not be experienced in any other way; it comes only from God. 1 John 4:7 tells us that “love comes from God”, which—according to Rom. 5:5—is “poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit”. In fact, love is said to be a “fruit” of the Spirit, as per Gal. 5:22a, which says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...” Fruit is something that grows and is produced, so this is the love that is “in us” and that is then generated “from us”. But the love is “from God”, and is always His...we can never duplicate it or imitate it. Only God can love with “God’s love”.

God’s love is unfailing and unchanging toward us, and we participate in and exhibit this love only when we have achieved spirituality and maturity. It is not a matter of self-will or self-effort. It comes from God alone. 2 Thess. 3:5 says, “May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance [faithfulness].” We love effectively and correctly only to the degree that God is producing His love through us. 1 Thess. 3:12 says, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ”Who does the increasing? Us? No. Only God.

By staying in fellowship through confession, walking in the Spirit by faith, praying continually, and growing through study and training, we can experience and operate within God’s love. 1 John 2:5a says, “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him.” When we follow the prescriptions of God’s Word, use His techniques, and access His grace assets, we will see God’s love “made complete” in us. This does not happen by itself, just because we are saved; we must receive it— God’s way—for it to take effect.

1 Pet. 1:22-23 tells us this: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.” Both the method and the outcome are cited in this verse: “purify yourselves” by God’s methods and sincere love will be forthcoming. The method for purification, which must be “obeyed” is confession. After confession, “sincere love” can occur.

Those who love, then, have all sins confessed, and are abiding continually in a state of fellowship with God. 1 John 4:16 frames it this way: “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us [because we are in fellowship]. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” The term “living” here is not eternal life, but temporal living in fellowship with God. When we are in fellowship, we are “living”, or “abiding” in Him, and that is when we are “living in love”. 2 John 1:3 tells us that Jesus Christ is “with us in truth and love”. Verse 6 tells us to “walk in love”, which

is added to “walk in the truth”, “walk by faith”, and “walk in the Spirit”, commands which we have seen in previous studies. We are now told to “walk in love”. This is obviously an advanced stage of maturity, or the ultimate in meeting God’s requirements. Walking in love takes place on the highest walking path of all.

Our general relationship with fellow believers should always be characterized by kindness, benevolence, compassion, and consideration. When we interact with each other, our attitude should be one of humility and graciousness. But there are specific ways in which we are to interact which comprise, I believe, our purpose for coming together and functioning as a team or as a “body”. These have to do with the operation of our gifts. The main conduit for love, and the greatest evidence for love’s presence, is seen in the “exchange of gifts” among believers. When believers mature and walk in the Spirit, and extend themselves to other believers through the operation of their gifts, God’s work gets done...correctly and in a timely manner.

1 Cor. 14:1a says, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts...” Love is linked to the development and utilization of our gifts. Exercising our gifts in the service and edification of others is the highest expression of God’s love through us. He gives us specific gifts to edify each other, and we exhibit His love when we use these gifts to help and support and prepare each other. Eph. 4:11-16 describes this process very well, giving us the following:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers 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 in 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 people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love [edifying each other], we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Emphasis mine)

The motivation for the operation of our gifts is love. The objective is greater maturity, so all members of the church can function with maximum efficiency in the operation of their gifts, thus strengthening the whole body and yielding the greatest results possible in support of the Kingdom of Light. By “growing up into Him”, we will be “built up in love” and “each part will do its work”. We will be “equipped for works of service”. This is how it is supposed to work. This is how the job gets done. Wake-up call: If you are not functioning in behalf of others through your gift(s), you are not showing mature love.

But notice again: the “gift”, its motivation and operation and outcome, all come from God. And notice what will come when the church machine operates efficiently and maturity is optimized: We will “attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. This is the greatest manifestation of God’s love and the highest fulfillment of His will for us: the receipt of his “fullness”. Through the inter-operation of all our gifts, we can mature to the point that we can get this “fullness”.

We have looked for love in the right place. We know now that it comes from God, and that it

has a specific operational component in the operation of our gifts. We have learned that the outcome of love goes beyond provision and privilege...extending to the acquisition of the very “fullness” of our Creator. We will have more to say about this fullness shortly.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN GRACE OPERATIONS. The Holy Spirit is the key to all grace operations. The grace is His, since the Holy Spirit is none other than God. He provides the power for the unfolding of the Father’s plan. With the function of the Holy Spirit, we have the prospect of having the “life of Christ” lived out through us, and we have the freedom and impetus to behave and think correctly. All cleanliness and holiness comes to us through the Holy Spirit of Christ, and nothing we will ever accomplish will be done without His direction and energy. With the filling and control of the Holy Spirit, we have the strength to resist sin (coming at us from the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature), and we have the capacity to allow God to fulfill His will through us.

A quick side-note on the “filling of the Spirit”. Eph. 5:18 commands us to be “filled” with the Spirit rather than alcohol, the implication being that whatever fills us, controls us. To be filled, we must be cleansed, since the first chapter of John tells us that when we walk in darkness (sin), we have no fellowship with God. And the only way for believers to be cleansed is by the confession of their sins. It then follows that cleansing leads to fellowship, which leads to the filling of the Spirit, which we sustain according to the strength of our faith, and which we will enjoy until our next sin. As we mature, sin lessens, and fellowship will be sustained, so that we can grow more, and walk more-consistently in the strength of the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit is the pathway to maturity, and that is how we become a significant tool for God to use in the implementation of His plan on earth.

The question may arise as to how we can sin when we are filled and “controlled” by the Spirit. The answer is simple. We never, for as long as we are on the earth, lose our free will. We will always have the ability to choose evil over good. The control of the Spirit stops at the line of our freedom of choice, and when we choose evil, the control of the Spirit terminates until we confess. When we confess, we are restored, and the Spirit resumes control...and the beat goes on.

When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, He provides spiritual energy for operating in God’s grace system. Gal. 5:16-25 makes this clear, saying the following:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh 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. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [walk by] the Spirit.

We will live by the Spirit...or by the flesh...at any given time. When we are controlled by the

Spirit, He can produce His fruit in us. When we are not, our sinful nature will produce sin or self-righteousness.

We need the power of the Holy Spirit, because without it, we can never experience the “fullness of God”. Eph. 3:16-18a tells us about this power, saying this:

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...

This power is the missing ingredient in most Christian lives, and in most churches. Without this power, we will be helpless against sin, and will not be able to do God’s will. Only with the Holy Spirit teaching us, moving us, and strengthening us will we be able to learn truth, do what is right, and find out what pleases God. Eph. 5:10 tells us to “find out what pleases the Lord”. Verse 17 tells us to “not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” Part of reaching the pinnacle of maturity is coming to understand the will of God in all its aspects, and then we will know exactly how to please Him. In the meantime, we can pray, with David, “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.” Want to know God’s will? Ask to be taught. At some point, you will know it. And by the time you know God’s will, you will also have learned how to harness and live in the power of the Holy Spirit; He can then enable you to fulfill the will that you are increasingly understanding.

REVIEW OF PRINCIPLES THAT PREPARE US FOR FULLNESS. To prepare to receive the “fullness of God”, we must reach maturity through purity, study, training, and the operation of gifts from others around us. These all blend to become one package, composed of all the grace assets, techniques, promises, and operations that God makes available to us. We have been trained through these grace assets and techniques. They have brought us to this point. Now, to ensure that we have these clearly established in our hearts, we will conduct a brief overview of them, after which we will see the “new” principle, and present the final step in receiving God’s best...His fullness. We will see at last the open path to God Himself...all of Him.

We want everything God offers. We want His forgiveness, His provision, His strength, His guidance, His blessings, and His peace. But the thing we need the most is His love. After we have done it all: confessed regularly, studied faithfully, prayed continually, trained rigorously, and trusted extensively, we will reach the summit of the Christian life, which is to love deeply. This is not a gushing, doting kind of love, but a genuine and abiding caring for the spiritual condition of our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we love as God loves, we will certainly attend to believers’ spiritual needs, but we will also attend to and pray for other types of needs, as God directs, including the physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of Christians in our periphery. But our *greatest* concern will be for the *growth* and *spiritual walk* of fellow-believers...and the greatest contribution we can make to their status and progress will be through the exercise of our gifts.

We have discussed gifts in some detail. For a quick reference, see the article, “Gifted Service and Love”. The exercise of our gifts is the most direct and fruitful way that we can love those who share our union with Christ. We know that our gifts...those special qualities and abilities in each of us which God graciously designed and distributed so we can strengthen each other...operate in the

power of the Holy Spirit, without which no meaningful service can be performed. When we mature sufficiently that our gifts are functioning in God's strength, the fruit of the Spirit will be seen in the edification and advancing maturity of those it helps.

One final word on gifts: Gifts facilitate our study and our walk in the Spirit, as we have discussed. Eph. 4:12-13 says this about gifts: They achieve the following...which brings us to the brink of "fullness":

...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 in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Notice here that the attainment of maturity involves assimilating the knowledge of the Son. When we are loaded up with understanding of Scripture, and fully comprehend the operation of God's love and grace toward the human race, we will be qualified by His Spirit for "works of service", and we will be nearing completion of our preparation to receive the fullness of God, seen here as the "fullness of Christ".

Col. 1:9-11a explains that the receiving of wisdom and understanding enables us to grow and to access the supernatural power that we need in order to take the final step into God's fullness. This passage says this:

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, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father...

Assimilation of truth helps us mature, and maturity engages spirituality. We must remind ourselves

continually of our need for the power of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to proceed toward the ultimate level of spiritual growth and experience, and we must be clear that we will never see the fullness of God without a maximum assimilation of this power.

The qualities needed to get "fullness" are coming together, and include these: maturity that reaches a sufficient level that God's love is in evidence; spirituality that bears the fruit of the Spirit; and a complete understanding of God's mercy, grace, and love...including full knowledge of how these *operate* in the lives of believers. It's all beginning to crystallize.

HOW TO BE FILLED TO THE MEASURE OF ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. Col. 2:9 says this: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form..." This tells us that, whatever the "fullness of God" is, it lived in Jesus Christ. He Himself did not retain His deity on earth, so the "fullness of the Deity" had to be in the form of the Holy Spirit. We are in union with Him, and can have the same resources He had to maintain God-consciousness and holiness. Verse 10, following the verse just quoted, says, "...and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." Fullness is available.

Fullness in Christ is offered and we want it, which is why we are exploring ways to get it. We have seen these assets: cooperative interaction of our gifts, faithful study of the Word, and the function and power of the Holy Spirit. These provide the means to lead us to maturity, and prepare us to receive God's fullness.

Eph. 3:14-21 provides a full discussion of the process for getting the fullness of God. We quote here this entire passage. Read this carefully:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family 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 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. 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.

Paul's first prayer in this passage is that we will have the strength of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (inner being), so that "Christ may dwell in our hearts". When Christ is "dwelling" in our hearts, this means that He is comfortable, fully at-home, and completely in-charge within our hearts. He, by His Spirit, controls us, which means we are walking by means of His Spirit. The first prayer in this passage concludes the "maturity/spirituality" aspect of our preparation to receive God's fullness. Only one more thing is needed.

