

Killing Sin Before Sin Kills You

A Survival Guide

by William Gibbs

Killing Sin Before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide

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Dedicated to believers who want
to know how to defeat the
supernatural powers
of sin.

Killing Sin Before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide

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...another must do it for me. And that is the secret of the spiritual life. A man must learn to say: "I give up everything; I have tried and longed and thought and prayed, but failure has come. God has blessed me and helped me, but still, in the long run, there has been so much of sin and sadness." What a change comes when a man is thus broken down into utter helplessness and self-despair, and says: "I can do nothing."

Andrew Murray

Chapters In this book...

Chapter 1 Introduction to Sin

Chapter 2 The Problem of Sin

Chapter 3 Dealing with Sin

Chapter 4 Clearing Past Sin

Chapter 5 Defeating Sin

Chapter 1: Introduction

With slight alteration, we quote from an earlier study, *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*, where we framed sin this way:

Sin is the greatest problem in the universe. It is so great a problem that the Son of the Creator had to die to solve it. Since its inception, sin has been the biggest issue and menace confronting God, angels, mankind, and all creation. It was originated by, and is now supported through, the most powerful forces in all of existence, outside of God Himself. Sin has *supernatural* underpinnings. An individual act of sin is not an “infraction” or a “misstep” or a “misdeed”...sin is the most horrible, monstrous, malevolent condition that can ever occur...and here’s the shocker: we do it all the time. We believe in Christ, and we are seeking God’s power and blessings, but we sin, because it is our “nature” to do so. We have a “sinful” nature.

Sin must be dealt with, and that’s where the plot starts to thicken. We will never kill it completely, even though it is possible to deliver some crippling blows to it, as we shall see. At the outset, however, we must acknowledge that sin is bigger and more powerful than we ever imagined, and the idea of our grappling with it in our own strength is preposterous. We are soft and easy prey for sin, and there is no time when its strength will be insufficient to wrap us in its chains, no matter how long we have been believers, or how much we try to overpower it. It is, perhaps, surprising that we as believers still tend to be slaves to sin, either intermittently—or perpetually—all of our lives. Those who say this is not so are liars...self-deceived. This is extreme, yes. But true. Yet there is hope for beating sin and escaping its grip.

It is time to remove our masks. Sin is and always will be bigger than we are. We cannot make ourselves good or holy or righteous, regardless of external conformities or perfunctory observances. This is why Jesus Christ had to die on the cross...because we alone can’t deal with sin. And this is why born-again believers must engage all the assets offered by the Holy Spirit in order to cope with sin...because we still can’t deal with it on our own. Any participation in this battle requires that we begin with this simple premise: Sin is beyond our control, and it is always with us.

At salvation, we are identified with Christ and we inherit His righteousness for all eternity. This is our *position*. This is the place of “victory over sin”, being “dead to sin”, and no longer being “under the dominion of sin”. It is possible for these to become realities in our Christian lives, but that will not be easy. As believers now, in time, still living in these bodies on earth, we have a *condition*, which includes a *propensity for sin*. (For a list of verses verifying and clarifying “position” and “condition”, see Appendix A and B.)

It is our *nature* to sin, and this inclination will be with us until we are removed from this life. In this study, we will clarify the operations of our nature...and its allies, the devil and the world. We will de-

fine sin in all its aspects, and show why it is so powerful. And we will look at life under the law of sin, with a view toward overcoming it.

Sin is devastating, elusive, subtle, destructive, tireless, and incredibly irresistible. We must define it, deal with it, and deter it, if we are ever going to have any respite from it. If believers do not deal with this most formidable of all foes, they will never live the Christian life in all its fullness, even though they are saved from condemnation and headed for heaven. They will be Christians, but they will fall short of honoring God with their lives.

Sin will deliberately rip your heart from you, and control it for as long as you permit it. Stopping this assault will take more than just wanting it to end. We have to want something else even more...we must want God. In this study we will show how and why our relationship with our Father will depend on our alignment with Him...the state of our communion with His Spirit...and we will see how this condition affects every aspect of our Christian experience. We must know and experience the full potency of the Holy Spirit to empower us against sin.

This means that we must reach a level of dependence on God's enablement that will allow the curtailment and disempowerment of sin as our major driving force. To begin with, if we want *sin* more than we want *God*, we will not be committed to the growth needed to combat it. As a result, we will inevitably serve all the forces of evil, and stand in opposition to God. We will be enemies of God...His very own children rising up as haters of their Father. But we must not be left there. We must know what we can do...all that the Bible and the Spirit give us as ways to escape this end. We must discover how this unstoppable force can be stopped.

Chapter 1: The Problem of Sin

In this chapter...

Section A. God's Impossible Standards

Section B. What is Sin?

Section C. Types of Sin

Section D. Progression of Sin

Section E. Sin is Like Quicksand

Section F. Meet the Allies of Sin

Section G. Satan's Involvement in Sin

Section H. The World and Sin

Section I. Our Sinful Nature

Section J. Self-Effort and Sin

Section K. Law vs. Grace

Section L. Morality vs. Sin

Section M. Stop Trying

Section N. Law of Sin

A. GOD'S IMPOSSIBLE STANDARDS

We Can't Meet the Standards. God's standards consist of an endless array of do's and do-not's that He expects us to follow and live up to. We can all agree that the standards are good and reasonable and morally sound and totally suitable as guidelines for behavior and thought among mankind, and especially for believers. We *should* follow the requirements set forth in God's standards, especially those established in His "new law" of love. There's just one hitch: We can't do it. We have listed seven pages of "standards" in an earlier book titled, *Bible Basics on Living by God's Standards: Pathway to Righteousness* (see pages 3-10), and the lists cited are not comprehensive...merely representative. There are many. And we are incapable of meeting these standards.

Jesus Himself indicated that the requirements of God's standards are impossible for us. Regarding the "law" in existence at the time of Christ's earthly ministry, Christ said this: "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law." He was speaking to Pharisees, the most rigid law-keepers of all time, and informing them that all of the supreme efforts they were exerting to meet God's standards *were not working*. No one can do it, and no one ever has, except for Jesus.

God's standards are divine, and we are insufficient to live up to them. We are human, and humans cannot generate or fabricate divinity; only God can generate true goodness and righteousness. This is the hardest lesson we will ever learn in all of our seeking to know and please God. We will never be able to comply with God's standards well enough to satisfy Him. How ludicrous it is that we puny humans think our paltry efforts will impress an infinite God. What comes from us is—at best—only relatively good, and "relative righteousness" does not satisfy God's standards.

Standards in Scripture. We will not try to duplicate all the lists presented in the book, *God's Standards*, as they are too voluminous, but we will insert here some verses that reflect God's regulations for human behavior. The following represent examples of God's standards:

Ex. 23:1-9—Due to its length, this passage will not be quoted entirely, but it includes such standards as not being a "malicious" witness, not following the crowd in doing wrong, returning a lost donkey to its owner, don't deny justice to poor people, don't accept a bribe, and don't oppress a foreigner. These show how specific God's standards can be.

Jer. 7:6-7a—"If you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place..."

Rom. 13:5-14—Again, too lengthy to quote, but this passage includes these: pay taxes, pay all your debts, respect authority, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't covet, and love your neighbor as yourself. This passage also calls for us to put aside the deeds of darkness; put on the armor of light; behave decently; and avoid orgies, sexual immorality, drunkenness, dissension, and jealousy.

Jude 1:16-22—The set of standards found here includes not doing these: grumbling, fault-

finding, following evil desires, boasting, and flattering. It also prohibits ungodly desires and following natural instincts, and at the same time commanding edification of others, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in God's love, waiting for mercy, and showing mercy to those who doubt.

Luke 3:14b—Jesus told those coming to Him: “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

1 Peter 5:5-8—This passage commands us to submit to older people, to be humble and self-controlled, and to resist the devil.

And we could go on and on: 1 Pet. 2:11-17; Phil. 4:4; 1 Tim. 6:8; Is. 35:3-4; Prov. 17:23; Prov. 11:24; 1 Cor. 10:14; Gal. 6:2; Ps. 28:3; Ps. 26:3-5; Ps. 10:2; Prov. 28:4; Is. 33:15-16; Matt. 6:1-7; Matt. 6:19-34; Matt. 5:21-48; 1 Thess. 4:1-12. These are loaded with standards. The requirements are overwhelming! Devoting every waking moment of every day of our lives to the understanding and mastery of all God's standards will not enable us to get through a single day without error. Our biggest deficiency is that we are woefully devoid of *resources* to enable us to follow them. This book is written to help us understand what these resources are and how to access them.

Looking Forward. Before we get into the weeds of “dealing with sin”, we must tarry for a bit on the topic of what sin is. We must look at the problem of sin, understand its parameters, fathom its power, and face its perniciousness.

B. WHAT IS SIN?

First Look at Sin. 1 John 5:17a says, “All wrongdoing is sin...” Rom. 14:23 says, “...everything that does not come from faith is sin.” These are broad-brush summaries of what sin is. It is wrongdoing. Of course. And it is anything that is done away from a position and posture of faith, which means anything that is not done in fellowship, or “in the Spirit”. If you have perused previous studies on sin, such as “Part Two: Dealing with Sin”, in *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations* (p. 20 and following), then you are familiar with the concept that sin is anything that we do when we are controlled by the “sinful nature”. If this is your first reading of our written materials, then you can anticipate sufficient reiteration in this study to catch you up on this concept. On the other hand, if you are familiar with the “basics”, then the rest of this section, and perhaps one or two others, will be a good review for you, before we get into new discoveries.

Looking Forward. Sin is too complex for us to envisage its scope, power, and attributes through a simple definition. We need to elaborate on its qualities and markers to get a better grasp of its devastating capabilities. We must look at the various types of sin, see how sin operates, and know its subtleties, so we can build an understanding of how to deal with it. We will also need to be familiar with the allies of sin, the place of self-discipline in dealing with sin, and that juggernaut known as the “law of sin” in order to prepare for coping with sin and eventually curtailing it significantly. We will not annihilate sin as long as we are in these bodies (so much for the book title), but there is a way that we can greatly reduce its powers and effects on us. This is what we want to examine.

C. TYPES OF SIN

Overview. There are types of sins and lists of sins. We will look at both of these under the heading of “types of sin”. There are basically three types of sins: overt sins, sins of the heart, and sins of the tongue. These are self-explanatory, and—as we delineate specific acts or lists of sins—it will be easy to see which category each sin fits into. Jesus cited the three major types of sin in Matt. 5:21-22, where he said the following:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, “Raca” is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Notice in this passage some clear examples of the three types of sin: murder (example of overt sin), sinful anger (example of sins of the heart), and hateful name-calling (example of sins of the tongue). *All* sins can be slotted into one of these three classes of sin. *Overt* sins include observable infractions and immorality. *Sins of the heart* cannot be seen, because they take place within the non-material part of the inner man. These include any spiritual or attitudinal condition that disregards God or violates His standards. *Sins of the tongue* involve speech that is produced by sins of the heart. For example, hatred and anger (sins of the heart) can result in the formation of a false report about another person (a sin of the tongue). Be aware that all sins are the product of the lies of Satan, which are promoted by the world and enthusiastically embraced by the sinful nature.

Sins that God Hates. Prov. 6:16-19 provides seven areas of pernicious sin, as we see in the following:

There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

So the seven sins that are most offensive to God include pride, lies, murder, plotting evil, rushing to evil (thoughtless or addictive behavior), character assassination through false reports, and trouble-making (such as creating disunity among believers). Notice that all these sins fit into one or more of the specific categories of sin. Also note that each type of sin is inextricably linked with the other types. Once again, these all originate from Satan’s lies, which invade and corrupt the heart, causing manifestations of evil through overt acts or use of the tongue.

Evil Described. Evil is clearly and repeatedly depicted in Scripture, perhaps nowhere more succinctly than in Rom. 1:28-32, which says this:

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy,

murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

The acts and attitudes shown here are saturated with evil...sin is dripping off their fangs. If we looked closely at details in this passage, we would see aspects of the salacious nature of sin that are hard to grasp. Sin is never innocuous or harmless or inconsequential. It is devastating and destructive in ways that are shocking...which is why we must become familiar with it.

Lists of Sins. To encapsulate "lists" of sins, we pilfer from our basics course, *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*. We presented the following in that volume:

By reviewing lists of sins, we will be able to "intuit" what constitutes sin. The lists we offer below will give a cross-section of the sins that we commit. We will find ourselves in these lists, and if they do not fit us, other lists will, because we all sin. The irony is that some people actually believe they do not sin. This is the result of crass arrogance and deliberate ignorance, and it is the least healing and restorative view we can have. If you are honest, you should be able to see some of your tendencies and practices, perhaps many of them, somewhere in the following lists:

1 Cor. 6:9-10 shows us the types of people that are "wicked":

The sexually immoral (committing adultery and fornication).

Idolaters (worshipping outside of faith in God or making *anything* more important than God).

Adulterers (players, cheaters, swingers, and prostitutes).

Male prostitutes.

Homosexual offenders (those who "practice" a prohibited "lust pattern").

Thieves (taking what someone else has earned).

Greedy (preoccupied with acquiring money, property, or things).

Slanderers (gossiping, criticizing, maligning).

Are you seeing yourself yet? How about the categorized list in Gal. 5:19-21:

Sexual sins: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery.

Serving false gods: idolatry and witchcraft.

Sinful attitude: hatred, discord, jealousy.

Sins of excess and addiction: drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Col. 3:5-10 adds more of these "outputs" of the "earthly nature". These verses call for us to "Put to death, therefore, whatever [sin] belongs to your earthly nature" (v. 5). Here is the "list" from this passage in Colossians:

Sexual immorality (no margin of error here).
Impurity (dirty thoughts, as well as actions).
Lust (looking and wanting).
Evil desires (imagining and wanting).
Greed (idolatry in wanting).
Anger (that leads to sin).
Rage (screaming or destroying things or people in an emotional fit).
Malice (hatred).
Slander (destroying reputations).
Filthy language (forbidden or offensive words).
Lying (words that do not match the truth).

Eph. 5:3-4 echoes the charges from Colossians 3 above, for us to live cleanly and purely. The passage in Ephesians says this:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

James 2:1 and 9, taken together, add a surprising sin to the lists: *favoritism*. "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism...But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers." Something as subtle and seemingly low-intensity as "favoritism" brings God's displeasure. As you can see, the possibilities for sinning are extensive, and none of us is completely free from sin in our daily lives. Some sins are even more obscure than this one.

Some sins are not even listed, as such, even though they are said to violate God's "standards". Here are some standards that don't jump out at us as occasions for sin, but these are either required or prohibited, so any departure from them would qualify as "sin":

"Make the most of every opportunity" (Col. 4:5b).

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs" (Eph. 4:29).

"...everything not from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23b).

"It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall" (Rom. 14:21).

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Col. 3:17).