Paul's second prayer ushers in the "one more thing" that we need in order to get the "fullness" of God. The one thing is this: to have the power to "grasp", or take possession of, the *full scope of the love of*

Christ. Paul expounds on this, saying that we must "know" this love, which means we must have *absolute knowledge* of it. By the time we truly understand God's love, including His mercy and grace, and have absolute knowledge of how it operates in our lives, we will have reached a level of maturity that will qualify us to be "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Then God can express His love toward us in exceptional ways, far beyond what we can measure or ask for or imagine. There is no limit to what God can give us IN THIS LIFE, when we reach the point that we fully *understand* and *receive* His love, and arrive at the point where His power completely controls and directs us.

So here it is: To get God's fullness, we must move beyond mere comprehension of, or even agreement with, concepts in the Word, even those that cite the workings and provisions of grace. We must move up to ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE of grace and love, which means being *saturated* with God's view point and His methods and His power. We must become *pre-occupied* with God and His ways, and *immerse* ourselves into complete SURRENDER to the requirements of His will and the ways of His love. Then we can become "rooted and established in love", and be completely "filled" with God Himself. And then we will know what the "fullness of God" really is. When we

reach the level of maturity that we are completely sold out to the grace of God, we will be filled with all the fullness of God. But not before.

SEQUENCE FOR BEING FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD. This is a difficult study, because it is breaking new ground. And we must revisit this topic again before we rest. But for now, to encapsulate the process for fullness, we offer a sequential listing of the steps leading up to receiving it. None of these can be omitted, and the time required for each step is variable. Being filled with God's fullness involves the following:

Confess all known sins for forgiveness and the filling of the Spirit.

Pray for wisdom, as well as for the entire complement of things we have learned to pray about.

Study the Bible meaningfully for spiritual nourishment and growth. Endure God's training for refinement and maturity.

Seek the interchange of gifts among mature believers for maximum mutual support and growth.

Walk in the Spirit by faith for steady empowerment and spiritual production.

Immerse yourself with singular concentration into an absolute understanding of God's surpassing love, with focus on grace operations.

Stand by to be filled with the whole measure of the fullness of God.

We believe that the attainment of the fullness of God is the time when God's immeasurable benefits and blessings surge forward in ways that cannot be envisioned. It is a time when Satan finally "flees from us", and a time when we experience the complete peace and joy that God makes available. This is

the true "rest" which God offers, and the great deliverance He promises. And this can be done while we are still alive in these present bodies. This will not happen at the beginning of our Christian lives, nor can we expect it before we reach advanced maturity; but if we follow God's plan for growth, we will see His fullness before we are through.

Our understanding of the "fullness of God" will be fleshed out in upcoming studies, particularly the one on "Surrender".

Appendix H

Importance of Wisdom

Knowledge and Wisdom. Herman Hesse, a German novelist in the early 20th Century, had one of his characters say, in the novel *Siddhartha*, “Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom.” Whatever Hesse intended, this happens to be true in regard to learning the Word of God. We can accumulate knowledge in truck-loads...but that does not mean we are acquiring wisdom. Even knowledge of the truth, if untreated or unrefined, will not be useful. To be useful, knowledge must be enriched.

“Knowledge” is found in the Bible, but it does not become “wisdom” until we *understand* it as truth by **believing it as we learn it**. When we *accept* the truths of God’s Word, they process into our hearts, from which point we can apply them and follow them. (See *Studies on Walking in the Spirit*, “The Internal Make-up of Man”.)

Wisdom is the total set of spiritual knowledge that has been *incorporated* into our hearts as understanding, which then operates from within our inner selves as divine viewpoint. Wisdom is what we seek, and what we ask for to increase strength, maturity, and productivity. Wisdom, of course, *functions by means of the Holy Spirit* to add *power to potential*, and to make His truth a *reality in practice*.

God Gives us Wisdom Through His Word. Job 38:36 shows the Lord asking Job this question: “Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?” The question is rhetorical...the obvious answer is God. Understanding and wisdom come from Him. Understanding and wisdom, by the way, are used interchangeably, but a nuance of difference will be distinguished to help us visualize the “processing” of learning from the time it is received until it is applied. The difference is one of degrees of refinement and work-readiness. Wisdom is understanding that is ready to be applied.

Wisdom and understanding are important, because they are the media for knowing and applying all the techniques God has given us. We see their worth in the following words that Solomon gave to his sons:

When I was a boy in my father’s [David’s] house, still tender, and an only child of my mother [Bathsheba], he taught me and said, “Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor.”

Pause and allow these words to sink in. The central place of wisdom cannot be denied, and the opportunity for acquiring it is unprecedented, because we are in the Church Age. We have today what David and Solomon did not have: the completed Word of God...a plenary library of spiritual knowledge and wisdom.

Choosing Wisdom. When we become wise, because we have chosen (wisely) to gather understanding from the Word, we recognize that *all we have is choice*. We have no inherent heavenly power apart from the power of God, and we will have that only if we *choose it* by learning about it; that means receiving, updating, believing, processing, and applying the Word. When we do this,

wisdom will build up, and this accumulation of wisdom will lead to greater access to the power of the Holy Spirit, Who is the source for all fruitfulness and goodness.

Acquiring Wisdom. To acquire wisdom, we must first *want* it. To further elucidate this principle, we quote next a paragraph from Book 2: *Studies on Maturing as a Christian* (p. 3), as seen in a chapter titled, “Knowledge and Wisdom”. Here is what this paragraph says:

Prov. 1:5 says, “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning...” Notice that a wise man “will hear”, meaning a wise man is WILLING to hear. The choice is yours. If you want it, you will get it. “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out” (Prov. 18:15). You will SEEK it when you WANT it. You will FIND it when you SEEK it. And to help in your search, you should always ASK for it, saying with the psalmist, “I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes” (Ps. 119:125). Scripture is our spiritual bread and butter, our entrée, our vitamins, our Omega-3, and all else that we need to be sustained in our Christian walk. We must want it. We must learn it. It’s our life-line.

When we want it, we will go after it. We will reach for it and grab hold of it, because we value it. And God wants us to have it. Wisdom is waiting.

Col. 1:9-11a spotlights the importance of acquiring wisdom, and cites the benefits it brings to us when we get it, as follows:

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....

Wisdom gives us strength and increases fruit in our lives, because the Word of God gives us ways to maintain a stronger connection with the all-powerful Spirit of God.

A passage in Ephesians tells us to “wake up” and “rise from the dead”, which means we should “get into fellowship and stay there” (Eph. 5:8-14). In the verses that follow this passage, we see the call for us to embellish the *return to fellowship with increased*

wisdom, which will be accompanied by the teaching and enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is what we see in Eph. 5:15-18:

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. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

“Living in wisdom” is the opposite of “being foolish”, or living as “unwise”. In wisdom we will find the will of the Lord, and His techniques will bring us to the infusion of the power for living: the control of the Holy Spirit. Just as it is when we drink alcohol, *that which fills us controls us*, which is why we are commanded to “be filled with the Spirit”. Wisdom shows us how this is done.

When we study, and believe what we study, we will be equipped to apply wisdom and follow all the techniques we have learned in the past, including those that are in the background, such as fear of the Lord, acknowledging God, being still, waiting on the Lord, thanksgiving, and God-consciousness. (Please re-read Book 1 and Book 2 for a thorough review of these and other essential elements of spiritual knowledge.) To these we will add the main pillars of our Christian

walk: confession of sins, prayer, learning while believing, and exercising a growing faith through study and training. When we combine ALL the techniques God has given us, and make them part of our spiritual repertoire, we will come into possession of a dynamic system of wisdom.

Who Rejects Wisdom? Prov. 18:2 gives us a description of the type of person who rejects God's teachings. This verse says, "A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions." A person who is not seeking true wisdom is a fool, whose mind is locked away in the dungeon of his own arrogance. He does not want to see the light of day or the truth...he only cares about his own opinion. He does not search Scripture for truth, or—if he searches at all—he does so only to confirm his prefabricated views.

The person who wants wisdom must approach God's Word with humility and a passion for getting closer to God through His truth. Those who are not seeking true wisdom only want to broadcast their own notions, and you can spot them from a hundred yards...they talk more than they listen. Gifted teachers of the Word will spend much more time studying and "listening" to the Word than they do teaching...probably eight hours of study for every one hour of teaching.

The outlook for those who shun wisdom is bleak, as we see in Prov. 10:21 (NET), which says, "The teaching of the righteous feeds many, but fools die for lack of wisdom." They will die, either spiritually, in that they will not be kept spiritually active by the control of the Spirit; or—at some point—they will die the "sin unto death", in which case God pulls them out of life through physical death. The counter for this outcome is a return to Scripture through repentance for sins, prayers for wisdom, and focused attention on the contents of the Word...wherein the righteous feed.

Appendix I

Praying for Wisdom

Getting Ready to Pray for Wisdom and Understanding. Before we can pray properly or effectively, we must make sure the conditions are right. This involves several things. First of all, we **must be in fellowship**. James 5:13b says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” This means a believer must be *clean and in fellowship* to pray effectively. Eph. 6:18a tells us, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” This, of course, means to pray when we are in fellowship and controlled by the Spirit.

There are other scriptures that call for us to pray with sins removed and/or abiding in a condition of being filled with the Spirit. I Tim. 2:8 says, “Therefore, I desire the men to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.” (Footnote 2) Notice the three conditions specified: 1) “holy hands” indicate a condition of sanctification, 2) the absence of wrath shows that *wrath is absent*, so *love is present*, a sign that fellowship exists (the *result* of “holy hands”), and 3) “no doubting” makes it clear that faith is operational. When these are all true, our prayers will be heard.

Jude 1:20 admonishes, “Build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” Faith that is “holy” is faith that functions when fellowship exists, so that we can pray in communion with the Holy Spirit.

Fellowship, then, is the first condition for effective prayer. The second condition is that we **must believe** that God is listening, that He cares, that He knows best, that His will is going to be done, and that He will “work everything” for our good. In James 1:5-6, we see an invitation for us to pray for wisdom...with a caveat regarding faith...as follows:

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 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. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

If faith is not working when we pray for wisdom, *we will not get what we pray for*. When we ask for anything, faith must be present. This presupposes other conditions, such as our being in fellowship, and having a sufficient set of knowledge and maturity to understand the processes and reasons for trusting in the Receiver of our prayers.

Prov. 1:27-29 adds a third condition to the requirements of fellowship and faith as a precursor to prayer, inserting the need for us to **“love God’s knowledge”**, while— incidentally—we are expressing “fear” toward God (meaning reverence, awe, and trust). Here is what this passage says:

...when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me

but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the lord.

If we love God’s knowledge, we will **spend time in God’s Word**. But, if we will not listen to Him, He will not listen to us. This is depicted in Prov. 28:9, which says, “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law [for us, this is refusal to study the Word], even his prayers are detestable.” Zech. 7:13 is even more specific, saying, “When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not

listen,' says the Lord Almighty." Listening is attending to faithful study of the Word of God, so that we can hear it, learn it, believe it, and apply it.

If we have neglected our studies, we must change that pattern, and commit to consistent intake of God's Word, as David did in Ps. 119:59: "I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes."

The conclusion is clear. If we are going to ask for discernment, we must be sure that our prayers are going to be heard; we must be certain we are "firing on all cylinders", meaning that we are in fellowship, believing God and His Word, and "loving God's knowledge".

Asking for Wisdom. Before we are through, we will see many examples of prayers for wisdom and understanding. One example is seen in Ps. 119:25-26, which says this:

I recounted my ways [confessed] and you answered me; teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

This prayer is echoed by another example in the same chapter, verses 124-125, which we see here: "Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees. I am your servant; give discernment that I may understand your statutes." Then once again, in verse 18, we see this: "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." Prayer opens up truth for us. This is why we must always begin study with confession and prayer, whether it is personal, small-group, large-group, or some other setting.

Prov. 2:1-11 instructs us to pray for understanding, and shows the difference this will make in our studies of the Word. This passage is somewhat lengthy, but it is worth the time it takes to peruse it. Here is what it says:

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

What a beautiful expression regarding the privilege of "calling out" for understanding, and the benefits we derive from our time in His Word. This passage says that those who stay in fellowship, pray for wisdom, search for understanding as for hidden treasure, and accept the teachings of the Word, will see *instruction* do the following:

1. Infuse wisdom, knowledge, insight, and understanding (for those who seek it).
2. Give victory for the upright (those in fellowship).
3. Provide a shield for those whose walk is blameless (those walking in the Spirit).
4. Guard the course of the just (those who have confessed and been forgiven).
5. Protect the pathway of the "faithful ones" (those who study and trust).
6. Offer further protection through discretion (for those who apply truth).
7. Guard by means of understanding (for those who believe truth).

We must not neglect this important step in our preparation to learn: We must *ask for wisdom*. This is what Solomon did, as recorded in II Chron. 1:10-12, which illustrates *how to ask* for wisdom, and shows *what can happen* when we do, as follows:

“Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?” God said to Solomon, “Since this is your heart’s desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.”

Solomon’s humble spirit and honest prayer for wisdom generated great results. This is a good model for our approach to praying for wisdom. We come to Almighty God in search of answers, because 1) we don’t have them, and 2) we know He offers them in His Word. Understanding of the answers in His Word will come then, if we are prepared to pray for it...in faith.

Other Examples of Praying for Wisdom. We want to provide some classic instances of David, a spiritual warrior, praying for knowledge and understanding. Scriptures reflecting his search for understanding follow here:

- Ps. 119:33-34—“Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.” When we pray for understanding while we are studying under the guiding instruction of the Holy Spirit, we should also express a commitment to apply what we learn.
- Ps. 25:4-5—“Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” A prayer for knowledge from the Word does not come out of nowhere...or else it will go nowhere. Our prayers will only be effective if we are in a state of trusting in Him “all day long”.
- Ps. 27:11—“Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.” The oppressors are not just attackers among our human counterparts; they include demonic beings who watch for every opportunity to distort or remove the truth we learn. Through prayer we fortify ourselves against such foes.
- Ps. 119:169—“May my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word.” When we receive instruction from the Lord, it is because the necessary conditions have been met, and the required techniques have been followed.
- Ps. 86:11a—“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth....” When we are taught by the Holy Spirit, we will be equipped to live our lives by God’s standards through His provisions and procedures.
- Ps. 43:3—“Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.” For us, the place of God’s dwelling is within us, and to “go to His Most Holy Place”, we must apply the formula He gives us for getting nearer to Him.

We have seen here that, to get the effects we hope for when we pray for understanding, we must 1) pray in faith and fellowship, 2) believe the Word as we learn it, and 3) follow the instructions embedded in the knowledge we gain.

Praying for the Wisdom of Others. Sometimes, we want other believers who are especially on our minds or in our hearts to receive wisdom from God to strengthen them in their spiritual walks.

There are some things we need to know about doing this, so that we will be aware of our limitations, as well as our opportunities.

A good example for the content of a prayer for others is found in Eph. 1:17-19 (NET), where Paul lets the Ephesians know what He is praying for concerning their learning. Here is what he said in this passage:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him—since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened—so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength.

The thing Paul is praying is that they would be “given spiritual knowledge and wisdom”, creating the contingency for them that they can “acquire wisdom”. He wants them to receive God’s knowledge, assuming that they are in fellowship and are walking by faith. Otherwise, they will not be qualified for teaching, so what is *offered* may not be *acquired*.

Notice that Paul does NOT pray that God would operate inside of them to *change their minds* about truth, or about God, or about the techniques for living, or about any other spiritual quality or condition. He simply asks God to **bring information to them**. This is all we can do, when it comes to praying for the “wisdom” of other believers, because *we cannot make their choices for them* or *do the “seeking” for them*, and *neither will God*. They must *seek* it themselves to be prepared for it. All God will do is make it available to them.

The idea that God does not tamper with our choices is well-covered in *Studies on Living in God’s Plan*, especially pp. 37-42. In this series it became clear that God allows us to make choices, and that His plan, devised in eternity past, operates around those choices to accomplish His will...without mechanistically directing what choices we make. This is why we cannot expect that our prayers for others will be fulfilled if it is asking for God to, for example, “make them receptive” to His truth. God does not flip their internal switches for them. It’s up to them to become receptive to the truth. When they want it, and are prepared to receive it, God will get the teaching to them. That’s all we can ask for. (NOTE: In regard to God “hardening the heart”, and so on, see the *Plan* series, cited above.)

One thing needs to be made clear about “freedom of choice”, and its frequently-referenced twin, “free will”. The point has been made in some circles that we don’t have “free will”, because there are limitations as to what we can choose to do. For example, a person in prison can’t *choose* to walk out and “free himself”. So he is not free to choose...the range of alternatives is limited. But it seems obvious that he still has CHOICE, especially as to what he thinks and believes.

Is there anyone who really thinks that, when we use the term “choice”, we mean that our choices can operate outside of natural and *a priori* parameters within our environment? It is obvious that we can’t fly or live under water. But we can always “make choices”, within the fixed limits of the reality in which we are living (also known as “God’s plan”). God simply DOES NOT MAKE OUR DECISIONS FOR US. When He made us, He decided to limit Himself to the degree that *He lets us choose*. If this is not true, then we are automatons, and cannot be held responsible for our choices. Period. He may make us *wish* we had chosen better, but we still...and always...*make our own choices*.

We should notice one more thing about Paul’s prayer in Ephesians, just seen above. He suggests the types of things that will happen if the Ephesians will prepare and open themselves to God’s wisdom. Here are some benefits that Paul predicts for them:

1. They will **know God** better.

2. Their hearts will **be enlightened**.
3. They will **know the hope of God's calling**...our salvation.
4. They will **understand their value** as God's inheritance.
5. They will **know God's power**.
6. They will **see "mighty strength"**, in the expression of God's power.

Conclusion. We should be motivated, as a result of this study, to pray for wisdom and understanding. If we trust Him when we pray for knowledge, we can be sure that we will get it, as He has promised. But we must be reminded that all the techniques for spirituality must be met for us to be instructed by the Holy Spirit; we must take care of *first things first*. Truth will be declared...when we are prepared. And we will build from that point, fulfilling Prov. 18:15, which says, "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out."

Appendix J

The Faith Perspective

INTRODUCTION. We have written a book on faith, titled, *Bible Basics on Walking by Faith*. The concepts presented in *Walking by Faith* are Bible-based and—we believe—sound. We want to review some of the truths discussed in that book, but we want to go beyond these and see some new truths that have come to light as a result of recent studies. Look for new applications, even in the portion of this writing that is devoted to refreshment of teachings that were offered previously. This study will dig deeper into the process for exercising our faith under all conditions, and will show why it is so important to enrich and enlarge our faith as believers.

WHAT IS FAITH? In the context of the Christian life, faith is being persuaded that God has the power to do what He says He will do. This is what we see in Rom. 4:20-21, which speaks of Abraham's faith, saying the following:

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.

We apply this verse to our lives when we first believe that Christ died for our sins. And then we apply it when we believe that God will forgive the sins we commit after we become Christians (when we confess them), and that He will provide all we need to live the life of Christ. Faith is believing that God exists, and that the message of the gospel for salvation...AND the pronouncements of God's ways for meaningful living...are true. We believe that He IS, and that we have a stake in His existence, because we have become His children through faith in Christ.

Faith is a lot of things, as we have seen in previous studies. It is fear of the Lord, occupation with Christ, acknowledgement of God, trust, resting in God's promises, God-consciousness, submission to God's will, waiting on the Lord, thankfulness, patience in trials, perseverance in tests, endurance in suffering, and being still before the Lord. It is *belief*, for starters, but it is also *trust*. Trust implies that we can relax, because we believe the truth that the One who promises will deliver what He has declared. We can turn ourselves over to God, with all our problems, our aspirations, our dreams, our hopes, and our intentions. We can relinquish control to Him, because we believe He loves us and will act in our best interests, even when we don't SEE this in our immediate experience.

When faith has grown, it becomes "fear", which is not "fright", but is awe and reverence...extreme respect...for the Lord. Fear is *strong faith*. To reach the level of faith known as fear is to discover the rich blessings of God's provisions, which—as we have learned very well—is much more than money or possessions. Ps. 31:19 says, "How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men." Ps. 34:9 adds, "Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing."

And then there is a level of faith beyond fear, known as the "fullness of God", which is based on an ABSOLUTE understanding of the LOVE of God. This is the penultimate spiritual experience, and

leads to the best form of life available to human beings. This is the time when the gates of grace fly open, as they did for Job...a time when our lives foreshadow the richness and glory of heaven. Very few believers achieve this level of growth, but it is open to all.

LEARNING ABOUT TRUST. Is. 26:4 admonishes, “Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.” It is God that we are to trust. And this is not just a suggestion; it is a *command*! Not to trust is a sin. Heb. 3:12 instructs us, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” Sin is not always unbelief, but unbelief is always present when we sin, and unbelief itself IS sin. When we do not trust, we are sinning.

God wants, more than anything else, for us to trust Him. This is the greatest honor we can show Him, and the hardest thing we can achieve as we live out our lives in a hostile and alien world. And we are not the first. The disciples themselves had trouble learning trust. This is what we see in Mark 4:35-41, which we quote here in its entirety:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

This is how the Lord must feel with us, at times: “Do you still have no faith?” Those of us who are studying and praying and learning and maturing are still confronted with events, temptations, distractions, deceptions, and tests that challenge us and bring us to this question: Where is my faith? Why can’t we just do what Peter called for when he gave the command: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”? (1 Pet. 5:7) We will learn this at some point, but the road to this understanding is long and rocky, and may require a number of intense storms before we really get it.