"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17).

These are standards that God has established, and failing to meet them is a sin. And then there's the "biggie", the over-arching standard for all believers, which is to love God and fellow-man,

as we see in the following:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matt. 22:37-38)

Failing to love God and man is a sin! (See Matt. 22:37-38) Anytime something is *required* in Scripture, and you don’t do it...or is *prohibited* in Scripture, and you do it...you are sinning.

More Sins. There are many other sins. For example, not forgiving is a sin. We see this repeatedly, as follows:

Luke 17:4—If he sins against you seven times and seven times comes back to you and says, “I repent,” forgive him.

Matt. 18:21-22—Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Matt. 6:14-15—For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matt. 18:15—If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

Clarification on forgiving others: Forgiveness of others requires others to “repent”. This is similar to God’s forgiveness of believers when they confess their sins to Him. The key to forgiveness is contrition on the part of the offender. We cannot demand forgiveness from others if we have not admitted our fault in the matter. Only then can forgiveness be expected. But any time we are facing someone who has confronted their error and changed their mind about a “trespass”, forgiveness is required. If we refuse to forgive, we are sinning, and will not be forgiven by God for it...that is, *until we face and confess our error of not forgiving*, which ALWAYS brings forgiveness.

For more “lists” of sins, peruse these passages in Scripture: Prov. 6:16-19; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-10; Rom. 14:23; Rom. 14:21; Col. 3:17; Eph 5:3-4. Note especially Eph. 5, where even a “hint” of sexual immorality or “any kind” of impurity is forbidden. Violation of any principle or standard to *any* degree is a sin. And any sin can take us down.

Many sins are not listed in the Bible, representing conditions that we will recognize as wrong only when we mature. Heb. 5:14 states, “...solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” As we grow, we become more sophisticated in our recognition of departures from God’s rules of conduct. We need to know what sin is and what we have done that falls into the category of “sin”. Otherwise, we will not know what to confess, and—when we mature—what to avoid.

D. PROGRESSION OF SIN

Sin Starts Small and then Becomes Greater, but All Sin is Bad. Sin is a degenerative condition, which means it starts small, when it seems harmless, and then progresses from one level of malevolence to the next, and again to the next, until it is out of control and running rampant. Any sin separates us from God, not in an eternal sense, because of our permanent position in union with Christ... but in a temporal sense, because our communion with Him and His power is truncated by sin. The point is this: There is no sin that is okay. Sin is sin, and any sin whatsoever is unacceptable to God. And any sin will disrupt our peaceful relationship with our heavenly Father.

We are Responsible for All Sins. Sin comes from our own nature, acknowledging meanwhile the enticement and deception interjected from the world and Satan. It is certain that no evil or temptation to commit evil comes from God, and we cannot saddle the world and Satan with the accountability for our sin. The responsibility for sin rests solely on each of us. Before, during, and after sins or series of sins, we are the ones who must face the music for wrongdoing. “But it seemed so minor when it first began...so benign. And then it got big and unmanageable, and now it owns me; I am enslaved and powerless”. Have you ever been at this point? Somewhere along your line of growth, you assuredly will be. (More on this later.)

The Progressive Creep of Sin. James 1:13-15 describes the progressive nature of sin quite well, saying this:

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone, but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Death in this passage is not physical death, nor is it eternal condemnation. This is *temporal* death of a *spiritual* nature. This is loss of fellowship and separation from the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. So notice the steps leading up to this loss of fellowship. It begins in the heart, even if it is suggested or summoned by evil forces outside the heart. We may be *called* to sin by external forces of evil, but the response to the call, which is the inclination to commit the sin...originates within our own nature. We are the actors, even though we are “dragged away” and “enticed”. We are the ones with the desire to follow evil and succumb to temptation, with the result that our desire will give life to our thoughts and actions, and a sin will be born to live in our hearts and wreck our lives.

One sin will easily lead to others, since sin removes the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaves only our nature to watch the store and prevent more sin...like leaving the fox to guard the hen house. Under the dubious care of our sinful nature, sin can only worsen. In Romans 1 there is a complete litany of sins, where the progression of sins is seen repeatedly, advancing from not glorifying God to inattention to God and a lack of thankfulness, on to sexual impurity, then to idolatry...and on and on to the point that the sinner become, as described in Rom. 1:29, “filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity” (v. 29). And we need not think that such depth of depravity is limited to unbe-

lievers. Virtually any dark and dastardly deed an unbeliever can do, a believer can do, as well. When we are controlled by our earthly nature, we act just like unbelievers, and we will progress down the same path of degradation they do. This is what we must learn to avoid...a progression we must find a way to reverse.

E. SIN IS LIKE QUICKSAND

Slowly but Decidedly Sinking. Sin clings like glue, but glue is superficial and local, while sin is pervasive and universal. It plumbs to the innermost parts of man, and extends to the heavens themselves. Sin surrounds and invades, coaxes and entraps, conquers and destroys. And sin is always pulling us down with its irresistible gravity, and it will drag us into the muck, where there is no air to breathe, and no light. 2 Peter 2:17-20 depicts the “creep” of sin as it gradually soaks itself into our spiritual pores and saturates our hearts with evil. Here is what this passage says:

These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

Without elaborating, we can encapsulate the main truth of this passage by saying that believers are worse off than unbelievers, because Satan does not tempt or go after unbelievers the way he does believers...except to deceive them about the truth of the gospel message to keep them from believing in Christ. But he goes after believers with a vengeance, which means they are “worse off”, because they are more strongly enticed by Satan; therefore, they suffer broader and more-penetrating temptations. Thus, their “moral condition” can actually be worse than that of unbelievers. And, of course, there is the implication of divine discipline, which is stronger for believers who are maturing and mess up than for believers who are just beginning.

Becoming Entangled. But there is another point we want to feature from this passage (2 Pet. 2:17-20). We want to focus on the word “entangled” in verse 20. The word depicts entwinement, as with the braids of a rope. It also suggests that sin is like a vine with long and powerful tentacles that wrap themselves around a believer who is standing still. When it has ensconced him in its grip, it continues to wrap and re-wrap around him to secure him further, until he is completely entangled with it. Then is when sin will insert its vicious fangs into him, after which it will consume him and destroy him.

Is it hard for sin to so entangle a believer? No. We are easy marks. Heb. 12:1b says, “...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so EASILY entangles...” (emphasis mine) It takes no effort to be ensnared by sin. Col. 2:8a adds, “See to it that no one [no minion of sin] takes you captive...” This shows that we can be captured by sin. It starts with a single “drop” of sin, but it quickly escalates into a roaring tsunami, which will lift us up and carry us along to our ruin.

Tricky Business. Sin is a hair-trigger phenomenon, coiled and spring-loaded, ready to strike...or, more likely...to sink its crippling fangs into us without our even noticing. How quickly appreciation can become envy, esteem can become coveting, and admiration can become lust. “I was just admiring...” This is dangerous, because “looking” can be a sin. Jesus Himself said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” This is just one of many examples; it is a slippery slope we are all standing on. And the greatest danger we face is that we will fail to see and acknowledge our own sin. Stop kidding yourself. You are saved, but you are a sinner. Once you know sin better and are more adept at spotting it, you will see that you are drenched in it.

It starts small. It ends big. And the end of sin is death. Our spiritual lives will fall prey to the deadly effects of sin, if we don’t find a way to deal with it. Once we find ourselves standing in the quicksand of sin, we must realize that we cannot save ourselves from its deadly pull. We must be rescued, which is what this book is all about.

F. MEET THE ALLIES OF SIN

Sin has Friends. Sin all by itself is the worst and most vicious force in the world. But it does not work alone. Sin by itself has little force, but it has great allies, most notably the ruler of the world, Satan. And others: the world Satan controls; and our own nature, with its proclivity for sin. These are the companions of sin. In addition, there is a “law” of sin, which makes sin the soul-annihilator that it is. We will look now at sin’s allies, and later we will see the law of sin. By the time we are through, you will have no question that our puny efforts to withstand sin will not even slow it down. We must not only have help; we must be carried limply across this battlefield. Why? Because we are inept against the forces of sin.

Encountering the Triple Threat. We will discuss the allies of sin one at a time, but first, sample them in the following verses:

Satan.

- 1 Pet. 5:8—Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

The world.

- 1 John 2:15-16—Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

Our sinful nature.

- Rom. 7:23-24—...but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

It is time to become familiar with these indomitable forces (“indomitable” in human terms). If you want a thorough preview of these forces, take time to read about them at length in *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, pp. 55-151. For a quick summary of them, see the basics course: *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*, pp. 31-33.

G. SATAN’S INVOLVEMENT IN SIN

Being Saved is not Enough. A common message among Christians is that we are children of God, and this is supposed to make us immune from Satan’s attacks and influence. Just the opposite is true. We are TARGETS for Satanic subterfuge, because he must stop us, and the more we understand God and grace and the operation of the Holy Spirit, the more attention we will receive from Satan. Get rid of the notion that we are insulated against Satan, just because we have been born again. We must establish at the outset that resisting Satan and withstanding His machinations depend, not on our personal strength or self-effort, but on our spiritual preparation and advancement and our use of grace assets as believers. We must learn how to access the power of God, without which we will remain feeble and weak in the face of demonic armies.

Satan’s Campaign against God. The role of Satan in promoting sin cannot be emphasized enough. In our book *God’s Training Program*, cited above, we explained *why* it is so important for Satan to recruit and deploy humans in his cause. He is in a battle to disprove God’s word and to impugn His divine character; he is waging a war against God. His life depends on his victory against God, and he actually believes he can win. His objective is to prove that God is unfair for sentencing him to a lake of fire, by showing that God is not just or gracious or loving. If human recruits agree with Satan by rejecting God, either by not receiving His salvation or by refusing grace for living after salvation, Satan’s case is strengthened. He will lose in the end, but he will win many battles along the way before that time (through Satan’s scheming, human choice, and God’s allowance). It is this Satanic “scoring” that we must learn how to prevent; otherwise, we will be captured by him and become participants in his attempted coups.

There are so many layers and facets to Satan and his campaign that it is hard to recognize and pigeon-hole them. Don’t assume for one second that you can outsmart Satan, because he is the most powerful creature in the universe; his genius is so far superior to ours that there are no words to describe the difference. He is underhanded, nefarious, and insidious; and alternately beautiful, pleasant, and a proponent of morality. He is a show of lights, but his objective is dark. He is all things to all people, with an agenda of opposing God. His messengers are said to be “ministers of light”. He can fight directly by tempting people to sin, or he can conceal his goals by mimicking God and promoting his own brand of righteousness. In any case, he is largely successful in pulling our attention away from God by directing it elsewhere...toward sin, or toward the production of human good...both of which are evil and deleterious to God’s purposes.

John 10:10 provides a perfect description of Satan’s strategy. In this verse Jesus said, “The thief [Satan] comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” Here

is the dichotomy: death and destruction are brought by Satan on one side, and the life of Christ is offered on the other. What is Satan trying to steal? Life. What does he want to kill? Life. And what does he hope to destroy? Life...meaning the life of Christ in any believer. He knows he can't actually destroy the life of Christ, but he knows he will win if he separates the believer from the power of Christ, thereby causing a death of our spiritual connection and the cessation of spiritual production. His objective is to cut off the flow of the life of Christ, preventing it from fortifying believers. (In case you are not familiar with our teachings, separation from the flow of power does not mean loss of salvation, but represents a change for the worse in our "temporal" condition...meaning a loss of fellowship with God due to the stain of sin within us.)

Satan's Entree. Satan is not visible to us, which is part of his strategy, but he is constantly present among us, most commonly in the form of his emissaries. These are the fallen angels that followed Satan in his rebellion, known to us as demons. We are under siege by these powerful and brilliant and beautiful creatures, who want to destroy us. Eph. 6:12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." These dark forces bring "struggle" to us, and operate out of sight somewhere deep within our space, always looking for ways to demoralize us, defeat us, compel us, deceive us, and disable us. When we feel it is us against the world, that is exactly what Satan wants us to think, because he knows that we can't beat him...by ourselves. Get the idea: *rulers, authorities, powers of the dark world, spiritual forces in heavenly realms*. There is no chance we can beat such a formidable, supernatural foe.

Satan makes evil—in the form of either sin or legalism—attractive to us. He draws our attention to a thought or activity that leads us away from God...with lures are virtually irresistible. In Gen. 3:4-6 we see the prototypical temptation conjured up by Satan, one he has replicated over and over throughout history. Here is how it is described, opening with Satan's appeal to Eve:

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Notice the terms used by Satan to entice Eve: "good", "pleasing to the eye", and "desirable for gaining wisdom". This is still going on today with many more convincing arguments. We cannot account for, enumerate, or even fathom the limitless array of schemes and persuasions that Satan uses to bring us down. He is the greatest genius ever created, and he applies all of his intelligence to planning our defeat and demise. Have you noticed how often people want something "good" and "pleasing to the eye" and "desirable for gaining wisdom"? This is the relentless pursuit of the world's "best", which we all seem to want.

Eph. 6:11 mentions the "devil's schemes", and presents the "armor of God" as a defense against Satan's cons and wiles. It doesn't take much for us to be catapulted into a sin pattern that will move us away

from God and toward the world. Eph. 4:26 alerts us to the danger that “small” sins can become “big” problems, and uses anger as its example. This verse says, “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” Righteous indignation is appropriate, but anger that is growing to levels that cause loss of control is not. We can be angry without sinning, so why are we in a precarious position when we become angry at a lower level? It is because of the following: Begin by noticing verse 26, just quoted, which tells us not to “sin” as a result of anger. Then see what comes next in verse 27, which answers the question of why the tiniest sin can erupt into something larger. Here is what verse 27 says: “...and do not give the devil a foothold.” When we sin in perhaps the most inconsequential way, we open the door just a crack to Satan. That’s all he needs...in he comes with loads of more serious sins that are devastating to our spiritual growth and health. All he needs is a tiny foothold. This is why we are learning more about our sins...so we can recognize them when they’re small. It makes sense that dealing with sin is easier when it is small, instead of trying to overcome it when it gets big. This may be one of the most important things we can learn.

Satan also tries to “outwit” us, through a variety of means, such as prompting a lack of forgiveness among believers. 2 Cor. 2:10-11 reports such an incident, where Paul is instructing the Corinthians to correct their behavior by granting forgiveness, “in order that Satan might not outwit us” (v. 11). Any state of sin, such as unforgiveness, leaves us open to the wit and plots of Satan, and lack of fellowship and the absence of spiritual strengthening will make us soft targets for his arrows.

Satan Works against Confession. We have seen many times in past studies how we deal with the sins we have already committed... They are forgiven when we confess them (1 John 1:9). We will have more to say about this technique later, but for now, we simply want to see Satan’s role in preventing us from facing God with our sins. He does not want us to confess, because then we would be restored to fellowship and re-empowered by the Holy Spirit. Satan works so hard to keep this grace method under the rug that it has almost disappeared from “main-stream” churches...even though half the Bible is devoted to confession. Almost as many verses exist for the processing of sin in the life of born-again believers, as do those that show how salvation is secured to begin with. Yet you will not hear the doctrine of confession taught...it is virtually absent!