Faith is directed toward God, and not toward events or outcomes. So many times, we see the message, “believe and receive”, and immediately conjure up images of success, or a new relationship, or a specific acquisition, and we focus on the “gift” and not the “giver”. This is a colossal mistake. We can have no confidence that God will deliver the specific thing or condition that WE want. What HE wants is for us to understand that our confidence is to be in Him and His plan for us, and that the playing out of His will has the greatest prospect for success *according to HIS thinking*, not according to our own dim-witted and selfish imagination. We come to Him in faith because we want more of Him and His provision, not the world and its vain fortune. We want only God!

When we come to God, it is because we believe He IS God, and that coming to Him will make a difference in our lives. Heb. 11:6 frames this idea very well, saying, “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.” The kind of faith that PLEASES God, is faith that REALLY

believes that God is there, AND that HE REWARDS SEEKERS! When we come to God, we do so believing, not only that He is real, but that He will enrich our lives in the truest sense...BECAUSE WE WANT MORE OF HIM! The rewards do not come from seeking the rewards themselves; they come from seeking HIM.

It is common for us to think of our lives in terms of the circumstances that surround us. Often, our awareness of God's presence in our lives is hampered by our comparing what we see and possess with what we imagine is possible...i.e., what we WANT...not what God wants us to have. His final objective is to advance us toward greater spirituality and maturity. But we tend to get buried, either in what we see that we want and do not have, or by an onslaught of "trying" events. Often, we are frustrated, disappointed, or frantic. This is frequently our attitude: one of unbelief and non-trust. But we must not be discouraged when our faith is flagging, because—if we consistently follow God's pathway to growth—our faith will get stronger at some point...and we will KNOW IT when it happens!

Is. 8:12-14a exhorts us to direct our "fear" toward the Almighty, as follows:

Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary...

It is easy to believe in the things we see, and to discount the things we don't. This is why there is such a great need for a renewed and transformed mode of thinking, to bring us into the divine view-point regarding life and purpose. Is. 8:16-17 follows up the passage just quoted, saying, "I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him." Waiting and trusting...this is what we are to learn.

Prov. 3:5 calls for us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your understanding..." When we can learn to trust God with all our hearts, and quit thinking that all the answers are in the world, or *within us*, as Plato believed, then we can turn to the clear directions of Scripture for reliable substance...and sustenance. When we are uncertain about the content and flow of our lives, we can be sure of one thing: Our faith needs to grow.

God has given us all we need to reach a full and constant faith. 2 Pet. 1:2-4 sums it up well, saying:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 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.

Notice the repetition of the word "knowledge". This knowledge comes through intensive study. We have studied "studying" in all our previous writings and have thoroughly documented the need for us to know God's ways for living as they are presented in His Word. We know that we grow by learning. And that when we "know" who God really is, we will be able to "participate in His divine nature". When we live in His nature and power, we will live in a *spiritual* realm, more than in the world, thus avoiding all the snares and traps set for us by the world. When we have this perspective, we will

know that it is God who provides for us and sustains us, and we will know that our times belong to Him. Ps. 31:14-15 assures us of this, saying, “But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.” Seasons, events, relationships, promotions, and even death are in God’s hands. This is why we must study, so that we will learn to trust Him. When we know Him, we will know that we can trust Him.

Is. 46:46 gives us this: “I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.” God is the One who sustains; there is no other. This is what we are to believe. There is no participation in God’s sustaining grace except through faith. 1 John 5:4b says, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” There is no victory apart from faith in the ONE who brings it. Victory rests with the Lord, as per Prov. 21:31, which says, “The horse is made ready for battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” And when we trust this, He will carry us, as we see in Deut. 1:29-31:

Then I said to you, “Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place”.

To actuate the effects of God’s instructions and promises, we must BELIEVE them. There is power in the techniques and promises which God offers, but these are useless to us if we do not, first of all, *learn* them, and secondly, if we do not *believe* them. We must exercise faith within two aspects of our curriculum, the first being the *techniques*, and the second being the *promises*. The techniques include confession of sins, prayer, study of the Word, enduring God’s training, and exchanging mutual edification through the gifts of fellow believers. The promises are those things which God assures us He will provide. God is faithful, but almost all provisions have *conditions* which must be met for them to be released. Techniques precede promises.

When we have faith, we will have confidence that we can approach God, as per Eph. 3:12, which says, “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with confidence.” When we have faith, we will be assured that God loves and cares for us, and that He will give us what we need to live for Him. He will *help* us, as we see in 2 Chron. 14:11-12, as follows:

Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, ‘Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. Lord, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you.’ The Lord struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled...

He will *help* us when we *rely* on Him. The condition for help, is faith. Without faith, there will be no help, but with faith, *anything* is possible (Luke 1:37).

Everything is possible with God, because He has the POWER to do whatever He wants. Eph. 1:18-19 expresses it this way:

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 the saints, and his

incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength...

By being “enlightened”, or taught, we can know the kind of faith to which we are “called”, and the abundant resources which are available to us through the immense power of the One in whom we believe. Through our faith, we activate the power within us, which becomes the “working of his mighty strength”. That is the work that counts...His work. When God is at work, competence is evident. 2 Cor. 3:5 shows the source of competence for Christian living: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.” God fulfills every good purpose by HIS POWER. 2Thess. 1:11 repeats this concept:

“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.”

God “fulfills every good purpose” Himself; our part is to have “faith” in Him...to trust Him. Everything left with God will turn out good. He knows what He’s doing, and everything He does is for our benefit and growth.

Faith is drawn to the power. We believe and trust when we see that the force we rely on is infinite; but not only that, it is benevolent. God WANTS to help us. We just have to *understand* what it is He wants, and learn how we access what He wants us to have. Col. 1:9-11 describes this power that we can trust, and tells us how we acquire it, as follows:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and 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, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

God wants us to trust Him, and He knows that we cannot trust in something we do not know about. We must KNOW ABOUT HIM, so we can know how much we can TRUST HIM. This is why we study and grow. When we finally get this, and move up through “fear”, followed by “fullness”, we will be able to “live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way”. And great “fruit” will be borne by and for Him.

God has the power to fulfill what He promises, and we can believe what He says. Num. 23:19 confirms this, saying the following: “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” God will not withhold any good thing from a believer who has learned to trust in Him. His word is good; when He says it, He stands behind it. We can count on it.

INCREASING FAITH. *Saving* faith does not alter, grow, or change in any way. It is a one-time, once-for-all expression of belief in the saving grace and work of Jesus Christ...that He is risen, and that He finished the work of paying for our rebellion and sin. We believe in Him, and thereby we

are eternally saved. Thus begins the Christian life. Ah, but there's the rub. We are helpless *infants* at that point, even though there are those standing around who cheer us on, who say we now have the "victory", and who encourage us to "go get 'em"! But neither they nor we recognize that—at the beginning—we are useless. This is the time to grow and mature and prepare for big-boy living...not time to get out in the world, or the "church", or to start trying to be productive. We are not ready to do anything but eat and grow. We start from scratch, and all we can do at this stage is LEARN.

Initial faith—the faith that activates saving grace—is effective at the time we are saved. But faith has another dimension, which arises *after* we are saved. This is *operational* faith, which we carry into our lives as God's children. Our focus in this writing is on operational faith, since our (my personal) gift and passion is to help believers grow. We must never be discouraged. Operational faith can increase; you *can* change the way you respond to life...by degrees and over time. It is our objective to build up as much faith as we can in the time we are given. Growing this faith is largely based on understanding of God's truths, especially those that tell us how great God is, how He expects us to live, and how He provides for our lives.

It is conclusive: After we are saved we are to live and grow. And the mark of maturity is strong faith. Col. 2:6-7 says this very thing:

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, and overflowing with thankfulness.

After we are born again, we are to then to LIVE in Christ, or live by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is facilitated by being strengthened in the "faith", which in this case means the body of truth that God has given us for living. We are to have our understanding increased, so that we can LIVE in Christ. We are *in union with Him* as a result of saving faith, and then we *conduct our lives in Him* by coming to KNOW Him, which causes us to become "rooted and built up" in Him. Then we will overflow with "thankfulness", which connotes fear, trust, acknowledgement, humility, and God consciousness.

Repeating an earlier point, because it is important, we are built up by "hearing" the Word, and believing it, as Rom. 10:17 declares: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." We are to enter an intensive study of the Word of God, immediately upon being saved. We must go through "basic training", and then move on to more complex truths for living. Heb. 6:1a says, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity..." This begins a life-long process of study-review-study which will move us toward a greater faith, and equip us to fight the battle which has been drawn before us. In 1 Tim. 1:18- 19, Paul advised the young pastor:

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, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

When we absorb truth, we will become equipped to "fight the good fight" by continuing to believe God's Word in the face of gale-force winds that blow against it. We can then "hold on to our faith" and operate with a clean conscience. Here we see the two sturdy pillars of our belief system: 1)

faith based on assimilation of the truth, and 2) a clean conscience, based on the confession of our sins. These AVERT THE SHIPWRECK of our faith.

Continuing in the vein of “shipwrecks”, we are learning that, with constant faith and continual confession, we can stay afloat in the storms of life. Paul had been in shipwrecks himself, as we see in Acts 27:22-26, which gives an account of one. When the ship started to go down, Paul declared the following to those on board:

But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, “Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.” So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.

Regardless of the reason, when your ship starts to go down is the time to trust. This is the time of challenge, when believing God and His Word is crucial. Paul KNEW God and His truths, so he was prepared for this challenge. And he trusted God before, during, and after the destruction of the ship and his being dumped into a stormy sea. That is the kind of faith we want, because part of the increase of our faith involves challenges like the shipwreck of Paul. Our ship may go down, the body may sink, and the world may swamp us, but our FAITH does not have to shipwreck.

We learn and build our faith through understanding of God’s Word, and then we refine our grasp of His truths through the endurance of storms in life. We LEARN through tests and trials, by seeing God’s hand at work in all kinds of circumstances. 1 Pet. 1:6-7 frames this for us, saying the following:

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.

Hardship increases faith. This is why James 1:2-4 says that trials develop “perseverance” (faith), as follows:

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.

To bring our faith to the level of “not lacking anything” will require the training that God provides to strengthen our faith. There is no shortcut to this kind of growth, and those that sign up for God’s training are in for a “bumpy night”. There is no other way to “finish the work”.

The perspective of suffering to increase our faith is that of the long view. We are not focused on the world and our time in it, so much as we are the eternal place of an infinite God and our future with Him. 2 Cor. 4:17-18 confirms this notion, saying this:

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.

The suffering we are doing now to build and strengthen our faith is nothing compared to the “glory” of God’s eternal state. So suffering has an immediate benefit, in that it increases our faith, but it is also securing for us greater rewards in heaven, as we endure our training. Our most immediate gains, though, are here and now. Our object is to increase our faith, while we have time.

When suffering comes, we can know that God is giving us the opportunity to grow. That is why we are called on repeatedly to “rejoice” when hard times come, no matter what they are. Our focus is to be on God and not on our circumstances. Our faith is in what we do NOT see, rather than what is crashing down on top of us. Hab. 3:17-18 says this:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

As we begin to mature, we will come to understand and experience the joy and contentment that only God can give, regardless of conditions around us. When we learn to trust, even in tragedy, we will know that we are maturing. We will know the following from verse 19: “The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.” Painful setbacks and scary events plague the growing believer. And we are completely vulnerable and fragile. In the end, there is nothing for us to do but to trust God.

I am moved by the plight of slaves in our country’s history. Their hardship provides an excellent analogy, perhaps an example, of the endurance and faith of a people operating under the worst kind of mistreatment and misery. Perhaps no single group in modern history has been more single-minded in its faith and dependence on the Lord than were these slaves, who toiled night and day at the whimsical mercy of their masters. Yet many of them lived in inner peace, because they were blessed by their God, who gave them understanding and strength in the middle of their suffering. They listened to their masters read the Bible, and encoded what they heard into spiritual songs. And they believed the Word. I opine that their greatest joy and victory was internal, where they worshipped their Lord, and prayed to Him and trusted Him through everything that happened. Their faith is a model for all of us, including their descendents. It seems to me that not enough has been spoken in behalf of the spiritual walk of these slaves.

Whenever suffering takes place as part of God’s training, we are instructed to keep on trusting. It is easy to become glib about what we should do when suffering comes. We have developed all kinds of phrases and clauses that are supposed to assuage the pain, but these have become worn and trite. An entire jargon of “Christianese” has evolved, with the result that the severity, as well as the purpose, of suffering has been minimized and superficialized. The faith we need is not the faith of public bravado, but the faith we hold in our hearts and in our hands as we go through the vicissitudes of daily Christian life.

We have many questions about this faith: What does faith “feel” like...on the inside? What happens when we “believe” and express faith? Why is it so hard to keep faith steady in the storm? We are searching for answers.

It is the recognized norm of natural human behavior to detect and avoid danger and threat, so how can we encounter setbacks, disappointments, attacks, mistreatment, deprivation, pain, or bad news of any kind, often with no end in sight, and not react to them in some defensive manner? How can we say, “I am at peace?” How can we have confidence, when we see no relief and no solution? It may be easy to speak of tragedy when it is in the abstract, or to be insouciant when misfortune belongs to someone else, rather than us. But when it is personal and fully felt, it cannot be dismissed like some fictional drama, because we *feel* the pain! Yet we must “trust”. This is difficult, and if you have reached this level of intensity in God’s training program, you know what I mean.

It is not easy to be a GROWING CHRISTIAN, and it cannot be taken lightly as a “nice option”, because it is not without pain. The end result of maturity and the blessings that come with growth will be fantastic in the long run, but getting there is a real grind that requires maximum attention to study and prayer and our walk in the Spirit. I know the passage that says God won’t “test” us “beyond our limits”, but that limit is an undetermined value, and we cannot assume that our “limit” precludes severity. If we want more of God, to get closer to Him, we must be willing to endure whatever suffering it takes to get us there. As we have said before, there are no shortcuts in God’s training program.

God will provide opportunities for advancement that will bring maximum growth and strengthening, but these translate into considerable pain and pressure. This does not happen with Christians who just “dabble” at Christian living, but is reserved for the serious student, the true seeker, the real “thirsty deer” who pants after the waters of the Holy Spirit. The fact that challenges arrive in your life means that you have the privilege of being trained by God, so that your faith will become strong and steady for all occasions.

As you progress into higher levels of maturity, you will learn “fear of the Lord”, which brings special blessings. Ultimately, you have the potential to reach the “fullness of God”, which is the apex of our intimacy with God while we are still alive on earth. When we reach that point, God’s provision will flow into our lives beyond anything we ever imagined, and God’s will and purpose will be fulfilled in and through us.

Do you want it? If so, buckle up, because training is in the cards. You must sit at the feet of a teaching pastor, and/or get regular instruction in the Word from another reliable source. You must stay “pure” through humility and confession. You must pray constantly regarding all things, especially that you will acquire wisdom as you learn and grow. And you must access the gifts of fellow believers to allow them to contribute to your growth, as you offer your gifted service to them. And finally, you must endure God’s training, which brings all processes together in a fast-paced, high-pressure course that will stretch you to the limit. And in the end, you will know what God wants you to see: His GRACE! (Please read the book, *God’s Training Program for Believers*, available by free download at this website.)

We want to clarify: “Enduring” is not the same as “stoicism”, where suffering is grimly borne. Nor is it denial of what is happening. Enduring means to go through the rigors of God’s training with eyes wide open, USING ALL THE ASSETS HE MAKES AVAILABLE TO HELP US THROUGH IT. That is how we train. When the test comes, we access life-preservers and other resources for relief, and we get through it. But to say that God’s way for us to get through suffering is by “grinning and bearing it” WITHOUT THE COMFORT AND RELIEF OF GRACE...is ludicrous! GOD OFFERS RELIEF. Ps. 121:2 says, “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Ps. 18:2 adds this:

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

It is legitimate for us to ask for relief from suffering and testing. This is why Jesus modeled a prayer that included this: “Deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 5:13b). And this is why Paul prayed three times—pleaded—that God would remove a “thorn” from his side. (2 Cor. 12:7-10). And this is why prayer is such an important piece in the armor with which we resist Satan and the world, as we see in Eph. 6, where the armor description is consummated with this: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph. 6:18a). And this is why James said, in James 5:13a, “Is any one of you in trouble [literally, “Is any one of you suffering?”]? He should pray.”

As we see, there are considerable passages in Scripture that make it clear that we can pray for relief from suffering. 2 Cor. 1:3-4a says this: “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...” And Isaiah tells us of streams in the desert which God provides for His children, as we see in the following:

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.

Even in the desert, as we saw with the Israelites in the wilderness, God will provide. Grace is never far away, as Paul learned so well. The following describes what he went through as he was learning about grace for training:

2 Cor. 11:24-32—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? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

God loves us. His object is not to make us suffer for suffering's sake, but to get us focused on Him, and to get us to understand fully that we can trust His plan, purpose, power, and provision. That is why He offers help for us as we train. Ps. 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble." Ps. 120:1 adds, "I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me." And finally, Nahum 1:7 promises, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him..." He allows suffering, but He will be our refuge, if we turn to Him for relief in the time of trial, rather than to the world, or to our own solutions.

We have shown so far that *Bible study* and *God's training* bring about our movement toward maturity. We want to add one last thing, which contributes greatly to our growth. It involves the mutual exchange of benefits among believers through interactive edification. Each believer is given one or more gifts to enable him to contribute to the growth of other believers. The interchange of services among believers is the greatest expression of love, apart from dying for each other, and most of our growth objective should center on the refinement and exercise of our gifts in behalf of others. Keep in mind, gifts come from the Holy Spirit, and it is the Spirit who will work them through us. That is the function and purpose of spirituality. He bears His fruit through us by using our gifts.

Growth begins with faith, and as faith increases, we are carried upward through manifestations of that faith. The most significant output of faith is the operation of our gifts, or loving service to others. This progression of faith is seen in 2 Pet. 1:5, which says this:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

We start small and build, and—along with maturity—we develop our gifts, which operate as extensions of "love". And this is a great resource for all of us...if we place ourselves with other believers who are growing as we are...so we can benefit from their gifts, as they benefit from ours. When we get it right, everything we do with other believers will take place with edification as a backdrop, as per Eph. 4:29, which says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Edifying each other is the most important thing we can do.

If you do not know your gift, do not fret. Grow...and trust...and wait...you will know it at some point. And if you operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is inevitable that your gift will become fully operational, and that your gift will help produce growth in others. Paul spoke of the operation of his gift in 2 Cor. 4:13, and related it to his faith. Here is what this verse says: "It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak."

When faith is functioning, our gifts will operate; and the stronger our faith, the greater our production.

It is a given, then: Gifts are useful as catalysts to maturity. Eph. 4:11-15 frames this well, as follows:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in 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 people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

The working of God's gifts prepares us for works of service, which revolves around teaching each other "the truth in love". As mature believers help other believers toward maturity, we all fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), and God is glorified in the following ways:

As a result of the service of mature and gifted believers, the gospel is given to unbelievers in a meaningful and fruitful way.

As believers edify one another, mutual symbiosis and growth occur. Angels see believers trusting God, which glorifies Him.

Our biggest job—and the outcome of maturity—is the operation of our gifts in edifying each other. This leads to the attainment of the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), which is the ultimate spiritual experience. The fullness of Christ consists of these: God's love, joy, and peace; operation in the power of the Holy Spirit; commitment to the plan and will of God; and understanding of the grace of God.

As faith grows, spiritual operations will increase, especially that of love, which enfold the operation of gifts. 2 Thess. 1:3 says, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing." This is when we begin to see the "service" of our "faith", i.e., when it starts to contribute to the growth of others. And once we get into the swing of it, the operation of our gifts even facilitates our own growth. This is what we see in 1 Tim. 3:13, which says, "Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus." So when we exercise our gifts, we strengthen ourselves. (For more on *specific* gifts, see the chapter, "Gifts", in the book, *Bible Basics on Maturity*, available at this website.)

Growth is a long and arduous process, but if we are going to see meaning and production in our Christian lives...if we are going to be real players in the "game"...we can't sit on the sidelines after we are saved. Salvation is a beginning...not the end. We are just getting started, and our goal is to reach the "fullness of God", as per our previous article, "Getting the Fullness of God". In that study we explained the meaning of Eph. 3:14-21, our source for the concept of the "fullness of God". We offer here a brief

analysis of that passage, phrase by phrase, to see once again this fullness, which is the final destiny in our journey to maturity. Read Eph. 4:14-21 and then peruse the following:

“...strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...” (v. 16) This is being “filled with the Spirit”.

“...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (v. 17) When Christ “dwells” in our hearts “through faith”, He not only occupies our hearts...He manages them. When we “walk in the Spirit”, Christ manages our hearts. This is identical to the control of the Spirit, which is accomplished through an ongoing faith.

“...being rooted and established in love...” (v. 17) suggests the direction and purpose of maturity, which is the growth, not only of faith, but love. This is divine love, the product of our walk with the Holy Spirit.

“...may have power...” means “may *receive* power” (v. 18), which calls for us to access grace assets and techniques so that we will be operating in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“...to grasp how wide...is the love of Christ...” (v. 18) shows us the thing we must understand initially, which includes a full knowledge of mercy and grace.

“...to know this love that surpasses knowledge...” (v. 19) gives us the final step to attaining the “fullness of God”, which is to gain ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE of God’s love. This level of maturity moves beyond techniques and training, and into FULL awareness of God.

“...that you may be filled to the measure [limit] of all the fullness of God...” (v. 19) shows the destiny for all true seekers of God. The “fullness of God” is the penultimate experience we can have with God this side of heaven. This is the place of rest, blessing, peace, and—at some point—reduced Satanic encroachment.

“...do immeasurably more” (v. 20) tells us the extent of God’s work and provision for believers who have received the “fullness of God”. It is beyond imagination!

We must not settle for less than God’s best. We must commit to growth and service, and seek to know the full extent of His love and grace.

WALKING BY FAITH. When we say, “walking by faith”, this implies “walking by the Spirit”, or “walking in the truth”, as well, even though the application for these differs slightly from one to the next. We will see these as basically identical for the purposes of this study.