In Zech. 3:1-5, Joshua the high priest was standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan was “standing at his right side to accuse him” (v. 1). The angel told Satan that Joshua was a “burning stick snatched from the fire” (v. 2), meaning he was fresh from confession. This qualified Joshua for clean clothes and a clean turban, symbolic of his being cleansed from his sins. (See also Isaiah Is. 6:1-7, where confession and cleansing are similarly depicted.). Satan was rebuked by the Lord for making accusations against a “forgiven” believer. The point is this: Satan accuses us of wrongdoing, and he does not have to look far to find and report something we have done wrong. The fail-safe for blocking such accusations is confession, since this wipes out the sins and leaves Satan without a case. If sins remain on our temporal sin record, then Satan has a point he can make against us. This is reminiscent of Job, whom Satan accused of having selfish motives in his devotion to God. Satan is our greatest critic, and his audience is God Himself. If he can discredit us, he believes he can discredit God and elevate him-

self. And generally, we make his job easier by following patterns of sin without having them cleansed.

Satan Talks to Believers. The question arises, how much access to our minds does Satan have? 2 Cor. 11:3 shows that Eve was influenced directly by Satan. And we may be, also. This verse says, “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.” Deceit and cunning may come from the outside, through Satan’s messengers, but I believe Satan can give us messages directly...on the inside.

In Acts 5:3, we see a direct statement of such direct interaction between Satan and a believer. This verse says, “Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?’” Satan was speaking into Ananias’ heart. There seems to be a conversation between Satan and the hearts of believers...with the sinful nature standing as the primary recipient of Satan’s messages. The ears of the sinful nature perk up when Satan speaks, and that nature is energized to take over and control the rest of the heart. Satan’s coaxing and cajoling take place within the heart, from which proceeds all kinds of evil. Mark 7:21-22 says this about the heart:

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, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean”.

One reason for this is that Satan is suggesting what our next thoughts or acts should be. Paul said he was tormented by a messenger of Satan. “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul was being attacked from within by messages from Satan, his brain being bombarded by false and misleading messages from the craftiest liar of all time. These were not soft, whispered suggestions from Satan, but persuasive and penetrating demands...filled with evil...mind-bombs, lobbed directly into Paul’s thought-center. The word “tormented” means “punched in the face”. These are major blows against Paul’s mind, delivered directly by Satan or one of his messengers.

Saul is another believer whose mind was accessed and corrupted by Satan. This is what we see in 1 Sam. 18:10-11, which says the following:

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, “I’ll pin David to the wall.” But David eluded him twice.

This is obviously not an evil Spirit “sent” by God, but one “allowed” by God, permitted to invade the psyche of Saul. God gives Satan permission to needle us and pressure us...even to extremes, as we saw with Job. But we have learned in previous studies that everything that happens is part of God’s plan; what God brings or allows is designed for our growth and spiritual advancement. (See *God’s Training Program for Believers* and *Bible Basics for Living in God’s Plan: Pathway to Purpose*.)

We must be clear that God does not encourage or promote evil in any way. The evil spirit...or demon...that “came forcefully upon Saul” had to come from Satan. This force was not physical, so that

means it had to be spiritual. This tells us that the attack was on the heart and mind of Saul. Our point: When a believer is “out of fellowship”, as Saul was, he is especially open to the voice of evil, since the receptive sinful nature will be in charge. I do not believe Satan or his demons can “possess” believers, but I believe he can strongly influence them through suggestions made directly to their hearts, received and amplified through the sinful nature.

Serving Satan. The Bible tells us that anytime a believer sins, he “belongs” to Satan. This is evident in 1 John 3:7-8, which says this:

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous [in fellowship], just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.

Jesus Christ came, first of all, to conquer sin forever and to overcome Satan. This is already accomplished, in effect, but its full manifestation and consummation will take place in the future. Christ also came to save those who believe in Him. For those who have believed, the battle goes on in the heart, as the Holy Spirit and sin (personified in the devil, the world, and our nature) vie for control. When sin exists in the heart and life of a believer, that believer is “of the devil”. They are in the devil’s army at that point, even though they are permanent members of God’s family. And while they are in the grips of Satan and his minions, believers can do nothing but sin, however much it may sometimes be camouflaged as “good behavior”.

Fighting Satan. We will see ways to deal with Satan and his allies later in this book. For now, we will only say that the weapons it will take to fight Satan must be supernatural...which means they do not come from us. 2 Cor. 10:3-4 tells us 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.” The weapons of the world will not help us fight Satan. This includes anything derived through human ingenuity or wisdom, and any system designed to “improve” the world. It may do some good in the world, but it will not help defeat Satan. Later in this study, we will have more to say about ways to withstand the onslaughts of Satan.

Satan Opposes Gifted Operations among Believers. Satan opposes the function of our gifts, because that is the medium for our growth and unity. Satan wants us to attempt to operate on our own, and to conduct service in ways that lie outside our gifted areas. He wants the “foot” to try to occupy the role of an “eye”. This guarantees failure. It is good for us to aspire to greater gifts, but it is wrong—and counterproductive—for a believer to exercise a gift that he has not been given. A good thing done in a wrong way...is wrong. The correct function of gifts has been thoroughly examined in previous studies, but one thing we can know for sure: Satan will do anything to prevent us from growing to a level that our gifts are productive. Satan chokes on spiritual fruit.

We are not through with Satan, as there is much more to say about him, especially what we must do to keep him from overpowering us and dominating our lives. For now, though, we want to look at the

other two allies of sin. We will explore first the place of the *world* in advancing sin, and then we will look at our own *sinful nature* and its role as an internal engine for wrongdoing. When we can see clearly the place of the devil, the world, and our cooperating sinful nature, we will be ready to investigate the way for DEALING with the sins they instigate, and after that we will dig yet deeper to discover our prospects for actually DEFEATING it.

H. THE WORLD AND SIN.

Satan Rules the World. The world is the body; Satan is the soul. Just as the human soul controls and directs the human body, so it is that Satan conducts the affairs of the world. The world belongs to him, and he orchestrates its workings for his purposes. Oh, but isn't God in control of everything? Yes. But he has given "choice" to angels and to man, and He has made a sovereign decision to work around their free wills, and is planning history accordingly. God's "plan" is what happens; His "will" is what He *wants* us to "choose". His will is not always done, but His always-foreknowing plan is being done all the time. Eventually, His plan will fulfill His will, and eternal homeostasis will be established.

For now, God's plan to allow choice among His creatures is being played out. So it is that Satan is allowed to rule the world. (There is so much more behind this. See *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Life*, "War Against God", pp. 55-93, for a complete discussion of Satan's control of the world, information on how he got here, and an explanation as to why he is permitted to do what he is doing. See also John 12:31 and 14:30.)

1 John 5:19 says it plainly: "We know that we are the children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." The world is like a living organism, and its heart is the devil. The world is a living, thriving, evil monster; but no horror show is likely to be seen here, because Satan is presenting the world as a beautiful and alluring creature. This is the disguise of Satan, who makes evil seem good, and good seem evil. Satan offered kingdoms and authority to Jesus Christ (see Luke 4:5-7), because they were his to give. (Remember that Satan was addressing the *humanity* of Christ.) The world promises peace, prosperity, progress, and advancement, and it often delivers, because its ruler has the power to make it happen. Those who play by the rules of the world may indeed do well *in* the world.

When we See it we Believe It. The under-belly of the world consists of sordid pleasures, licentiousness, debauchery, greed, and self-indulgence; whereas the surface of the world reflects gain and ease. Either of these presentations of the world is a distraction from God. The world is Satan's tool for prying us away from devotion to God. His antics in the world fool us all the time, and we are mesmerized by his dulcet resonations in the world. The world is all that we see with our eyes, and it is where we witness and conduct corporeal existence. So it is that our focus tends to be on the world, and our view of life and God often goes no higher than the ceiling.

Our drive is often to get more of the world, which puts us at peril of having less of God. We are captivated by the "seen" and bored with the "unseen" (see 2 Cor. 4:18). We must be aware that the world is here to trick us. What we see in the world is Satan's illusion of satisfaction and grandeur, but these are

lies, and those who believe lies will make mistakes. Rom. 1:25 describes this condition, saying, “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.” Accept the lies of the world and you will reject the truth from God...which will leave you fumbling and stumbling in the dark.

Embracing the World. When we embrace the world’s messages and practices, we become friends with the world. Matt. 18:1a puts it like this: “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!” The world is cursed, because it has taken God’s standards and has caused deviations from them to seem appealing to man. 2 Tim. 3:2-4b frames this condition, as follows:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...

This describes the conventions of man in the world. This is the world that belongs to Satan, and a view of those who succumb to it. You will find yourself in this passage somewhere. You have an area of weakness, as do we all, and you have been tied to your habit as though it (or they) had giant hooks buried in your flesh. You are a slave to some irresistible practice or thought pattern. Don’t be smug about weaknesses in other people that are different from yours; you have your own. Assuredly, there is some kind of sinful pattern that you are likely to succumb to. Go back through the list. See yourself? Name it. This is your nemesis...your idol...and the obstructor of grace in your life. What’s more, the layers of the sin-onion are endless; conquer one, and another is uncovered. But do not despair. We will see hope before we are through. Thank God.

1 John 2:15-16 tells us not to love the world. This passage says the following:

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

We are not to love the world or *anything in the world*. This is because the world is FULL of traps and pitfalls. We cannot take a single step without stepping in it (sin-piles). It is laid across our path like a carpet. It is impossible to stay clean. Here is what the fabric of this carpet is made of, according to the passage we just quoted. These describe our practices and condition when we embrace the world:

Cravings. This consists of yearnings for the trappings and possessions offered by the world. This also includes addictions of all kinds. These quickly become idols.

Lust of the eyes. Included in our lust pattern are desires for sensual pleasures, unbridled greed, and wanton self-titillation. (If it feels good, do it!)

Boasting. This is pride, self-service, self-sufficiency, and willfulness. These are well-served and supported in the world, but these are conditions for which we must have disdain and disregard.

Do we see anything in the world that does not lead to sin? Not much.

Understanding the World. 1 Cor. 7:29-31 adds to our understanding of the composition of the world and how we are to face it. This is a tricky passage. We will quote it; then explain it. Here is what it says:

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

The meaning in this passage is clear, once it crystallizes. It is saying that the world is temporary, and nothing in it has lasting value, even our deepest relationships. The correct view of the world and our lives in it, is to see that it is so fleeting and brief that we should not be attached to it in any way, because it will all disappear soon...either because we have moved on, or because Christ has returned. What is there that will matter concerning what we have done or acquired in the world, one-hundred years from now?

Solomon described the world and its emptiness quite well in Ecclesiastes, encapsulated in this phrase: “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything [in the world] is meaningless’” (Eccl. 1:2). Returning to our passage in Corinthians, we see that when we “use” the things of the world, we become engrossed in them, which means that what we *have*, *do*, and *want* is linked to the world. And nothing we see in the world has any lasting value.

An example of using the world and being engrossed in it is found in 1 Tim. 6:6-10, which describes the lure and danger of money, as follows:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Attachment to the world and *anything* in it will lead to temptations, traps, foolish desires, harm, ruin, and destruction. It leads to “all kinds of evil”, and the eventual outcome after a brief moment of “high living” is unbelievable grief of many kinds. But we will not be deterred. The world is too attractive and auspicious. We must have more of it. This makes up the attitude, though not always consciously expressed, of ninety-nine percent of believers, ninety-nine percent of the time. “The world is too much with us”, according to William Wordsworth. We are submerged in a flood of promises that the world’s bountiful benefits will come, and most of the time, we believe them. Our view-point is given to us primarily by the world.

Matt. 6:24 informs us that while we are serving the world, we cannot serve God. This verse says, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the

one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” Our divine invitation is to store up treasures in heaven, as we see in Matt. 6:19-20, which says this:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

And what will be reflected when we choose either heavenly treasures or earthly treasures? Matt. 6:21 answers this way: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What we treasure...what we value...what we want: these reveal what is in our hearts. If we want God, the treasures of the world will be devalued. This will not take place instantly, but is the product of a growth process that will require enormous commitment over time, as we shall see.

When our hearts value wealth (of many types) in the world, we will be looking at life through “worldly” eyes, or with a “world-view-point”. And if our eyes are on the world, we will be looking into the blackest darkness, where what we imagine as good—the world’s interests and thoughts and images—is actually not good at all...and is passing away. This is confirmed in Matt. 6:22-23, which says this:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good [spiritually focused], your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad [carnal, worldly], your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

There is no way to adequately describe the utter blackness and desolation of preoccupation with the world. We will be lost and won’t even know it, because we are proceeding down a path that we cannot see. It is impossible for us to have the right perspective; the world is too strong and too much in our face. And we will stay lost until we revise our view-point to that of God’s. We can get this view-point, as we shall see, but there is much to do before that will happen. Anything that we choose or do outside of God’s view-point will be a violation of His standards, and black just keeps getting blacker. At some point, we will forget all about God, and come to see the dark world as a well-lit place. The deception of the world can bring us to this point.

We see this position established again in Col. 2:20, which says, “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules...” Paul is referring to the legalistic practices of religion, which are based on humanistic notions and “principles of the world”. He is asking why the Colossians still belong to the world, adopting a world view and worldly practices, since they have new life in Christ. In verse 23, these practices are said to have “an appearance of wisdom...but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” How much benefit will a worldly outlook provide for us spiritually? None...it has “no value”. Worldly solutions may help with superficial conditions in the world, but they give no “heart” to spiritual change. Good things may *seem* to happen, but when you scratch beneath the surface, you find “nothing of value”. One thing we can know for sure from this passage: Sin will not be hampered by any system or process we find *in the world*.

Scriptures to Help us Understand the World. Here are some additional passages elucidating the concept of worldly (or human) view-point vs divine (or Godly) view-point:

- Col. 2:8—“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” Knowledge from the world will “capture” the unwary, and leave them with ideas that are empty and misleading.
- 1 John 4:5—“They are from the world and therefore speak from the view-point of the world, and the world listens to them.” To someone who is fluent in “world language”, a conversation can take place in which the “world-oriented” speaker and the world understand each other.
- 1 John 4:6—“We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.” The mechanism for perception of divine view-point is absent, as long as a worldly view-point dominates.
- 1 Samuel 16:6-7—“When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.’ But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” Samuel was headed out to anoint the next king, and applied human view-point when he spotted Eliab. But he was informed that appearances (world-view-point) mean nothing to God. God had in mind a short, ruddy-complexioned boy named David. Concerning David, the Lord told Samuel, “Rise and anoint him; he is the one.”

The Bible is replete with examples of world vs divine view-point. It will be our objective, among others, to see and adopt the divine perspective, in order to view the world clearly, to see it as it really is: standing in opposition to God.

I. OUR SINFUL NATURE

Meeting our Nature. We believe our encapsulation of the concept and place of the sinful nature, as given in *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, is sufficiently clear to be quoted here to introduce this topic. Here is what we said about the sinful nature on p. 127 of that volume:

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

Paul described this nature very well in Romans 7. In verses 14-16, Paul states that he is puzzled why he keeps on sinning by doing the wrong thing or not doing the right thing. He doesn't want to, but he keeps on sinning. Then in verse 17 he points out the real culprit by saying, "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." In verse 18, he adds, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature." He then goes on to say (still verse 18), "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." He can't do the good he understands he should do, because of something inside of him that prevents it. In verse 20, he points again to that force inside of him that keeps him from doing the right thing, saying, "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." He has repeated his reference to this dark, mysterious presence within us, pointing out that—when it controls us—we are powerless to stop it.

Paul is saying that the "I" that is Paul is not doing these things. Yet his sinful nature is HIS nature. He must own responsibility for himself...his behavior and attitude. And that is what he is doing. By saying that his very own "nature" is doing bad and stopping good, he is admitting that he is culpable for his own sins. And the "I" he speaks of which opposes the "bad" is PAUL PLUS THE HOLY SPIRIT. For as long as the Spirit is in charge of His heart, Paul wants to do good. What, then, can stop him? His nature. The "good I" wants to do good, because of the influence of the Spirit. But the instant a choice is made to sin, that desire for good disappears, and the monster takes over to drive us to sin even more. At that time, the "I" that is aligned with God goes into hiding, and the power of the Spirit is cut off. When this happens, we become helpless to stem the tide of evil.

We will see later exactly how our connection with the Spirit equips us to resist bad and do good, but for now, we are saying that the sinful force raging and thrashing within us is unbelievably powerful. Unchained, it can do a lot of damage, and it will drag us along with it into confusion, mayhem, and unbridled iniquity.

Operation of the Sinful Nature. When we discussed the "progression of sin" earlier, we cited James 1:13-15, which showed us how sin progresses from one level to the next. We want to re-visit this passage, only this time we are looking for the role of the sinful nature in instigating this sequence. We want to look particularly at verse 14, which says, "...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." The outcome is that sin starts at some point...and then it grows and worsens. "Evil desire" is none other than our sinful nature, which "drags us away" and "entices" us. We "tempt ourselves" to sin, because it is our nature to do so. Yet the battle is not, as we will see in more detail later, between our evil selves and some nobler quality within us. It is our nature vs the indwelling Holy Spirit. When we are in harmony with the Spirit, the nature will be controlled. When we walk away from the Spirit by sinning, our nature becomes our god, and whisks us off to do evil.

The greatest objective of our evil nature is to keep us away from God's power, because that nature knows an engaged God cannot be overcome. This is why our nature embraces both sin AND morality as ways to pull us away from the perfection, righteousness, and divine good that come from God alone. Do you see the battle? The sinful nature is warring against God by having us either 1) engage in

sin, OR 2) espouse human good. The goal, as we suggested, is to pull us away from our only source of resistance against Satan's ploys, which is God's power. 1 Pet. 2:11 describes this battle, saying, "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 wars against our very own soul...that is, our soul when it is controlled by the Holy Spirit. When we are "in sin", the Holy Spirit is not in charge, and we are cooperating with our sinful nature with no hope for refusing its demands.

Gal. 5:17 makes it clear that the war is against the Holy Spirit, and that we are fighting alongside Satan's army when our sinful nature is at the helm. This verse 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." When the sinful nature takes over, we are carried helplessly along with it on its forays into all kinds of sin. And notice where the conflict is: "They"—the sinful nature and the SPIRIT—are in conflict with each other; they are at war. This is not a wrestling match between the sinful nature and some good "self" within us. The combatants are two: The Holy Spirit and our nature. We will see in detail later that the only good "self" within us after we are saved is that "self" which is in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. There is no apparatus for good within us other than the indwelling Holy Spirit. Conclusion: the war within us is between our sinful nature and the Holy Spirit.

The Deceit of the Sinful Nature. Jer. 17:9 tells us, "The heart [the sinful-nature part] is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" What is the most deceitful force in the world? Satan? No. The world? No. It is our very own sinful nature. No matter how smart we think we are, how clever and savvy, the sinful nature will win any argument. You see, when we come up against our very own nature, it is our nature who takes up arms, and what can our nature do to defeat itself? Nothing. And all of evil is content when its foe is human and not divine.

When the sinful nature is in charge, no good can be done. Even the good we do is BAD! Human good is anti-God. And our nature promotes it all...both sin BY us, and good FROM us. It will do anything to keep us away from the gun cabinet...i.e., it will use any means to prevent our being armored and armed by the Holy Spirit.

And what happens when we are not armed? The sin that arises is startling. This is what we see in Gal. 5:19-21a, as follows:

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

There is little question that this abominable brute that lives within us is bad; the hard pill to swallow is that IT IS US!

Where do we Get the Sinful Nature? It may seem a mystery why we have such a tyrannical beast living within us, one that "naturally" promotes evil. There is a cause and a reason why we have this unwanted "self". For a complete answer for this we refer you once again to *God's Training Program for Be-*

lievers. (See pages 129-130). You will be surprised to discover, when you read about it there, that God is the one who put that nature there...and for a good reason.

The nature that drives us to sin will be seen again and again in this study, but this introduction should serve as an outline into which we can insert details, as we proceed.

J. SELF-EFFORT AND EVIL

Self-involvement in the Christian Life. Self-effort has two aspects: 1) avoiding sin and 2) producing good. We will look further at the topic of reliance on self-effort to “avoid sin” as we go along, but the emphasis in this section is on self-effort in “producing good”. We already understand what the “sins” are, having seen the “lists”, but what we might be less familiar with is the form of evil known as “self-righteousness”. What we must learn is that *all* self-effort, even that which is engaged in doing “good”, is EVIL.

We tend to want a DIY style of Christianity...do it yourself. Remember the mantra of our grandparents? “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” We want to be self-made men and women, because this bolsters our pride, our sense of worth, and our belief that our existence is justified. If an achievement is chalked up, the assumption is that “I did it”! It is our strength and our intelligence and our beauty and our personality that brings about good things. And even if we have not witnessed this with ourselves, we have witnessed it enough with others to convince us that the secret to good behavior and the accomplishment of worthwhile feats lies in self-effort and self-discipline and self-motivation. We believe the way to the good Christian life is through our own abilities and qualities.

Discipline and effort and ability do play a part in our daily lives, as with jobs/businesses, relationships, civic responsibility, education, recreation, and so on, but never in the area of spiritual reality. The world-related pattern of self-performance has no place among spiritual operations. Spirituality excludes self-effort. Spirituality can and should overshadow and permeate our participation in the world, but the world and its practices should never be the basis for attempts at spirituality. When we are right with God, we will apply *self-motivation* appropriately in our activities in the cosmic system (always couched in faith), and *God-motivation* in our spiritual walk. We will be aligned with God, and working appropriately within the world.

When our hearts are pure, every piece of our spiritual production will be dependent on grace and God’s power, and our efforts will play no part. This has been confused by many, in the sense that spiritual “activities” might be translated as “effort”, such as studying, praying, and so on...but all of these are outcomes of participation in GRACE opportunities...made available and prompted by grace. All of these are *products of grace* in the lives of *willing* believers, enabled by fellowship. Once again, we are reminded that the original starter for grace operations lies in the non-meritorious act of confession, which comes from an attitude of humility and a posture of reverence toward God. And confession is not effort; it is just honesty before God.

Our Efforts vs. God’s Efforts. The attitude that we can generate our own “good”—is as common regarding Christian living *after salvation* as it is regarding salvation itself. We tend to think we must

“qualify” for salvation through effort, but some of us finally get away from this false notion and see that salvation is a matter of personal faith. This brings God’s grace and forgiveness. After salvation, it is easy to believe that we have to “perform” to please God. This is the typical view. Not even the most spiritual among us can escape the persistent notion that, if we are bad, God will be mad at us; and if we are good, God will favor us. The lie behind these, that we accept too readily, is this: that we can do something—*anything*—to please an infinite God.; and that we can *deserve* God’s grace.

What we must come to understand is that ONLY GOD can please God, and—a much harder concept—only God can love God (we’ll explain this part later). Good things: love, spiritual production, true worship, unity, and service can all take place, but only if God’s divine energy and character are behind them. When it comes to all spiritual matters, the show belongs to God. He is the producer, director, and star of Christianity. We participate only when we find ways (and we will) to embrace His grace and engage His power.

The truth is, most believers say they need God “in their lives”, and they profess some kind of cooperative undertaking with God, whereby we do part and God does part. It is a joint effort. What is missing is an understanding that God doesn’t need our part. What He needs is our recognition of HIS PART, which is the only part that counts. The whole of the gospel and all true “discipling” can only be directed toward one ultimate objective: finding out how to unleash God’s power in our lives. The most foundational principle in all the Bible is this: God is God. Conversely, we are not God. But, like Satan, we want to be, and we see such divinity in ourselves that we actually believe we can generate a brand of good that will please God. This reflects faith in self-effort. Our view is that of man as the center of all existence, while the ultimate reality is this: God is the original cause and center of everything.

Looking back to early human history, we see the struggle between self-generated worth and the provisions of grace, beginning in the first family. Gen. 4 tells us that Abel’s offering was accepted and Cain’s was not. This upset Cain, so God said to him, “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” What God was telling Cain is what He tells us now, which is that we must *do right*, which means using God’s grace-methods for salvation...and then for living. Grace comes through blood (viz., that of Jesus Christ). Abel’s offering involved blood and Cain’s did not, and therefore Abel received what grace offered.

If we receive what grace holds out to us (much more on this later), we will do what is right. Our part is to believe, which is the equivalent of “not working”. What was Cain’s downfall? It was his “work”, which was based on self-invention, pride, and effort. He brought part of his best crops, whereas Abel brought some of the best of his flock, and his offering was accepted. Abel won. Cain lost. Products of our own self-designated efforts will not win the day.

Both Sin—and Attempts to Produce Good—are Acts of the Flesh. In previous books we have repeatedly emphasized the lack of value in self-effort, either to quell sin or produce good. We must understand at some point that both the act of sinning, as well as any self-directed effort to produce good, are equally evil. Both are products of the “flesh”, or the sinful nature. If we are counting on

the flesh for holiness, we will not be receiving the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Gal. 5:2 says, “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.” Paul is speaking to believing Jews, and admonishing them not to rely on “legal” principles to generate holiness. Those who are relying on the law are refusing the spiritual help that comes through the Spirit of Christ, which means He can be of NO value to them, as long as they are counting on themselves, rather than grace.

The book of Galatians was one of the first epistles Paul wrote, and he began with this early writing to emphasize a principle that was obvious to him: the “law” will not make us righteous. In verses 3 and 4, in Galatians 5, Paul told them the following:

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 law have been alienated from Christ; have fallen away from grace.

When we rely on ourselves and our self-generated righteousness, we must do it perfectly for it to work. And, of course, we can’t, so it won’t. Keeping the rules and conforming to standards in the name of “obeying” takes us down a path that puts us into self-dependency, which WILL NOT WORK! Christ is of no value to us, when we do this. We have been alienated from Christ and have *failed God’s grace*. (This does not mean we are “condemned”; we are still saved, but we are failing God...separating ourselves from His power-flow.)

Our Good is Not Good Enough. We must say this again: To be “good enough” to please God, we have to be *perfect*. Can we be perfect? No! So we must rely on another system to bring about our holiness. And that system is one of grace, wherein God completes and fulfills His perfection through a believer who has not “alienated” Him. In contrast, a believer who is counting on self-effort to meet God’s standards will be doing the opposite. He will be *sinning* by trying to be *good*. It seems so hard for us to get the idea of grace. It is not about OUR doing; it is about GOD’S doing. We have been trying for twelve or thirteen books, now, to get this point across...to find the words. The hardest thing we will ever do is letting God be God. This takes enormous growth and maturity. But until we get this, the deeper spiritual life will evade us.

So human effort is not productive, according to the grander “divine” scale of production. Ps. 127:1-2 says this:

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

What we accomplish will amount to nothing, unless it is the Lord’s hand that achieves it. It’s not what we do for God that lasts, as the epitaphs says, but *it is what God does*...that counts. This wretched flesh can produce nothing good! We trust our own thoughts and believe our own solutions and machinations more than we accept God’s ways for achieving good. We respect our own ideas more than we do God’s Word. We rely on our power and reject God’s. This must be corrected, and we will have sugges-

tions.

One of Satan's objectives is to keep us focused on what WE can do...our abilities, our righteousness, our plans. We believe in "responsibility", "self-control", "obeying", "right behaving", "trying", and "doing our best". These will occur, but not as processes initiated by us. We will achieve good things IF we begin with God first and make sure that there is no blockage between Him and us, so that these things and more can be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. We must never begin with ourselves as the source for anything good. We must keep the sequence right: Align with God; then move forward in His strength and by His direction.

It seems as though everything we talk about is introductory, and we say again and again that more will be forthcoming. It's true once more: "Self-effort" has many facets and connections, and we will surely see it again, even in our next subject, which deals with law vs. grace.

K. LAW VS GRACE

Can Law-keeping Make us Righteous? You can be saved by keeping the law. This is absolute truth and so stated in Scripture. But for this to be true, you must keep the *perfectly*. That's the impossible part, and it's the reason no one can ever be saved by keeping the law. If we could be saved by keeping the law, we would not have to be "justified" or "made righteous" by God; we would just follow the law to develop our own righteousness. But because we cannot keep the law, we must RECEIVE justification and righteousness from a source outside ourselves. We know that when we believe in the message of Christ, we will receive the righteousness of Christ, which qualifies us for heaven and prevents our condemnation.

We have recognized that union with Christ is our eternal position, which imputes His righteousness to us. But what about our condition? We are told that we still sin after salvation, so can we sustain righteousness in our daily routines and behavior by keeping the law? Obviously not! We could not generate righteousness *for* salvation, so can we now follow all the rules and requirements of Scripture to look good to God *after* salvation? No! Can we live the true Christian life by keeping the law? No! We will be more detailed soon concerning ways to "live righteously", but for now we are trying to determine the value of law-keeping to make us righteous. It has *none*. We are establishing that law-keeping can neither make us righteous before God for salvation purposes, nor will it satisfy our requirements for righteous *living* as saved individuals.