We have talked about growth, and have seen that the main benefit of rigorous divine training is the advancement of our maturity. Our topic is “faith”, and the point of growing is to increase the strength and consistency of our faith. There is a strong link between our training by tests and trials, and maturity, which culminates as a walk by means of the Holy Spirit’s power. Both training and “walking” are tied to faith, and each requires its own form of trusting. The object of faith in training is to prevent the events that happen from derailing that faith. If we trust through training, our spiritual walk will not be disrupted, but if we falter under pressure, our walk will be hampered, and we will end up discounting God’s love and may even become bitter toward life.

When suffering comes, how many believers say at that point, “God is great!”? Not enough. It is easy to praise and give thanks when things go well, but it is when things seem to be falling apart that we are challenged to continue believing that everything is working together for our good. On the other hand, when our faith is strong enough to withstand the onslaught of bad news and difficult experiences, we will continue our search for God and our trust in His goodness, even in the middle of the storm. We must understand, and this is not easy to concede: The Christian life is HARD. But endurance will lead to God’s fullness, and then our faith and fellowship will be constant and strong, and God’s blessings and peace will be multiplied.

We have studied previously the difference between being “filled with the Spirit” and “walking by the Spirit”. When we are cleansed through humility and confession, we qualify for the empowerment of the Spirit’s “filling”. After we are filled, we will be “walking in the power of the Spirit” commensurate with the level of our faith. If we are new or immature believers, the influence of the Spirit will fade quickly and we will be back in a pattern of sin or legalism. But if faith is getting stronger, the filling will continue, and we will be “walking in the Spirit”. Put simply, the *continuation* of the filling of the Spirit will depend on our *maturity* level...or the strength of our faith. As faith gets stronger, our walk in the Spirit will be sustained for longer periods without interruption. At every opportunity, the evil forces that invade with sin and self-righteousness challenge this faith, and bring us under the control of the flesh and leave us in a state of carnality. This is why it is so important to stay “clean” through constant confession, until we *mature*, when the frequency of confession will be reduced. This is when our faith will be stronger, thus holding us “in the Spirit” and keeping us away from sin.

Our goal is to develop a faith that is strong enough to keep us trusting under all circumstances, so that we maintain a walk in the Spirit, even in the middle of tragedy or misfortune. Strong faith keeps us close to God, where we find strength for living and confirmation that our faith is well-placed. Heb. 10:22 says, “...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.” The words “sincere”, “assurance”, and “faith” all connote a heart that trusts in the God that dwells within us. “Having our hearts sprinkled” and “having our bodies washed with pure water” are clear references to being cleansed by the blood of Christ and the washing of the Holy Spirit. This is the forgiveness that comes to believers through grace by the confession of our sins. Here are some verses that confirm the validity and veracity of the cleansing process:

1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify

us from all unrighteousness.

Heb. 9:14a—How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences...

John 13:8-10a—“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.”

Ps. 51:2—Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Being washed or cleansed is a process offered to believers only through the confession of sins. Their “bodies” have been washed, but—as sin occurs in their lives—their feet need to be washed. When we are washed, we are cleansed, pure...blameless. 1 Thess. 5:23 says, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify [cleanse] you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Blamelessness comes, not through a change in demeanor, though with maturity that too will come, but through confession. We are blameless to the degree that we are *forgiven*. When we are clean, and are in fellowship and controlled by the Spirit, faith can function and grow. So—first things first: Wash your feet!

When we are clean, and are taking advantage of that time of fellowship by studying, praying, etc., we will be operating in faith, or “walking by faith”. Gal. 3:11 says the “just”, or those who are clean, will “live by faith”. Living by faith is walking by faith, and faith is directed toward God, and not toward the conditions we see around us. 2 Cor. 5:7 says, “We live by faith, not by sight.” Things can look bad to our eyes, but faith focuses on God, who sees beyond circumstances and any period of suffering, to that time when we will be mature, walking in a faith that sees what He sees.

When faith is strong, our production will be great. 1 Tim. 1:4b says, “...nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith.” God’s WORK is by FAITH (Note: not EFFORT). Our goal is to stay clean, so faith can grow, to enable us to walk in the Spirit. That’s the summary of all our teaching and writing: Confess to stay clean, as we grow to trust more, so we can produce holy “good” through the power of the indwelling Spirit. This is the circuit we follow; this is the road we walk. There’s no other way.

The purpose of “walking by faith”, then, is to “walk in the Spirit”. Look at Phil. 2:1 and 2 Cor. 13:14, which both link faith with fellowship. 1 Pet. 1:22 wraps up the outcome of fellowship and spiritual power: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.” When we are purified by following God’s methods for cleansing, and walk in the love of the Holy Spirit (same as “walking in the Spirit”), then we can love one another deeply, primarily through the operation of our gifts, as we have seen. The result is the “fruit of the Spirit”.

I hope this is beginning to crystallize for you. We will be filled with joy and peace and love, for as long as we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, which goes on as long as we are clean and walking by faith.

With faith, the filling of the Spirit is perpetuated, thus becoming a “walk”. Rom. 15:13 expresses Paul’s prayer for the Romans: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” It doesn’t get much clearer that this: God’s joy and peace, understood as signals for fellowship, are sustained by “trust”, which causes an “overflow of hope”. This overflowing hope is *advanced* faith and productivity, which generates divine good in the “power of the Holy Spirit”. Faith and spiritual productivity are inextricably linked.

For further confirmation that faith and our walk in the Spirit are linked, we offer the following proof texts to establish this point:

Eph. 6:23—"Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The phrase "love with faith" links fellowship with faith. Faith is added to fellowship, because that is what will sustain fellowship and turn it into a "walk by the Spirit".

2 Cor. 1:24—"Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm." The term "joy" is another signal for fellowship, which must exist for faith to be operable and growing.

Eph. 3:16-17—"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." We are "strengthened with power through His Spirit" when we are in fellowship. Then Christ can "dwell in our hearts", or dominate our walk, "through faith".

Rom. 15:13a—"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him..." We saw this verse earlier, and use it here to reinforce the notion that fellowship is sustained by trust. (Remember that "love", "joy", and "peace" are all indicators for fellowship.)

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." The life of Christ, indwelling us now as His Spirit, is lived out through us, consistent with our ongoing faith in Him.

The filling of the Spirit is perpetuated by faith. Faith leads to empowerment by the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is in command within us, His fruit will be produced, as seen in Gal. 2:22-23a—"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." These will be seen IN US, when we walk by faith and thus by His Spirit.

IMPACT OF FAITH. "Without faith it is impossible to please God..." So says Heb. 11:6a. Because faith is essential to God's pleasure, He scans for it constantly in believers, and He spots even the most minute atom of it. Matt. 17:20 tells us that "...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 for you." We must have faith to please God, and it doesn't take much. The direction of our faith is its most important aspect, and if it is aimed properly, it will receive nourishment and thrive. Our faith must be directed toward God, rather than the detractors—demons, the world, and ourselves. Our objective, once again, is to grow as much faith as we can.

Faith provides many positive effects. One of them is that—as long as we are believing—we will have the confidence we need to come before God. Job 13:15 says, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope [trust] in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him!"

Another positive effect of faith is that it provides a breastplate for our hearts, which serves as protection from evil as we exercise service toward fellow believers. 1 Thess. 5:8 says, "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate..." Faith and love, which travel together, protect us and keep us in the "daylight". Faith is a shield, according to Eph. 6:16, part of the armor of God that we are to "put on" (Eph. 6:11). Protection comes from the "strength and power of the Lord" (Eph. 6:10), which is accessed by faith.

The effects of faith are so significant that faith stands alone as the means for accessing grace assets and provisions, including the love of God. Gal. 5:6b says, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Faith activates grace, which produces love. This in turn prompts our gifts, thus producing the fruit of the Spirit. This is why we BUILD our faith by adding the following one at a time (as we saw before): goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and—ultimately—love (2 Pet. 1:5). Love is an asset of grace and an effect of faith.

One of the outcroppings of faith is that prayers are answered. If we are in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and are trusting the One to whom we pray, our prayers will be answered positively. This does not mean we always get what we ask for, but that the outcome of all events will be the best that is possible...within God’s plan and according to His will. As we mature, our prayers will morph to match what God wants us to have. As prayers are refined, we pray *according to His will*, and—in the end—we will actually be able to *articulate His will* through our prayers. When we reach a high level of maturity, our prayers are so in tune with God that we *pray for* the exact thing God wants us to have. (See *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer*.) James 5:15a reports this: “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.” The prayer of faith will get results!

Faith also brings righteousness. This includes both the eternal righteousness of Christ, with which we are imputed at salvation, and the experiential righteousness that comes from the control of the Spirit when we are in fellowship as believers. Rom. 1:17 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’.” Faith generates righteousness, because faith relinquishes God’s work to the Holy Spirit. It is our bodies that are used as His tools when this is done, but the source, origin, energy, and direction for it come from the Holy Spirit.

Faith gives us access to grace, which enables us to stand in peace (i.e., in fellowship), regardless of external conditions. Rom. 5:1-3 describes the process this way:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith [saved], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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.

As we access grace for living, we experience the peace and joy that comes with constant communion with the Spirit of Christ. As we mature, this state of being becomes the norm. This privilege is for those who have *faith for living*, and are thus operating under *grace for living*. We can stand in grace, because we walk by faith.

As we have stated repeatedly, the function of our gifts is a big part of each believer’s life, as well as the life of the body of Christ, or the church. Rom. 12:2-6 shows how understanding, grace, faith, and gifts are linked, saying the following:

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. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in

accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Grace designs and guides all spiritual operations, and faith is the receiver for grace. The more our faith is tuned to grace, the better the signal for grace will be. In other words, the more we believe the truths from the Word, the greater we will see our faith become; and the greater our faith is, the more grace we will see. The element that increases our faith is understanding and wisdom, and the medium for this increase is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit causes the nutrients of the Word to be assimilated into the heart, where it mutates into greater faith. In a sense, the Holy Spirit helps us “digest” the nourishing content of the Word. Faith, then, comes to the one who wants the truth...who seeks it, acquires it, and believes it. The results will be *more grace*, and—as the passage above suggests—the *meaningful operation of our gifts* and the *fulfillment of God’s will* can be expected.

We are to come to God with FAITH, assured that He will honor that faith, and that He will meet *faith* with *grace*. Faith *calls up* grace. Heb. 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” For this to happen, we must follow the steps we have learned, suggested in the following: When we are cleansed through humility and confession, have been praying, are frequently feeding on God’s Word, and are trusting Him, we can enter the “Most Holy Place”, which is where the throne of God is. There we can “receive mercy”, an expression of grace-forgiveness; and this will enable us to “find grace”, which will serve us IN OUR TIME OF NEED! Faith is the ticket.

GOD’S PERSPECTIVE AND OUR FAITH. We have seen in previous studies all the alternatives to faith, such as walking in the flesh, trusting in ourselves, relying on the world, and pre-occupation with our circumstances. The focus in this study has been on examining the *correct* objects of our faith, including Jesus Christ, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. The *kind* of faith we have emphasized here is a minute-by-minute trust in the goodness of God...that He will provide everything we need for our physical and material lives, and that He will equip us for spiritual growth and production.