Staying Saved by Keeping the Law. We are *saved* by grace, and afterwards, salvation must be *sustained* by grace. Some agree that grace saves us when we believe, but then they depart from grace, assuming that we must KEEP our salvation by "being good". So we are saved by faith and then live by works. Is that right? No! Performance did not get our salvation, so why would it now keep our salvation secure? The point we must establish is that salvation is by grace at the beginning...and it is the basis for its being kept...forever. Whether we are talking about initial salvation, or the salvation that is kept for us by grace, LAW-KEEPING PLAYS NO PART! We do not contribute to our conversion and regeneration, and we cannot contribute to our holding on to them. We did not save ourselves, and we

cannot keep ourselves saved.

Gal. 4:9 tells us that, after we are saved, we should not turn to law-keeping to either *keep us saved* or *sustain us in our walk with Christ*. This verse says, “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles [of the law]? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” Whether it is because we want to “stay saved”, or because we are looking to make ourselves “spiritual”, enslavement to the law will not bring one trace of credit to us from God, and such legalism will hold grace at bay.

It is not as though there is a “passing grade” for staying saved. There is no acceptable number of sins, past which we are no longer salvageable; no percentage of “goodness” that keeps us in the fold. It is only grace that will keep us saved, which does not depend on us; our show of legal complicity will add nothing. Just one error; that’s all it takes for us to fail as law-followers. James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” We will certainly break one law, so we are 100% guilty. Our grade is “zero”. John 7:19a says, “Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law.” Law-keeping does not contribute to our spirituality, as we shall establish again and again, and law-keeping cannot be used to keep us saved.

Law vs. Faith. Law is the antithesis of anything that leads to holiness, such as faith, grace, and the control of the Holy Spirit. Faith is the means for our being saved, and the Holy Spirit is the agent who makes it happen. Faith is also the means for our walking in the Spirit after He comes to live within our hearts at salvation. Gal. 3:5 asks, “Does God give you his Spirit [save you] and work miracles among you [sustain you in your Christian life] because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” Observing the law is not the basis for our being saved, nor will it facilitate the operation of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our relationship with God is NEVER conducted or enhanced by what we do, but by our acceptance and implementation of what He has done, and is continuing to do!

Faith is essential to God’s working in us. Faith sustains spirituality, whereas law-keeping disrupts and prevents it. Faith keeps the Holy Spirit empowered, while the law truncates His control within us. The power of the Spirit must be sustained through a moment-by-moment faith, as we have discussed many times in previous studies. Without faith, there is only sin, and with sin, only the flesh can operate, which can do but one thing: make us a slave to sin.

Trying to Keep the Law is a Sin. When we try to live by keeping the law, we operate “under the law” (Gal. 4:21), rather than “by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). There are two things that put us under the law, as follows:

1. Sin.
2. Trying to live by the law (actually a sin, as well).

To describe law-keeping as a sin, we will quote from a previous book: *Bible Basics on Walking in the Spirit: Pathway to Production* (p. 68), which says this:

Anything done *by us* that falls under the Law, whether it violates it, or serves it, is sin. Even

moral behavior is sin, if it is done by *us* to honor the Law, rather than by the *Holy Spirit*, Who honors Christ. If we violate the Law, this is clearly seen as sin, but if we—independent of the filling of the Spirit—try to follow the Law, even though we “appear” righteous, we will be operating “in the flesh”, which can NEVER please God (Rom. 8:8). We will be practicing a “form of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5).

This goes back to self-effort and self-righteousness. Any attempt we make to be “godly” by producing better “humanity” is just “vanity”, and will have the effect of making us powerless against sin.

Examine this Chart: “Law (Flesh) vs. Grace (Spirit)”. This chart can be found in Appendix C.

L. MORALITY VS. SIN

The Inside and the Outside. Matt. 23:27-28 helps us distinguish morality from sin. The distinction is not as clear-cut as it may seem on the surface. Morality can be good, but it can also be bad. In fact, morality can be a sin. What a surprise! That something good can actually be bad. Here is the passage:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Most of the time, we are satisfied that our “morality” is good, if we believe everyone around us SEES us as moral. We forget that God looks at the HEART. We can fool those around us, but we will not deceive God; he knows what rascals we are! It is possible to look holy and moral on the outside, but to be full of hypocrisy and sin on the inside.

Morality vs. Sinlessness. We must distinguish, also, “morality” from “sinlessness”. It seems odd that all sinlessness is moral, yet not all morality is sinless. Here is the key: Any act or thought generated by the flesh, or any act not originated by the Holy Spirit, is SIN!! If the sinful nature (the flesh) is in charge, only EVIL can be produced, even if it is “moral”. It is possible to comply with a rule, and for that compliance to be WRONG. It is the impetus behind an act that makes it good or bad. If it is from the flesh, it is bad...no matter how moral or righteous or “Christian” it may seem. If it is from the Holy Spirit, it is good...always...while morality from human effort is always bad. Any practice of morality that is not an outcropping of spirituality is an affront to God. Morality, “obeying”, practicing good, keeping the law, asceticism, self-discipline...can produce human good, but if not emanating from the Spirit, they are bad...sinful.

If an Unbeliever can do It... Anything an unbeliever can do is NOT Christianity. Human compassion, morality, religious ritual, altruism, and so on are expressions we admire. But this is not Christianity! Christianity is CHRIST! It is Jesus Christ, in the person of His Spirit, living out His life in us, when we, as His children, are prepared to let Him be alive in and through us. What is the thing a believer can do that an unbeliever can’t? (This is a tricky one.) BELIEVE! Belief distinguishes believers from unbelievers...not behavior. Unfortunately, any terrible thing an unbeliever can do, a believer can

do also. The great difference is found in the presence of faith. And if faith grows and stays resident, then the believer will not only be different on the inside...it will show in his life.

This is one reason we cannot judge a person's eternal position by looking at the way he lives. All believers sin, and believers who are not growing and/or not walking in the Spirit can wrongly be assessed as "unsaved". They are saved...just carnal. And, to be sure, unbelievers can be very moral, and unselfish, and caring, and pleasant. But that is no guarantee that they are right on the inside. So how can you tell if a person is saved or not? Many times, you can't, because believers can be horrible, and moral unbelievers can hide behind their mask of morality. (I am familiar with Matt. 7:16 and 20, which says, "...by their fruit, you will recognize them," but this applies to false prophets...another story. And I am aware of James 2:14-26, which talks about the evidence of faith being visible to onlookers. I covered this in a discussion of the book of James, which can be found in *Bible Basics on Living by God's Standards: Pathway to Righteousness*, pp. 69-74.) Better to leave "positional" assessments to God.

M. STOP TRYING

Results of Trying as Opposed to God's Working. This section expands and carries forward the notion we saw earlier, that self-effort is not a good thing and is no substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit. There is something liberating about realizing our limitations—and God's great competence—when it comes to fulfilling His will. It is good to know that we can't perform God's work apart from God's power, because this sends us looking in the right direction for resources to enable us to complete it. We saw earlier in Gal. 5:4 that self-effort, or attempting to keep the law, alienates Christ. It makes Him a stranger to us, and truncates His power within our hearts, which causes work stoppage in our lives. And, as we saw earlier, such attempts represent a denial of grace.

TRYING to keep the law is a choice to use the lesser of two powers: ours vs. God's. In a passage we have seen many times before, we want to isolate and magnify *one word*. We will quote the passage and then focus on the word. See if you can spot the word when you read the following:

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Gal. 3:2-3)

You got it. The word is "trying". The word "now" means "after salvation", which is the time we received the Spirit. Having believed in Christ, which did not involve human effort (only faith, which is the opposite of effort and works), are we now going to maintain and harmonize our relationship with the Spirit by *trying*? Our goal is to get close to God, please Him, do His will, and be His instrument for completion of His work. Our initiative, energy, determination, and effort do not contribute to God's infinite power and perfect work. We are, in effect, told to "stop trying".

Trust and Obey. Purity in thought and behavior is also our goal. We are told repeatedly to "obey", or "stop sinning", which conveys a troublesome overtone of "trying". The assumption is that purity will come through obeying, but obeying must be done in a certain way...or within the periphery of a cer-

tain “condition”. The disparity between obeying and not trying seems irreconcilable; how can obeying be done without trying? The answer will be found in the sequence in which they occur. We “stop trying” by trusting, and trusting creates a result called “obeying”. When we stop trying because we are trusting God to do in and through us what we are unable to do on our own, we will be obeying His command to trust. When we trust, we stop trying and *God goes to work* to generate purity in us. As long as we are “trying” to obey, we will end up *without* compliance with His will, and we will be *disobeying*. As long as we are trusting, obeying will occur, and work will get done.

How do we reach a point of trusting at a level that enables us to stop trying and walk by faith, and lets God be God in us? That’s the most important question of all. The short answer is this: God’s work gets done through us when we are spiritual (walking in the Spirit) and mature (building strong faith through confession, study, prayer, endurance of God’s training, and mutual exercise of gifts among believers). The long answer is found in the dozen or so books already penned to explain how these work to bring us to a place of cessation of our efforts and complete trust in God.

Summarizing the Term “Not Trying”. We selected a summary for the concept of “not trying” from *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, p. 5, as follows:

The amount of effort required to live the Christian life is a variable affected by one’s view of what the Christian life is. If you think that being a “Christian” is a matter of following a set of mores and rules, then you will gauge your effectiveness on the basis of your compliance with and conformity to specific standards. If, on the other hand, you see the Christian life as a relationship with the divine Creator, then you will assess your spiritual standing on the basis of how close you are to Him. It is my contention that the second view is the correct one: The Christian life is an ongoing association with God, in which we will either be “drawing near”...or “pulling back”.

Dependence on God for Righteousness. Phil. 3:9 reflects Paul’s dependence on the Spirit for his achievement of true righteousness. This verse says this:

...and be found in him [Christ], not having 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.

The message in this verse pertains to the righteousness we receive for all time when we are saved. There is a second application, however—as we have seen many times in Scripture—which deals with Christian living and the production of righteousness in our daily experience. We want to produce the righteousness that comes from God, and not that which we attempt to originate by trying. Ironically, the more we TRY, the worse we look to God. “Trying” is our attempt to BE God...to generate His righteousness. In so doing, we alienate God and create distance between Him and us. Whose privilege is it to be God? Only God’s. Learn to trust Him, so He can exercise His unique, divine power and privilege; only then will we be part of His operations and fulfill His purpose.

What makes the whole sin-resistance thing so hard is the presence of forces operating within and

around us. There is even a “law” that is operating inside of us that makes sin irresistible. We will now take a look at this law.

N. THE LAW OF SIN

Meet John Owen. Thorough discussions of the “law of sin” were provided by John Owen back in the 1600’s. Some of his studies have been summarized by Greg Herrick, pastor and teacher at a church in Calgary Alberta, Canada. In his review of Owen’s work, Herrick tells us, not only what Owen *said* about sin, which is sometimes difficult to follow, but what he *meant*. We will rely considerably on Herrick’s material from Owen’s studies. (This study is available at www.bible.org, under “Greg Herrick”...look for the series, “The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers”.) Herrick’s summaries will help us unravel and grasp difficult and crucial concepts regarding this law of sin. I am convinced that there is a “law” at work, and understanding it is vital to our seeing what sin is and how it operates. Here is a rather lengthy quote from Herrick’s study, which will serve to introduce us to Owen’s work:

Owen’s discussion of the pervasiveness of sin’s power in our lives will seem overdone by the standards of some today, but he is certainly closer to the Biblical mark than any moderns. So then, let us ditch the moderns, as one writer has wisely said, and let us proceed forward with Paul, who I find Owen to properly interpret. Owen’s discussion is not just chicken soup for a hungry soul, it is good medicine for the depraved soul. There is no healing until a correct diagnosis has been given. As Karl Barth once said, “If Jesus Christ died on a cross in our place, then I guess we know what our place is!” Let us never forget that it took a cross to reconcile us to God, not just a polite conversation between two parties at odds. The problem is much worse than we 21st century techno-geniuses have psychologized—even in our more sober moments. Thus, Owen pulls no punches in discussing sin’s hold over Christians, nor is he in any way stranger to grace and power. But, the latter never seems to become a reality in our daily experience until we are literally smitten with the depth of the depravity of our own souls. “Nothing good lives in me,” that is, “in my flesh,” says the apostle of grace. (Endnote 1)

Regarding our discussion of the “law of sin” in this current writing, we refer the reader to Endnote 1, where reference is made to both the work of Owen, and to the summarization of Herrick. Unless otherwise apparent, all notions regarding this law came from them.

Disclosing the Law of Sin. Rom. 7 is central to a study on the law of sin. Verse 23 says, “...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 term “law of sin”, according to Herrick’s summary, refers to the “being” and “nature” of sin within us. And the statement, “making me a prisoner of the law of sin” has to do with the “power” and “efficacy” of sin. Terminology note: “Efficacy” is used repeatedly by Owen/Herrick, and should be defined. This term means “fully effective in accomplishing its aims”. What this law intends, gets done. It is “efficacious”.

Both the being and nature of sin, and its power and efficacy, are seen in Rom. 7:21, which says, “So I

find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” The use of the term “law” in this verse points up both the nature and power of sin, because sin acts like a law within us and is powerful to bring about its ends. The law of sin lives within us and is attached to evil and darkness that will haunt us continually.

This law of sin is not a law presented *to* us, that is written down, but is a live force *within* us, prompting and urging us toward sin. Adam’s sin was *proposed* to him, whereas our sin is *inbred* within us. And it will be tirelessly effective in compelling us to sin. Unchecked, this law of sin will CONFINE and DOMINATE us.

This law has authority over us, which will last for a lifetime. Rom. 7:1*b* says, “...the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives...” For as long as we live, the “law”, which we have discussed at length, is integrated with the law of sin. The law of sin will use the “laws of God” to shadow us and hover over us as a *superior*; thus, we are considered *inferior* to the power and influence of the “law of sin”, and it will demand obedience from us.

Deceit, Temptation, and the Law of Sin. One of the tools of this mighty force is deceit. Deceit presents information or conditions as facts and reality, and convinces us that what we are hearing or seeing is the truth. What we do not see is what the law of sin is HIDING from us. It must not let us know what will really happen when we sin...the consequences. Any negative outcome from a proposed sin will be disguised, and is it any wonder that we so easily participate in sin, with its utter appeal up front, and with its real aftermath being concealed?

Mark 7:20-23 says this:

He went on: “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.’”

This verse fits well with Owen’s view of the law of sin. Look at the despicable things that come from WITHIN US! What is the source for this evil power that is operating inside of each of us? We saw earlier in James 1:14 that “...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” Temptation and evil come from the law of sin operating within us. And look at verse 15 (still in James 1): “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” Owens says the aim of the law of sin is to use its power to KILL us spiritually. This is brought about through *deceit*, as we saw above, and *temptation*, as we see here. We have seen the role of Satan, the world, and our sinful nature, but what, exactly, is this “law of sin” that jumps out at us like a troll from under the bridge? This is what we must find out.

We might be feeling a little helpless right now, with Satan, the world, and our own evil nature coming against us, and now we must contend with this potent “law”. Well, indeed we are helpless, as we will see with progressive clarity as we proceed. Part of knowing our dilemma is seeing, with increasing acumen, the potency of the evil that bedevils us. But we are looking for lucidity in this dense fog. All of

the evil forces use deceit, which makes it hard for us to recognize evil; it looks like something else entirely. Undaunted, we continue trying to look behind sin's mask to see the hideous face of this monster.

So far, we have seen two distinct areas in which sin is working very effectively: 1) force...the power of the law of sin to demand evil from us, and 2) deceit/temptation...tricking us into sinful behavior without our even calculating where it leads. Keep in mind that these forces within us are STILL US! And the picture on the mug shot will be ours. We are still responsible and culpable for the sins we commit. How are we ever going to win this one? Don't stop now, if you really want to know. God knows we need Him, and He has made a way, if we can just find it. But prepare yourself; it is not going to be easy.

Verses on the Deceit of the Law of Sin. We present next some verses that point up the power of deceit, and our vulnerability to it. These tell us how virile the wiles of deceit can be, why we should be wary of them, and why we can't resist them, as follows:

Eph. 5:6—Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

1 Cor. 6:9—Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [For a full discussion on "inheriting the kingdom of God", see *Bible Basics on Sin and Mercy: Pathway to Forgiveness*, pp. 70-83.]

Gal. 6:7—Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

Luke 21:8—He replied, "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and 'The time is near.' Do not follow them.

Heb. 6:13—But encourage each other daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Jer. 17:9—The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Jer. 4:22—My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.

Job 11:12—But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can be born a man.

Eph. 4:22—You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.

1 Thess. 2:9—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...

2 Tim. 3:13—...while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being

deceived...

The Increase of Evil When Maturity Advances. Do you ever feel that the more you mature, and the more you pray and endure and advance in understanding, the harder it is to resist temptation, and the more you see failures you never saw before? This is the opposite of what we have taught: that maturity strengthens us against sin. So what is happening with good growth and advancement in spiritual skills and faith that is causing sin to become a bigger problem?

Thank God, John Owen answered this question several centuries ago. Actually, he referred to Paul's inspired writing, which provided the answer *many* centuries ago. The answer begins in Rom. 7:21, which we saw earlier, and re-quote here: "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." When we follow God's grace methods, and are walking in the power of His Spirit, the inner power of the law of sin brings on "greater evil". And the more we advance, the more this "law" that is "at work" will impact our hearts. More righteousness brings about more temptation and deceit. "When I do good, evil is right there with me." No matter what good we are doing, evil is increasing to match it, and we always seem to be slightly behind the curve as we progress. Will this ever end? Only if we KEEP GOING and KEEP GROWING! More on this later.

Evil awaits an opportunity. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert, he let Jesus alone at one point. Why? Luke 4:13 says, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." This is Satan's strategy: he waits for the right opportunity. At the right time, under the right conditions, with the right temptation, Satan will strike with evil, and we will be unable to stop it or prevent it on our own. Even when we mature, we must know what is happening. When we do "good", evil meets force with force. This is what makes the Christian life so tricky and difficult, and until you begin to mature, you will not know what this means.

I am convinced that one of the things that happens when we grow that makes it seem that we are sinning more...and in worse ways...is the development of a greater sin-awareness and sensitivity within our spiritual consciences. When we look at the development of Paul's conscience, we see that he attained a conscience of "holiness and sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)—connoting confession and cleansing—at the mid-level of his maturity. Then, by the time he had reached full maturity, he developed a "clean conscience" (2 Tim. 1:3). His conscience had been perfected. As we grow, our consciences grow with us. And the stronger they become, the more they become critical of any aberration from God's standards, which can make us *feel* as though we are doing worse, when we might actually be doing better. At some point, we will be doing very well, when our consciences will be clear of the burden of guilt and shame.

Zeal to serve the Lord and live a holy life, as Herrick reports, will stir up the law of sin within, and may cause a maturing believer to give up. This is the test. We must continue to grow in knowledge and grace, NO MATTER HOW SERIOUSLY OR REPEATEDLY WE FAIL! This is one of the most important principles in all our studies. We must follow the edict of 1 Sam. 12:20: "'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.'" When we fail, we must confess our failure to God and walk in humility and ALWAYS

MOVE FORWARD. We must never look back.

Those who do not look for truth and follow God's pathway to maturity will not understand how being "mature" puts us at risk for new hazards. Look at Gal. 5:17, which says this: "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." (emphasis mine) Do not forget the war! We are in the middle of an enormous battle, and if we do not hear the bombs going off and see the enemy advancing toward us, then we can be sure that WE ARE NOT MATURING. Struggle comes with growth. It is not for the unwilling. Evil, with all its proponents, only goes after the "good".

Encouragement in the Face of Such Powerful Evil. The relentless advancement of evil leaves us in need of encouragement. This is what we find in 1 Cor. 15:54-58, which follows:

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

We must continue on. We must "always give ourselves fully" to our task of growing and trusting. We must stay ahead of the pursuing evil, and continue to seek God and His face. We cannot stop or we will be overrun and defeated. When we experience the power of the law of sin, we must know that this is coming to us because of our growth, and this should encourage us to keep on moving, and to thank God that our faith is getting stronger. If we give in, sin and all the surrounding evil principles will win, and then—oddly enough—they will not bother with us much afterwards, because they have "won" us. On the other hand, if we keep growing, at some point evil will finally acknowledge that we cannot be beaten, because we are walking in the strength of our God, and it will give up and leave us alone. We discussed this in *Step by Step toward Surrender: Preparation for Living*, and will review it later in our chapter on "Defeating Sin". This will be the time when we will finally celebrate victory, even while our feet are still on *terra firma*.

There is hope for us, because—just as evil is increasing with good—grace is increasing with evil. Grace is found one step ahead of evil, and if our movement is forward and we take a step, and another, and another, there is hope that we will stay inches ahead of the chomping jaws of evil that is chasing us. Rom. 6:1-2 says, "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?" Grace is the answer and our defense against evil. This is the grace of God, and the Holy Spirit, and of Christ Jesus, which is our only hope for freedom from the law of sin. Rom. 8:2 says, "...because through Christ Jesus the law of the [Holy] Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." This is *done*, positionally, and *being done*, conditionally...if we are consistently moving toward maturity.

We can lean back toward sin, as we saw in Rom. 7:23, where we are described as "prisoners of the law

of sin”. Or we can lean forward toward God, as we see in Rom. 8:3b, “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.” Life in the Spirit of grace: that will be our deliverance, as we shall see.

Are the Law of Sin and the Sinful Nature the Same? The case can be made that the “law of sin” and the “sinful nature” are one and the same. But I believe a “law” is a law and a “nature” is a nature. The law of sin is a principle and a power, and the sinful nature is a conscious entity that enforces the law to serve its purposes. The sin nature has power of its own, but enjoys the force of law behind it, as well. This law puts a badge on the sinful nature and sends it out to “keep the law” that protects and promotes evil. The law and its enforcer are inextricably linked, but they are not, in my opinion, the same thing.

Conclusion on the Law of Sin. We have presented the indescribable force of the law of sin, and we have seen that its power increases in the presence of good. We have also glimpsed briefly at the hope we have in the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. These are perfect and no evil can beat them. Where our problem comes in is that we don’t access the assets of grace, and are thus left on our own to deal with the insurmountable forces of evil.

Closing the Chapter on “The Problem of Sin”. We have looked at sin, defined it, described it, disclosed its origins, and determined its effects. We have also discovered that it is much more potent than we thought, because of its allies and because of the powerful law that backs it up and instigates it. How can we *deal* with such a superior force? We will look for the answer to this question in the next chapter (Chapter 3). There *are* things that we can do that will allow God to equip us for this battle. We want to gather and employ these resources to enable us to advance toward the objective of this book, which is to DEFEAT sin. Sounds ambitious, but with God, nothing is impossible. First, however, we will see how to DEAL with sin, which will keep us afloat until we can defeat it.

Chapter 3: Dealing with Sin

In this chapter...

Section A. God Knows Us

Section B. Recognizing Free Will

Section C. Fellowship with the Holy Spirit

Section D. Studying and Applying Truth

Section E. Christian Growth and Maturity

Section F. The Place of Prayer in our Growth

Section G. Living by Faith

Section H. The Old Man and the New Nature

Section I. Discipline for Sin

A. GOD KNOWS US

Preliminary Note. For those who have studied our previous books, this section on “dealing with sin” may seem a little worn and repetitious. It is always good to review, but the seasoned student of truth, who has mastered issues of fellowship, study, maturity, prayer, and living by faith, may be comfortable moving ahead to Chapter 4. I am not encouraging this, except for those who are thoroughly steeped in basic and intermediate doctrines. There are some new treatments in this current chapter, such as the study of the new nature and the old man, that make this review worthwhile.

God Knows When we Want Him. God knows all about us. He knows what we will do long before we are born, and He sees our lives as an “event” and not as a long, meandering pathway, which is the way we see it as we live it out. God knows our weaknesses, but just as much recognizes any desire we have for Him. Our *wanting God* is what God sees that prompts Him to plan our receiving the gospel message so that we can believe and be saved; and our *wanting more of God as believers* is what prompts Him to get true teaching to us so we can grow, move closer to Him, and serve by His strength.

Rom. 1:18-32 presents a condition known as “negative volition”, which is an internal state of *not wanting God*. When anyone harbors an internal condition of disinterest in God, He will let them go their way. Verse 28 in this passage says, “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge [awareness] of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought to be done.” When we dismiss God, He allows this and steps back, to make room for our choices (“free will” is coming up in the next section). And when we refuse God, His perfect will is thwarted and we are left on our own. The point is this: God knows what is going on with us on the inside, and this determines the level and type of interaction He conducts with us. He knows exactly what we think...and what we want.

God Knows our Ways and our Motives. In the middle of Rev. 2:23, Jesus says, “...I am he who searches hearts and minds...” Jer. 17:10a says, “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind...” Ps. 139:1-4 carries this concept even further, saying this:

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.

He sees what we do, of course, but more than that, He sees the motivations, the thoughts, and the yearnings that underpin our actions. Prov. 16:2 adds this: “All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.” He not only SEES what moves us; He WEIGHS their value. He determines whether a motive comes from a call from our sinful nature and the law of sin, or whether we are clean and in fellowship, whereby our motives would reflect a heart that is prepared to serve and please God in the power of His Spirit.

We must understand that we can hide nothing from the Lord. Is. 29:15 describes it this way: “Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, ‘Who sees us? Who will know.’” Even for a person who is proclaiming great faith and devotion,

there is no guarantee that a proper spirit (Spirit) is behind it. Is. 29:13 says, “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.’” Empty worship is blasphemy to God, and is despicable. Go back to Is. 29:15, where we saw, “Woe to those...”, which targets believers who count on externals to satisfy God. But get this: NOTHING WE DO can please God. It is what GOD DOES that pleases Him. Our part in the process is to have a heart that worships, and then let God take over from there.

God Knows What we Need. Because God knows us inside and out, He knows what we need. If we want Him, He will provide what we need to serve Him. He will teach us about His grace and His provision, and He will lead us on a path toward growth and a walk in His Spirit. 2 Pet. 1:3-4 tells us what he provides to those who want Him, saying this:

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

It is here that God’s knowing us and knowing what we need meets our deficiency for dealing with sin. He will provide what we need “through our knowledge”, which connotes maturity and the use of grace assets and techniques. We will have all we need for “life and godliness”, and we will be able to “escape the corruption [temptation] in the world caused by evil desires”. But we must want a truly God-focused life for this kind of provision to be seen. We must want God to be the center of our lives. Only then will we be given what we need to become what He wants.

We are able to choose God, because we have “free will”. God has sovereignly decided to give us the ability to make choices. The next section features this basic provision God has made for all human beings.

B. RECOGNIZING FREE WILL

God’s Choosing vs. Free Will. Since the Reformation (discounting the views of Augustine in the 4th and 5th centuries), many great and learned scholars have espoused the view that God chooses those who will be saved. They see salvation as the work of God, from start to finish, because man is depraved and incapable of “doing” anything to merit a relationship with God. Their view is that God MUST choose, because depraved man is incapable of choosing. There is nothing redeemable in man, and therefore it must be God who selects certain individuals in whom He is pleased to implant Himself and to allow them to avoid condemnation and enjoy eternal life. Calvinists of various hues will admit that “faith” is required, but that God “gives” this faith. If WE generated the faith, it would be works (even though Paul says faith and works are opposites). But the choice, they say, rests with God, whereby He selects some to live forever, and by default designates others to live forever in a lake of fire.

God chooses us, that is for sure, but we have discussed in previous books the basis for this choice,

which is God's foreknowledge of those who will believe in Him. Foreknowledge cannot be taken away from God. He knows who will accept Him and who will reject Him. And He is obligated to get the gospel message to those He knows will believe. But the choice God makes is responsive to the desire of the individual human being, whom God sees clearly, inside and out. If they look around at creation, and respond positively, and want to know God, He will come to them, so they can believe. And when they believe, they are expressing a non-meritorious condition called "faith". But if they reject the notion of God, and show no interest, they are free to go their own way as condemned men. Remember: If anyone wants God, He will come to him or her.

Many Calvinists admit that we are somehow RESPONSIBLE for the requirement to "believe" for salvation, but say that they will just live "in tension" over the disparity between our "responsibility" and God's "sovereign choice". Then they remind us that "God's ways are not our ways." I choose not to live in such tension. This is confusion, of which God is not the author. BUT...it is not our objective to argue against the points of Calvinism, but to give credence to God's provision of free will to mankind. He made a sovereign decision to give "choice" regarding most things, especially those which are spiritual in nature, to angels and to humans. This is why Adam and Eve CHOSE to walk away from God, and THEY WERE NOT "DEPRAVED" AT THAT TIME. They exercised free will to rebel against God, just as, much earlier, Satan and his followers had used free will to line up in opposition to God.

Oddly enough, most "Calvinists", or "reformed" believers, have a better view of our relationship with God after salvation than those who espouse free will. The concept of depravity certainly applies to mankind, both before and after salvation, but we have new equipment after we are saved, which is the Holy Spirit. He alone enables us to satisfy the requirements for Christian living, and He alone can produce the life and righteousness of Christ in us. Calvinists, generally, are more plugged in to this concept than many who espouse personal responsibility—faith alone in Christ alone—as the basis for salvation. Unfortunately, Calvinists often focus more on HOW WE GOT SAVED than they do on HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. But when Calvinists do talk about the lives of believers, they often get it right, especially that the Christian life must be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. My focus is entirely on *believers*; therefore, I do not spend much time disputing the unilateral "election" point of view.

One of the richest messages for Christian living comes from Andrew Murray, a Calvinist who wrote in the 1800's. He is CORRECT in his views of our need to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And he is one who does not dwell on salvation, but moves on to doctrines more pertinent to our lives as saved people. I must say, thank God for our brothers with the Calvinist stripe. We have much truck with them.