Our tendency is to see faith as a catalyst for immediate change and improvement in our *earthly* conditions. But God’s perspective and plan are farther-reaching; they are long-term, and big-picture. We tend to look to God for money, health, good relationships, etc., which are legitimate and immediate concerns...and God is certainly involved in all of these aspects of our lives. But God’s greatest provisions for us are for our *spiritual* consumption and benefit, with assurances that all other concerns will “take care of themselves”.

We must understand God’s *eternal* view. Unfortunately, our corporeal outlook tends to cause us, even those of us who are growing, to see faith as a process related more to “tangible-world” outcomes than the achievement of spiritual goals. There are, then, two perspectives of the function and purpose of faith: 1) God’s, and 2) that of humans who are consumed with their own circumstances. When faith is directed *toward God*, and continues to increase, it will eventually cause our view to become like His.

When King Jehoshaphat recognized that he was outmanned and outgunned as he faced the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, he chose to adopt a view not confirmed in his senses, but only

in his own faith system. Here is what he said in a prayer regarding this confrontation with a formidable enemy: “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” (2 Chron. 20:12). His focus was on God’s power, not his own. He was looking at God, and not His dilemma. He trusted God, and not the odds, which were clearly stacked against him. God’s perspective was relayed in verse 17:

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.

When we learn God’s perspective, our eyes will be on Him and not the problem we face. Even if the problem continues or worsens, grace will sustain us and bless us, if our faith persists. Reminding ourselves of Heb. 11:1, we recall that faith is defined as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The issue is this: Will we trust our sight, or will we trust God? We are well-practiced in the certainty of what we SEE. But faith is BEING SURE WITHOUT SEEING. Faith is NOT a sensual experience. God’s plan, His love, His grace and mercy...even His forgiveness...are not experienced through the senses. Many churches nowadays emphasize the body and emotions as the center of spiritual engagement, but that is not where faith occurs. Faith deals with the unseen and the unsensed, and is a condition that operates within our hearts.

God’s workings will be hard for us to see and understand, until we reach a level of *super-maturity*, when we can come to know His *fullness*, and have *absolute knowledge* of His love. Until then, however, even though truth and grace will always be there, we won’t always see them, because we are measuring God’s reality and value by what we SEE WITH OUR EYES, rather than what we SEE THROUGH THE EYES OF OUR SPIRITUAL HEARTS (see Eph. 1:18).

As we have seen in previous writings, and see once again in this one, study, training, and growth give us new lenses through which to view our lives. When we reach higher levels of maturity, we will see life

from the divine perspective. Such a view is hard-won, and takes an immense desire for God and His truth. This kind of perspective seems to be rare, but we are assured that it is open to us all. We can all acquire the clarity and acumen of the divine viewpoint. We can all learn to trust as though we were actually SEEING God’s solutions, while we are staring right into the face of our problems.

Appendix K

Loving and Welcoming the Truth

Loving the Truth.

The Word is Pure. We saw in Volume 1 a number of verses that feature the Word as a treasure more valuable than gold or silver or pearls, something we would pay any price to get, and are willing to give up anything to acquire. That makes truth our most valuable possession, and gives us a perspective of the place it should hold in our lives. The Word is complete, it is true, it is effective, and it is pure. Because of this, and because of what it does to enable us to relate to God in meaningful ways, we love it.

There is nothing about the Word of God that is tainted or sullied. There is no corruption or subterfuge in connection with it. No deceit or exaggeration. This amazing book, penned by so many writers from so many periods in history, is astoundingly consistent and reliable. The Bible has been tested, challenged, questioned, distorted, and even burned...but it still stands as the best-selling, most-read book of all time. This is because there are many people in the world who seek the truth, and who treasure it when they find it. They love the truth, and trust it, partly because it is so pure.

Ps. 12:6 says, “And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.” The Word is pure, without fault or flaw. Ps. 119:140 says, “Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.” The endless truths, the techniques, the descriptions of God, the promises, the history, the prophecies, and the perfect plan of God all make up this pure aggregate of truth, which presents the essence of God’s nature. The purity of its truth draws us, and—as we embrace it—our love for it grows.

Things that Happen when we Love the Word. When we have affection for the Word, it is of course because we love the Protagonist of the book, Who is also the Author. But also, when we read the words, or study the concepts in Scripture, we feel appreciation for the truths themselves. We love the *truth*. And because we do, we are told that certain things will happen.

One of the things that happen when we love the truth is that we will have peace and stability. Ps. 119:165 says, “Great peace have they who love your law [for us, this is the “Word”], and nothing can make them stumble.” As per previous studies, “peace” is a symbol of fellowship, and “not stumbling” represents our walk in the Spirit (or a walk by faith). As a result of *loving* the Word, we will take time to *learn* how to maintain fellowship and live under the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, if we do not love...truly seek and value...the Word, we will not know how to access and retain the power of the Holy Spirit, and we will “stumble” into sin and/or self-righteousness. We will eventually fall on our face, and collapse in a useless heap. As we walk the walk of the Christian faith, we must have spiritual *energy* and *balance* to stay on our feet. The Word shows us how we get these.

It is interesting that the act of “walking” is a process of perpetually falling and catching ourselves. As we take each step, for a split second we are falling, so we move one of our feet forward to regain our balance and prevent the fall. When this process is repeated, it becomes “walking”. This is how our spiritual lives work. By loving the Word and accepting its truths, we discover and apply methods that enable us to walk forward one step at a time. We do this by 1) confessing to get into fellowship (catching ourselves), and 2) relying on the strength of God’s Spirit to sustain us (restoring our balance). This is “the walk by means of the Spirit” (cf., Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4).

Another thing that happens when we love the Word is that we will defend its truths. This does not imply divisive arguing over trivial points, but it does suggest that we must *know where we stand on the truths of the Word*, and have a strong scriptural basis for our positions. We will have more to say about this later in this series.

The “defense” of the Word has to do mostly with thwarting the attacks of the world and Satan, as well as the constant impulses of our sinful natures. The more truth we understand, the better equipped we will be to defend against these (cf., Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). In II Cor. 10:3-5, we see this defense referred to as “waging war” against opposing spiritual forces. Because we love the truth, we *protect* it. This passage says this:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 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.

These forces that we are fighting against are demonic and powerful, set on erasing our understanding and corrupting our thoughts. Resisting them requires preparation and study and training that rivals that of Navy SEALs. As much as SEALs are to be admired, the enemies they face do not reach the level of power possessed by the ones we encounter as believers. And if we are not equipped to face them, we are “sitting ducks”. Key reminder: “Being equipped” means “knowing with confidence how to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit”. This is the “divine power” it takes to “demolish arguments...against the knowledge of God.”

Sometimes, however, our love for the Word will be visible when we use it to encourage fellow believers, or to change the minds of those who “oppose truth”. In Titus 1:9, Paul is giving instructions to Titus regarding qualifications for “overseers” in the church, but this can apply to all of us. This verse says, “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

The better prepared we are by *knowing the Word*, the more likely it is that we will be effective in administering Scripture as a balm, or wielding it like a sword, and in knowing which is needed. Whenever we must “correct” someone who is mistaken, however, we should do so in love, and with “gentleness”. As Paul advised Timothy, “Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” (II Tim. 2:25). There are occasions when we should stand firm on sound doctrinal grounds, but our defense of the Word must always be conducted in a spirit of love.

Finally, if we love the Word, we will spend time with it. If we love laziness, or entertainment, or comfort, or anything else, more than learning the truth, we will not have its full benefits. If we live *in* the Word (learning), and *by* the Word (applying), we will be ready for battle...or for love. If not, we will be battered in battle, and love will be lost.

What's Not to Love? Are there parts of Scripture that we should not love? The answer to this question is obviously, "No!" Paul told Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness." ALL SCRIPTURE. I do believe, however, that some scriptures will naturally receive more emphasis in our studies than others.

Scriptures that tell us *how to* access the life of Christ, *how to* be filled with the Spirit and operate in His power, and *how to* mature and/or grow in grace and knowledge...these are the teachings that we will be drawn to, because they tell us *how to* "function" as believers. Essentially, we must know *how to* draw on God's resources...the ones that equip us to *trust Him to produce through us what we cannot produce on our own*.

This means that techniques, methods, procedures, strategies, and operational principles will tend to require the most time and attention, especially at first. As we learn these, and implement them in our lives, we will move toward maturity. And, as we progress, the other important features of the Word will have more meaning, because we will develop a broader doctrinal framework for understanding their value. For example, a study on end times or rewards in heaven is fascinating and essential, but if we study these and neglect teachings on prayer or faith or the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, knowing about end times or rewards will not be a great help to us. There is, it seems, a proper "sequence" for lessons from the Word.

We need techniques for living, thoroughly examined and explained, as soon after we are saved as possible, and repeatedly throughout our Christian lives. In fact, all new believers need to go through a kind of scriptural "basic training" to get them started in the right direction. And all believers need constant updates to be reminded of the procedures for knowing God intimately, and pleasing Him.

So we may seem to love some parts of Scripture more than others, but it is all about where we are in our growth process. As we know the Bible better, we will have greater love for all its parts. Like a long-term, loving marriage, the longer we stay in it, the more we will find to love.

Studying Without the Heart Being in It.

Coming to the Table Hungry. When we come to sit before a pastor-teacher, or when we go into a place apart where we privately meditate and study, if our hearts are not prepared to receive the truth, the whole study time is meaningless. We have seen that we should confess our sins and pray for wisdom before we study, and these are foundational to the learning process. We are also aware of our need to believe what we hear (through filters, of course), in order for the hearing to become understanding.

But there is an attitude behind all of these that underpins our assimilation of truth. That is our volition...our choice-maker, which lies at the "heart of our hearts". We must CHOOSE God's truth...but not only that...when we come to learn, we must WANT it with a hunger that is

ravenous. We must devour truth as a wolf does a fresh animal carcass—consuming up to twenty pounds of meat in one feeding. We must study with a sense of urgency and excitement that compels us to chase the truth with rabid intensity.

We must have passion, devotion, zeal, craving, and awe when we approach our studies. This is not an “academic exercise”, something to yawn our way through and check our watches periodically to see if study-time is almost over. It is a time to “wake up” so we can build our faith and renew our spirits...and put ammunition in our belts for impending encounters with evil or legalism. So this time requires a potent *readiness of heart*, as well as spiritual preparation (confession and prayer). Preparation is not complete until we have opened our hearts to accept the Word with focus and interest.

Opening the Heart. And how is that done? This is hard. We mentioned volition. This goes to the center of who we are, and what we really want. If we really want the truth, our hearts will be open. To go through the steps for spiritual preparation and processing is one thing, but there seems to be a final action that takes place at the point of destination for all study, which is the heart. We will explore what this is, though we will probably not fully explain it.