But still, if it were true that God would "create" people to be either believers or unbelievers, then He would not say that He wanted all of them to be saved. If He wanted all of them to be saved, and THE CHOICE WERE HIS, He would simply make them all believers. But He doesn't. 2 Pet. 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 1 Tim. 2:3-4 adds, "This is good, and

pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” It is God’s will that all be saved. Are all saved? No. God also wants all believers to learn the “truth”. Do they? No. This is because God gives man free will to operate within limitations imposed by environment and conditions of birth.

The Place of the Will is Important. It is important to understand free will, because it is the basis for what I believe about the reason we were created, which is this: we are object lessons in history for the fairness of God. These lessons are being demonstrated to Satan and his fallen angels, so they will see God’s justice in condemning them to an eternal lake of fire. Rejection of God is the basis for condemnation; God is showing Satan that individual men and women can choose or refuse God, but that each person is RESPONSIBLE for his/her choice, and he must suffer the consequences for the choice he makes. By this, Satan will be shown that he is responsible for his choice to rebel against God. (For a complete discussion on this topic, see our description of the origin, purpose, mechanics, and outcome of the war that Satan is waging against God in *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, pp. 55-93. No one or two paragraph summary can do justice to this complex topic.)

Without free will, how can there be responsibility? One of the greatest outcroppings of free will is *personal culpability* for wrongdoing, with no excuse, no matter how great the internal and external pressures from evil forces may be.

Being Willing. Ex. 35:20-21^a shows us how our free will can work, saying this:

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses’ presence, 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...

We see the phrase “who were willing” again in verses 35:22, 26, 29 and 36:2. How can anyone be “willing” without “free will”? And whose heart can move him to act without the freedom to determine values independent of outside coercion? To say that we have no free will is a stretch that I cannot make. I believe we have complete autonomy, when it comes to our relationship with God, because God *chose* to give us *choice*. Choice is one of the primary truths concerning our place in the divine scheme, as we see in the following:

1. We know that God does His own work.
2. We know we are weak, because of our nature.
3. We know that closeness to God and faith (maturity) are the keys to our utilizing His strength and positively participating in His plan.
4. We know that we have choice.

These are some of my core beliefs. There are many others, but these are particularly pertinent to my overall belief system. The fact that we have choice is a firm and seminal truth. I believe God deals with us based on our “willingness” to have Him in our lives. He “makes us willing”, no doubt, and gives us strength to serve, but don’t leave this out: We must first be “willing to be made willing”. If we have no

interest or thirst for God, He will not impose Himself on us...not ever!

Volition is hard to nail down. What is that kernel “decider” or “seeker” within us that determines the level of our interest in God? Somewhere in the innermost core of ourselves, there is a toggle switch, with “God” and “not-God” as the choices. By default, the switch is set to “not-God” (with an inborn “awareness” of God, Rom. 1:18-21 and Eccl. 3:11). Unbelievers will need to flip this switch *one time* to indicate a genuine interest in God. This opens them to the work of Jesus Christ, which—when believed—results in salvation. Once we have been saved, we never have to re-flip the switch for regeneration. But as believers in time, we have to reset the switch over and over again, since we lose our fellowship and communion with God each time we sin. Without question, there IS a switch, and our hands are on this switch. This is where our initial—or ongoing—choices are made; and it is here that we choose God, or we choose something else.

As believers we can choose to go with God each minute of each day, notwithstanding the many competing forces and distractions around us. This basic “choosing-God” is at the base and beginning of a sustained harmony with God. And we keep on choosing, all the time. Is. 65:12b says, “I spoke but you did not listen [you exercised free will in rejection of the truth]. You did evil in my sight and chose [by free will] what displeases me.” We must persist in *right* choices, which will come from wanting more of God...never being satisfied with less than the “fullness” of Him.

1 Ki. 18:21 expresses a condition of free will, as follows: “Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him, but if Baal is God, follow him.’” What was it that was wavering? Opinions. What are opinions? Personal proclivities based on individual choices. We see a similar case in Deut. 30:19, which says, “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.” This discloses the presence of free will, which is exemplified once more in Josh. 24:15, where the Word says this: “But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will [choose to] serve the Lord.” If you want God, you will choose Him.

Let’s face it. If you can’t find God...if you don’t see God in your life...if you are living for the world and not for God, then what is the problem? You are not choosing Him. Why? Because you do not want Him enough.

Wanting God Deeply Enough. We opened the discussion on “wanting God” earlier, and now we want to see it more directly in connection with free will. Ps. 73:25-26 helps us recognize what wanting God feels like, saying, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” God is the singular desire and focus of this psalmist. He wants God and NOTHING ELSE IN THE WORLD. That’s the kind of wanting that God honors. He is not impressed with half-hearted or tepid rummaging around for Him and His truth. He wants GENUINE DESIRE FOR HIM ALONE. He wants believers who are intent on knowing Him and getting close to Him, so that He can strengthen them and en-

able them to glorify their heavenly Father. He will not operate through someone who does not want Him. This is why we must be able to say, as David did in Ps. 40:8a: “I desire to do your will, O God...”

When we want God, we will do what it takes to know Him better and increase our faith in Him. When we want God, we will want *good*. But observe, we will not want God if all we want is “good”, because the good we want without wanting Him is not good at all. When we want and seek and find God, we will know what real “good” is, and we will see that it is God that we really want, and know that *good* is a by-product of our *relationship* with Him. Whatever conditions we describe to which we aspire in the Christian life, they must always begin with wanting God. Wanting has no power or goodness in itself, but it leads to these by the employment of God’s grace in advancing our understanding and commitment to His truth and righteousness.

We must be good God’s way. This means that we must follow His steps, which will take us into greater maturity and a consistent walk in the Spirit. This occurs through a relentless wanting of God, whereby we will at some point acquire *from Him* a love *for Him*. Good will then be produced through this love. The will to do good comes from a desire for Him; any other will for good is self-generated, temporary, and ineffectual. Don’t waste your time trying to be good, or even wanting to be good, if you have not first wanted and sought for God.

Seeking God. One of our main goals is to seek God, so we can see God. Ps. 27:4 says, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” We will not find Him if we do not look for Him. Seeking is an extension of our wanting. When we want Him, we will search for Him. Hezekiah searched for God devotedly, and as a result, he prospered. 2 Chron. 31:20-21 tells us about this, as follows:

This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God’s temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.

In all of history, all the great believers that we recognize as being fully devoted to the Lord were seekers. They looked for God in His Word and in prayer and in the training He brought to them. They saw God as the underpinning and overlay of all existence, and knew that the purpose of everything that exists and everything that has happens has divine significance in God’s plan. It is seeing God in every experience of life, and looking for His hand in all the affairs of men, certain that He is working His plan for the good of all believers who are seeking Him. 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.” Jer. 29:11-14a fleshes out our understanding of the value of seeking by adding the following:

“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. Your will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you...”

And if this is not strong enough, look at Ps. 63:1-8, which gives us a complete picture of what we find when we want him and seek him with all our hearts:

O, God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

What a beautiful picture of that rich place in the presence of God, which wanters and seekers will find. This is our desire. This is our delight. This is our declaration. We want only God. We come from *awareness* to *wanting* to *asking/seeking* to *using grace techniques* (confession, prayer, study, endurance, and trusting) to *training/growth* to *maturity*. This is the map to God’s fullness, which we will follow, if we are earnestly seeking Him.

C. FELLOWSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Fellowship is Present, or it is Absent. When we are in fellowship, we are controlled by the Holy Spirit. I believe this control is an either/or condition. We are controlled by the flesh or by the Spirit. There is no such thing as thirty percent control of the Spirit and seventy percent control of the flesh, or some such combination of mixed control. Either the Spirit is in charge completely or the sinful nature is in charge...completely. There is no gray area in this arrangement. Romans 8:5-15 distinguishes this control as absolute, equating the Spirit’s control to “life” and the sinful nature’s control to “death”. Life and death are absolutes. There is no such thing as “sort-of dead”. We will be, at any given time, controlled by the Holy Spirit or by the flesh. But in order to receive the control of the Spirit, we must be clean, since the Holy Spirit cannot co-occupy space with evil. We can’t be “clean” by sinless behavior, so we must be “cleansed” another way. This is what we get from 1 John 1:9, which gives the clearest picture of the process of fellowship through forgiveness and cleansing. These come when we CONFESS our sins and sinfulness to the Father. When we confess, He forgives and cleanses. And then by being cleansed, fellowship is restored and the control of the Spirit resumes.

Sinning While in Fellowship. So why do we still keep on sinning, even though we are in fellowship. This is because all the forces of evil operate with greater intensity when we move from “carnality” (not forgiven) to “spirituality” (forgiven). When we are in fellowship, evil increases, as we saw earlier. But—for as long as we are in fellowship—we can GROW and move toward maturity. This will increasingly enable us to deal with sin with greater reliance on the Holy Spirit, with the result that we will stay in fellowship LONGER, which accelerates further growth. This is why fellowship is so important: it is the preliminary condition for forward movement.

Freedom to Sin and Step Back from God. Our free will chooses repeatedly to sin, which disrupts fellowship and growth. God allows this, because He honors our freedom of choice. Because we have “choice”, and because God allows for us to determine what we will value and embrace, He does not force us to be “good”. But when unconfessed sin stains our sin record, God will read this condition on our hearts, and will not control us and motivate us against our will. The result is that His will cannot be done in and through us, for as long as He does not control us. We should note that, even when we are in fellowship, we are at choice and can step away from God. Fellowship is then lost until it is regained through confession.

Description of Fellowship. Fellowship is described in various ways in Scripture. Eph. 5:14b describes fellowship as being “awake” and “alive” (as opposed to being “asleep” and “dead”). Eph. 5:8 says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” Like the Ephesian believers, we were once “darkness” completely, but now we are “light in the Lord”, meaning that we are now “in union with Christ”, which is a place or *position* of “light”. And since our position is a place of light, we should also live in that light *in our condition*. Living in the light is living in the control and power of the Holy Spirit. Eph. 5:9 shows us what the outcome or “fruit” of the light is: “goodness, righteousness, and truth”. Notice how aligned the fruit of the light is with the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22, which are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”. Both sets of “fruit” come from fellowship and the control of the Holy Spirit. When we are in fellowship with the Spirit, we will be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), which means *controlled* by the Spirit, and when we are controlled by the Spirit, fruit will be borne.

Fellowship and Sin. For as long as we (believers) are sinning without repenting, we will be out of fellowship. But while we are in fellowship, we will not sin...until free will gives in to the potent forces of evil. With the control of the Spirit, we will have the resources to combat sin, if we have the maturity to sustain conditions that permit this control. 1 John 3:4-6 says this:

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

To fully understand the point we want to make here without great elaboration, we suggest you read “Fellowship in John’s First Epistle”, a chapter in our book, *Bible Basics on Living by God’s Standards: Pathway to Righteousness*. This chapter explains that the entire book of 1st John is dealing with *fellowship*, and *not salvation*. When the Word says, “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning,” it is viewing “living” as “being in fellowship”. This is “abiding” in Him, or being alive in the strength of His Spirit. This does not mean being alive physically, nor does it pertain to eternal life. “Living” refers to the spiritual life of fellowship. “No one who continues to sin has seen him or known him”, is a trickier phrase to interpret. I believe it means that, when we are out of fellowship, we will not be “seeing Him” or “knowing Him” in a close and intimate sense. This does not mean we have NEVER seen Him or known Him. It just means that—in a state of carnality—we cannot see or know Him. Face it, when we are out of fellowship, we are not even looking God’s way...and so the story goes...out of sight, out of mind.

The point is this: When we are in fellowship, we will not sin (until we choose to give it up by sinning again). When we are out of fellowship, we will look away from God and forget Him. As a result, we will be carnal, and as long as we remain in this state of carnality, we will do nothing but sin.

Control of the Spirit vs. Control of the Sinful Nature. Rom. 8:8-9a presents a similar dilemma for “hermeneutical” treatment, saying, “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled, not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” We believe that “lives in you” does not mean “occupies a place in your heart for all eternity”. We see a temporal application, which interprets this passage like this: “Lives in you” means “lives in you and is in charge of the place where He lives”. He “occupies us as the manager and authority of the space occupied”. Go further in Rom. 8 to the last half of verse 9, which says, “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” Not “having” the Spirit of Christ is different from His occupying us and not controlling us, as when we are out of fellowship. “Having” is the permanent possession of the Holy Spirit from the time of salvation. When we are saved, we “have” the Spirit forever. But when we sin, he is not “alive in us” in the sense that He is not in charge of our hearts, so He is not LIVING in us in that sense.

The Holy Spirit will always LIVE within us after we are saved, but it is only when he is living as the manager of our hearts that His *life* within us is also the *authority* within us. This occurs only when we are in fellowship. If we are controlled by the sinful nature, rather than the Holy Spirit, we CANNOT please God. The only way for us to please God is for the Spirit to be in charge. And the only way for Him to be in charge is for us to be in fellowship.

Living in Fellowship. In Col. 3:17, we see how much of the time we are supposed to operate in fellowship. This verse says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” The “name of the Lord Jesus” implies the sphere of authority and power inherent in His name. When something is done in His name, it is done in His power. The only way we can operate in His power is to be in fellowship. So, when we are instructed that we are to do EVERYTHING in His name, we are being told to do *whatever* we do...in fellowship. Our objective must be to keep His power working by staying in fellowship all the time.

The Holy Spirit, once in charge, will do everything for us except make mature choices. Only by maturing will we learn to operate a maximum amount of time in the filling and control of the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, we will oscillate frequently between the control of the Spirit and the control of the flesh. On the road to maturity we will fail many times, which is why we must keep confessing and keep growing. When we stay clean and live in fellowship, faith will grow, our relationship with God will be closer and more harmonious, and we will live meaningful lives in the power of His Spirit. This simple statement is the true secret behind every good thing we will ever accomplish in the Christian life.

Without fellowship, we will quite simply live a life filled with self and sin, regardless of how much we whitewash our appearances on the outside. Fellowship must be our way of living. Only when we live in the power of the Spirit will we have a chance against sin, because only the Holy Spirit has the power

to stop it. Gal. 5:16 summarizes this for us, declaring, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” This is the most important asset we can ever have for quelling sin: being controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

D. STUDYING AND APPLYING TRUTH

Operation of Gifts. One of the most important components in our growth is the process of accessing the gift-pool of the church. As individual members of the church, the single-most important contribution each of us can make to the cause of Christ is the operation of our personal gift(s) in service to fellow believers. The collective function of gifts is a main artery for growth and encouragement among believers. This is how God uses each of us to teach and strengthen the rest of us, and this is a main conduit by which the unified church is empowered and equipped. Your personal gift is your primary avenue of service and your greatest expression of love. The operation of your gift makes you a branch that bears fruit.