Going back to our discussion of the heart in *Studies on Walking in the Spirit*, we said that the heart is the center of our spiritual life. It is the place of spiritual enlightenment OR spiritual darkness. Eph. 1:17-18 makes it clear that there is a kind of “sensor” in the heart that is open or closed. This apparatus seems to operate through the volition, the “wanter” in the heart, which will either invite the truth that is being learned into the heart or will keep the doors to the heart closed. This device is known as the “eyes of the heart”. This passage in Ephesians says this:

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 know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints....

When the “eyes of the heart” are opened, they will let the light through, and “knowing” (understanding) will result.

There is also a reference to the heart, as it relates to learning, in the book of Matthew. Matt. 13:15 reiterates the role of the heart as the “receiver of understanding”. This passage says the following:

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.

For knowledge-becoming-understanding to process all the way into the heart, so that we “turn”...or change...there must be an open-eyed reception of it past the gateway to the heart...i.e., there must be a thirst for the truth. When the eyes to the heart are opened, the heart will “understand”.

So there seems to be final step of *welcoming* the truth into the heart that is required for understanding to be “seated” in the heart. This is a “softening” of the heart. Without this, ignorance will result, and wisdom will not be developed.

But why would the heart be “hardened” or closed? The heart, as per *Studies on Walking in the Spirit*, is the repository for all parts of the internal make-up of man, including the mind, the soul, and the spirit...and, incidentally...the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit. Excluding the Holy Spirit, any part of the heart could be a suspect for keeping the door to the heart closed.

When the heart is “hardened”, meaning it is rejecting the truth because of some trick of the will, darkness will fall on all understanding being delivered to the heart. Eph. 4:18 says, “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.”

Volition seems to be the key player in the opening/closing dilemma, so “hardening” is an act of *our will*. We have to make up our minds who it is that we will serve. If it is God, then we have to *decide in His favor over and over by inviting His truth into our hearts*, and acknowledging that it is “sweet”. And by inviting His truth in, *we are inviting His influence...*surrendering to His will and His plan. This is taking in the truth and *yielding* to its demands. This is a perpetual relinquishment of our will to His. And it is the hardest thing I can imagine we will ever have to do. This is frankly one step beyond my capacity to understand completely...and a future growth area.

So we have reached the limits of our present understanding of volition...but one thing seems certain: this kind of spiritual apex will come only as a result of consistently using all the mechanics of grace, plus an irresistible drive to know God. We must evaluate ourselves to see what it is we really want...because that is what indicates our heart’s desire.

A Heart for Truth Related to Worship. Ezek. 33:30-32 gives the following description of believers whose hearts are not into study and worship. See if any of this sounds familiar:

As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, ‘Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.’ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

Music is an important part of worship. But it is not the *heart* of worship. The core purpose of all worship is “learning”, because this is what God uses to equip us for *service*. We will pray and acknowledge God, and give thanks, and praise Him in word and song, but the *purpose* for gathering to worship is to shore up our equipment (understanding) to enable us to live life in His name...in His power.

The parts of a worship service mentioned above all have their own spiritual significance, which is another subject, but these are also for helping us *prepare* for “learning”. If any single part of the service is the *primary* reason we are in attendance, it is the *teaching/learning* part. The greatest value of being taught is, as stated above, that the understanding we get from the lessons can be applied when we return to our daily lives.

It is a common mistake for believers to gather for the wrong reasons. Consider your objective in attending. Do you *want* the Word? Will you enthusiastically receive it, conceive it, and believe it? That should be your main reason for being there, if your heart is properly aligned. And—by the way—if your pastor is not teaching the truth, find one who is. You want a church, not a dairy (nothing but milk).

Hearts that Come Near to Hear and Fear, or Tend to Stray and Stay Away. We will see several passages that display conditions of “heartless” worship or study. It’s like playing tennis with an unstrung racquet...it has no impact. Is. 29:13 describes believers who take on the appearance of being sincere in their devotion, but their hearts are not engaged with God and His truth. This passage gives us this: “The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.’”

Distance from God is a heart condition. To learn the Bible, our hearts must be seeking the path to Him. This readiness goes beyond confession and prayer, and even faith, and gets to the core of our thirst for God. If we want to get closer to Him, our hearts will be soft and fallow ground for the planting of His Word. We must *decide* to hear the truth. We must sit still, open our ears (and/or our eyes), and receive instruction. Otherwise, we will have zeal for *something*, but it will not be for the tremendous truths of the Word. Prov. 19:2a describes it this way: “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.”

When we study and pray, it is time to slow down. We must not rush our time in the Word. Otherwise, we will enter the fray of life “without knowledge”. We will be very busy and engaged in the affairs of our daily routines, but our activities will be “catch-as-catch-can”, prompting us to say, “I don’t know what I’m doing, so I’ll just sort of make it up as I go along”. This is not an auspicious plan...it “misses the way”. Rom. 10:2-4 confirms the fallacy of misguided zeal, saying the following:

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Paul is referring to Prov. 19:2 and bringing its truth into the Church Age. The main point we need to get from this rich passage is that having religious fervor is not the same as craving the Word. Nor is any other pursuit. When our motivation for getting with other believers revolves around localized church codes, or legalistic practices, or even such selfish preoccupations as approbation-gathering, mate-trolling, social-linking, emotion- generating, business-networking, or any other activity or objective that is not “learning the Word” (and edifying fellow believers, so *they* can learn the Word), then our hearts will not be in the right place to receive the truth.

II Tim. 3:6-7 tells what happens with those whom Paul calls, “weak-willed women who are loaded down with sin” (verse 6), and says they are “always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth” (v. 7). “Learning” here means “hearing”...not “learning” as we have defined it. These women (and we can be sure this applies to men, as well) are weak-willed AND loaded with sin. Sin prevents any acceptance of truth, and they have no WILL to change this condition and open their hearts to

the truth. There is no “heart” in the hearing. This passage illustrates that merely hearing or reading the truth will be meaningless, unless preparations are made, and the heart is willing to receive it.

Hearts that are Open to God...or Closed. Hearts that are open to God, and therefore open to learning, will receive and accept the truth from the Word. Hearts that have not been prepared by confession, prayer, and commitment to the learning will not be receptive to the truth. Here are several verses that illustrate the two heart-states:

Jer. 2:13—“My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” These believers have forsaken God, or positioned their hearts against Him. They are thus forsaking the “living water”, and digging their own wells...that hold *no* water. These believers are not prepared for the truth, or for the Giver of Truth, so they have disqualified themselves for accepting instruction.

Jer. 17:5—“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.” Applied to learning, this cursing is directed toward those of us who 1) trust in our own view-point for truth, rather than the Word, 2) depend on ourselves to glean the truth, rather than relying on the Holy Spirit to teach us, and 3) express negative volition toward God and His truth. These conditions leave us in a “cursed” state, which simply means that we are in line for discipline. Like a starving man who has collapsed in the desert, we are in trouble.

Ps. 66:18—“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened...” This refers to the cut-off of our prayers when we have unconfessed sin in our hearts. The cessation of many benefits occurs when we are out of fellowship. For example, the Holy Spirit will not be teaching us, because we have refused Him access. Sin disengages spiritual assets, and neutralizes truth receptors in the heart.

Prov. 28:13-14—“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.” Not confessing and not being receptive to truth results in “trouble”. If our hearts do not welcome the truth with flags flying, bands playing, and crowds cheering, we will not have much to celebrate.

Conclusion. If you feel that the lessons of Scripture are going in one ear and out the other, you will need to use the grace resources God provides to allow truth to *process* into the heart. As part of this, you must ultimately have a passion for God, a deep craving for truth, and a submissive surrender to His way. Only then will the truth reach into the recesses of the heart where it can germinate and do its enlightening and strengthening work through the power of the Holy Spirit. You must want truth more than anything; otherwise, your participation in the work of the kingdom will be fleeting and unfruitful. To learn, your heart must be in it. If it isn't, you will remain as you are.

Endnotes

1. “How is it Possible that Men should Delight in What they Do Not Believe?” A sermon by Andrew Murray, available at www.sermonindex.net, by SermonIndex.net Audio Sermons.
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3. *In Defense of the Faith* series, “Who was Jesus?” An article by Jimmy Williams, p. 9. Probe Ministries, 2007, www.probe.org.
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5. *Reliability of the Gospels* series, “Did Jesus even Exist?” by James Arlandson, p. 1. This article can be found at the website, *American Thinker*, listed as www.americanthinker.com.
6. Same as “5.” above, also p. 1.
7. Same as “5” above, except p. 2.
8. Same as “5” above, except pp. 2-3.
9. *In Defense of the Faith* series, “Who was Jesus?” An article by Jimmy Williams, pp. 10-14, Probe Ministries, 2007, www.probe.org.
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13. *How to Strengthen Your Faith*, by Andrew Murray, p. 33. Whitaker House, Kensington, PA, 1997.
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20. “Confession of Sin”. A sermon by Andrew Murray, available at www.sermonindex.net, by SermonIndex.net Audio Sermons.
21. Same as “15” above, except p. 32.
22. “Confession of Sin”. A sermon by Andrew Murray, available at www.sermonindex.net, by SermonIndex.net Audio Sermons.
23. “Confession of Sin”. A sermon by Andrew Murray, available at www.sermonindex.net, by SermonIndex.net Audio Sermons.
24. *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, “Prayer and Fasting or The Cure for Unbelief”, by Andrew Murray, p. 66. This book can be read online at www.worldinvisible.com/library/murray.
25. Same as “15” above, except p. 3.
26. Same as “15” above, except pp. 12-28.
27. Same as “15” above, except p. 12.
28. “Assurance of Faith”. A sermon by Andrew Murray, available at www.sermonindex.net, by SermonIndex.net Audio Sermons.
29. “The Faith that Takes”. A sermon by Andrew Murray, available at www.sermonindex.net, by SermonIndex.net Audio Sermons.
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41. *Spirit of Christ*, Chapter 4, “The Spirit and the Word”, paragraph 7. This is a chapter in an electronic book offered by “World Invisible”, written by Andrew Murray. This book is available at www.worldinvisible.com/library/murray. Click on 776404.
42. Same as 41.

Books by W. D. Gibbs

Featured Books (earliest to latest)

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AUTHOR’S NOTE: Paul said, “I am nothing.” Jesus said, “You are nothing.” It is not false modesty for me to say, “I am nothing.” I have it on good authority. Yet God is everything, and He has shared His truth with us in His Word. To the degree that the writings in this book accurately reflect that truth, I commend them to seeking believers everywhere. Where my nothingness has over-ridden God’s truth because of my ignorance or pride, I admit my weakness and failure, and warn you to be cautious. I am neither qualified for nor deserving of the privilege of explaining God’s truths, so I offer this treatise only with great humility and a sense of undeserved honor. If you do not find the truth here, keep searching. I am confident that God will reward your quest for His wisdom...and His fullness.

My name is William “Dick” Gibbs, and I am a retired educator living in Dallas, Texas.

Footnote: My greatest—almost singular—hope is that you see reflected in my words the greatness of God’s power and the beauty of His love; and that you understand how helpless we are to achieve what He expects—without His enablement. Only God can produce divine good; our job is to find out how to have Him do this...through us.

Yours in Christ,
W. D. Gibbs

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