For a specific delineation and discussion of gifts, see “Gifts”, a chapter in *Bible Basics on Maturity: Pathway to the Worthwhile Life* (pp. 53-68). Volumes could be developed on this important topic (and surely have been), but here we want to look at gifts with SIN as the backdrop. Gifts should always be considered with a view toward their usefulness in helping us deal with sin, as we are growing in knowledge and grace.

Gifts are described in many places in the New Testament. We will look at a few of these. We begin in Eph. 4, which points out the value of gifts to facilitate our movement toward maturity. By functioning within a matrix of gifted services, each of us grows. Eph. 4:11-16 gives a self-explanatory description of this process, as follows:

So Christ himself gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and 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 men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into 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.

This is a comprehensive description of the role and purpose of gifts, which is to make us mature. Every good thing to which we aspire, such as dealing with sin, depends on our progress toward maturity, and maturity is facilitated through the operation of gifts.

Col. 2:2-4 gives an excellent and eye-opening portrayal of the function of “gifts”, though it never once uses the term. This passage says this:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have

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

Paul's passion was to provide spiritual strengthening to Colossian believers (and to us) and to encourage an *esprit de corps* (spirit of unity) among believers. Strength comes through growth, and unity comes through mature love. This is how the church is supposed to work: with unity working through love, which operates in and among believers. When love is working, each believer looks after the needs of others and each contributes to the group through his individual gift. Right before this passage, Paul had said this:

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present every one perfect [mature] in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his [God's] energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Col. 1:28-29)

Paul is, first of all, citing the source and conductor for his gift, which is God, and then he gives the purpose of his gift: helping fellow-believers to mature. He wanted to “encourage” and “unify” them (v. 2-4), and beyond that, to impart the “full riches of complete understanding”, to equip them for living. One of the “full riches of complete understanding” is the process for dealing with sin. This is why he said he wanted them to have “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”: so that “no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments”. He knew that maturity, derived through the operation of his and other gifts, would increase their spiritual strength, so that deception could be countered.

One of the greatest discussions of gifts is found in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12, 13, and 14. These three chapters examine the origin, organization, importance, and operation of gifts, including certain limitations on their function. There has been a lot of confusion about the 13th chapter of 1 Cor., which is NOT about love, *per se*, but is about fellowship and the operation of gifts as a *product of love*. It is proper, when we see the term “love”, to think of it as representing the filling and fruit of the Spirit, which is accessed and produced through fellowship. Love is the basis for the exercise of gifts, which means that gifts should not be conducted in “pride, impatience, unkindness, or harshness”, as per 1 Cor. 13:4-7. If we are in fellowship, gifts will be delivered without these detractors. If we do not deliver our service in “love” (in fellowship), we will be like “resounding gongs” or “clanging cymbals”, no matter what our gifts are (1 Cor. 13:1). This means they will have no good effect.

1 Cor. 14:1 describes this well: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” The “way of love” runs through any legitimate operation of gifts. Love is the motivation and spirit for all bona fide gifted engagements. (For a more thorough discussion of the concept of love and gifts, see *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, Article 1, “Gifted Service and Love”.) When there are selfish motives or egotistical underpinnings attached to the operation of gifts, they will fail; no real fruit will be borne and there will not be harmony and unity among believers. This means that ALL believers must be maturing and exercising their gifts IN THE SPIRIT, for there to be unity and a cheerful exchange of gifts. The benefit and beauty of gifts will be derived only when the Holy Spirit is the orchestrator and conductor of their performance.

When we are maturing and walking in the Spirit, we can speak and act with confidence in the exercise of our gifts. 2 Cor. 10:12-18 tells us not to try to “ply our trade” outside our gifted area. We cannot “compare” or imitate or emulate the gifts of others. God gives the gifts where He wants them to be used, and any deviation from the area of giftedness he has assigned brings only frustration and confusion. Verses 12-13 out of this passage (2 Cor. 10) say this:

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you.

When God assigns a field to us, and we have matured to the point that we can exercise our gift in the power of the Spirit, it is proper for us to be confident, even to be “boastful” (“in the Lord”, or “in fellowship”, as per v. 17), or perhaps even forceful, which implies that it would not be inappropriate to say, “Listen, I know what I’m talking about...” Such confidence would not be suitable for an immature, carnal, or unknowledgeable believer...only for an assuredly mature one, operating in a spirit of love. Loving gentleness will always be the standard for effectual gifted operations, but occasionally the heat may need to be turned up to get a point across. Jesus was loving and perfect, but He could also be vehement, when it was required. Exercise your gift with confidence! And receive the gifts of other MATURE believers with assurances that what they offer will accelerate your spiritual growth. We must keep our eye on the prize, which is both to GROW...and to help others grow!

God Teaches Us. We need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to help us know God better. So says Eph. 1:17, which phrases it this way: “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.” Paul is teaching us that the Holy Spirit is the holder of all we need to know to have a better understanding of God...what He thinks, how He works, and how we should relate to Him. The Spirit has been teaching in one way or another throughout human history, but now—during this age—He is inside us to enable us to understand the truths we are truly searching for. This is not an advantage provided to believers, other than in this Church Age (except sporadically in the Old Testament).

Jer. 31:33 is a message directed to Israel, but it applies to us. This verse says, “‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’” Scripture is to be taught to us by the Lord and kept there to give us insight into this Being who will be our God. He has made it easy for us to acquire knowledge about Him, but many times we choose to learn the hard way. This is what happened to Solomon when he conducted eight great experiments in the world, with the result that Solomon ended up having to learn the hard way. And in another case, this is what happened at the healing springs of Shiloah, where God’s provision of healing waters (the gentle and easy way) was rejected. This is what we see in Is. 8:6-8, which gives us this account:

Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwa-

ter of the River—the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks.

This illustrates our dilemma: We can accept the gentle teaching of God's Word, or receive instruction in another way. Some of us have to learn the hard way. We can be instructed as to how a believer taps into the flow of grace and the power of God for the production of divine good, or we can learn this through object lessons presented to us along the way. Regarding discipline for unconfessed sins, or training through tests and trials, we demonstrated in *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, that many difficult experiences that come to teach us to trust God could be foregone or ameliorated, if we intensified our growth through direct study of the Word. When we refuse to learn through the Word, that leaves only learning by experience, which will eventually impress us with many truths. This is certainly not the recommended way to learn.

Storing and Applying Truth. Once we learn truth, we must store it and apply it to events and conditions in our lives. In a previous study, *Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word: Pathway to Truth and Wisdom*, we cited differences between knowledge and understanding, and understanding and wisdom. Knowledge is a head-level recording of learned truths. At this stage, the information is useless, spiritually. But when faith is applied to what he have “heard”, it is converted into *understanding*, just as digestion converts food products into nutrition and energy. But there is one more level of assimilation which is needed, and that is the conversion of understanding into *wisdom*. This can be done only by greatly treasuring and loving the truth, and genuinely craving a deeper understanding of God. This is *loving what we learn*, a pre-requisite for the transformation of understanding into wisdom.

When we process knowledge into understanding and understanding into wisdom, this places the truths we learn on the “launching pad”, from which they can be applied to experience. If truth sits in our heads someplace and is never applied as spiritual principles, then it will be of no value in our Christian lives. To be any good, what we know must become understanding. Then, if we treasure what we understand, it will become wisdom. Only at that point can what we have learned establish a connection with our daily lives; it is only then that we will be able to *apply* what we have assimilated. If we are without wisdom to paint our experience with the colors of God, then we are no better off than carnal or immature believers. We will not be using God's resources and techniques, and we will not be walking close to Him. When we identify truth from what we hear, we must *believe* it, and then we must *receive* it into our hearts, where it can be stored and applied.

James 1:22 gives us the sequence for learning and applying truth, saying,, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” When we listen, and believe what we hear, and truly value what we understand, we will be ready to do exactly what is called for in Scripture. When we continually learn AND apply what we have gained, we will advance with God's blessing. James 1:25 says, “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” The key antecedent for the practical application of truth is genuinely wanting the truth before we learn it. If we are disinterested in the truth, even if we master important concepts intellectually, we will have nothing to

apply to daily situations and events.

Fellowship must overlay each of the steps in the learning/application process. We must be in fellowship to discern truth and screen false or deceptive ideas from what we hear. Fellowship enables us to exercise faith toward what we identify as truth. Fellowship then converts understanding to wisdom, so it can be applied, which can only be done when the Holy Spirit controls us. Even the energy for application must come from the Spirit. So you see, a constant dependence on God throughout the learning process is required, so that we remember this: it is God who conducts our Christian experience of applying doctrine. We will not apply God's truths with any success, if it is not God who takes up the wisdom we have stored and uses it for His work. Attached to our fellowship and faith, our wisdom can be used by God to implement His own requirements and accomplish His own work. It will be our privilege to be the tools with which He does this.

Finding the Truth. In addition to understanding how we apply truth, we must master the essence and content of what we are to apply. Truth is of no value to us if we never learn it, or if what we learn is *watered down* or *incomplete*. In addition, the *volume* of truth that we acquire, and the *frequency* with which we absorb it, are important. Correctness, content, and amount must all be adequate for growth to take place.

In regard to the accuracy and purity of truth, I am going to use my gift that God is employing in this writing to boldly declare that there are many false paths laid out today in the practice of the Christian faith. There is a great deal of misinformation, and misleading messages are everywhere. Most messages proclaimed at this time glorify man and promote self-dependency and self-righteousness. If you recall the number of people who qualified for passage on the ark, there were only eight of them...eight mature people worldwide. Are there only eight people today who truly thirst after God and want Him to be the center and source for their lives? Sometimes, it seems like it.

True seekers have some unique distinctions, as follows: 1) Only maturing believers really *struggle* with sin (immature and carnal believers *sin*, but they do not sense a struggle with it, because they either don't know about it, or they have surrendered to it). 2) Only those who are advancing receive *intensive* training for acceleration of growth (carnal believers do not qualify for training; only for discipline). 3) Only the sincere seekers, those craving truth and godliness, will receive the inside truths of God's Word. For all other believers, sin is easy and comfortable, training is absent, and truth is obscured. Disinterested or half-hearted believers will not have the insights or wisdom of the seekers. And they will not mature and will not serve. They will be saved, but that's it.

Ps. 119:130a says, "I have chosen the way of truth." Choosing the way of truth is not just choosing to go to church on Sunday morning or praying occasionally; the way of truth is a commitment to be saturated with truth and live in constant awareness, reverence, passion, and awe toward God. The way of truth is finding a good study regimen and following it every day. Ordinarily, the pastor-teacher is the best resource for learning the Word, but main-stream pastors today do not provide this opportunity. Even with a gifted and spirit-filled pastor, it is essential that we complement studies under his tutelage with other studies. (For suggestions on studying alternatives, see "Guidelines for Studying", in *God's*

Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living, pp. 37-39.)

Truth is for Living and Growing. Maximum living requires maximum truth, especially truth that pertains to living. The entire Bible is profitable, but I believe the instructions that give us the greatest boost toward maturity and spirituality are those that tell us how to LIVE. And by “live”, we mean “living in Christ”, or walking in the power of His Spirit. To do this, we must not only *learn* the principles for living...we must *master* them and *internalize* them. As we will see, the process is successive and progressive. And the newness never ends. Every time we hear a lesson on the Word, or read a passage ourselves, some new truth jumps out at us, some new application or view to alter our thinking. There is no once-for-all study that will sustain us for the rest of our lives. We must keep on extending and refreshing our understanding, and building our wisdom. This will require us to learn new truths, and to frequently stir “old” ones through repetition and review.

A mind left with inadequate intake of truth will forget and/or ignore what has been learned already. When we get less, we lose what we already had. When we get more, more builds on more. Growth requires consistent study, without which we will decline spiritually. We must remember also to confess our sins before we study, so the Holy Spirit can teach us and bolster our understanding and wisdom. And we must pray for wisdom, as James 1:5 commands: “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.”

We must learn and re-learn, and learn again, continuing to construct and repair the super-structure of our faith. Know this: You’ll never get too much wisdom or maturity. You can’t be “over-spiritual” or “too mature”. You may not fit the world, but that doesn’t matter much in God’s kingdom of light. You must keep studying and growing, no matter what slips or setbacks may come, or what resistance you encounter. You cannot practice what you do not understand. KNOW to GROW.

Paul’s Growth. Paul’s growth is a good example for us all. I could get in over my head very quickly at this point, since I do not have sufficient scholarship to outline books of the New Testament, as J. Hampton Keathley, III; Charles C. Ryrie, and others, have done. But it seems to me that Paul’s growth advanced as he studied and learned and served over time. I believe this is reflected in the refinement of truths that he presented as his continued growth enabled new revelations. Here is a sequential run-down of the epistles he wrote, and a suggested advancement in his growth from the first epistle to the last:

- After his first journey, he wrote Galatians, where he was just understanding the difference between life under the law and life under grace (life lived by the Spirit).
- During his second journey, he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, in which he emphasized the proper establishment and conduct of the church; encouraged believers facing tests and trials; taught some spiritual principles, such as thanksgiving and prayer; and clarified issues concerning the “day of the Lord”. Truths were getting “meatier”, as he progressed.
- During his third journey, Paul sent epistles to Corinth and Rome. These include 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. This is the mid-point of his writing, and a tipping point for his

growth and his doctrinal presentation. In his epistles to the Corinthians, he introduced some new principles for living, and refined others. These include lessons on the proper conduct of the church, discussion of the importance of wisdom and growth, the place of repentance and fellowship, the purpose and correct function of gifts, and the place of the Holy Spirit in the maturation process. In Romans, written after Corinthians, he went further into spirituality and issues related to spiritual conduct. He was expanding his views on the importance of the Holy Spirit and the role of faith in our relationship with God. Paul was moving forward.

- During his first Roman imprisonment, Paul's refinements are becoming clear. It is here that he came from the "wretched man that I am" to an understanding of what it means to have the "fullness of God" and to be completely surrendered to Him. During this imprisonment, he wrote his most powerful solicitations for life to be lived in the power of the Spirit. Books written at this time include Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians (also Philemon). In these books, he completed the picture of what the Christian life is supposed to be, and fleshed out the principles he introduced previously. This is obviously the time when Paul truly surrendered to God, and achieved a peak of spirituality that was unsurpassed. I believe he was no longer "wretched" at this point, but was experiencing the benefits of his sustained and persistent growth. (Even though he was in prison, he was full of joy.)
- After his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote 1 Timothy and Titus; and then, during his second imprisonment in Rome, he wrote 2 Tim. These are "maintenance" books, books designed to stoke the fires of spiritual fervor in church leaders and their followers...his legacy. Paul's continued growth and spirituality are evident, as he reiterated and refined principles he had presented earlier. By the time he completed his last book, he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." There could be no greater testament to a life devoted to growth and service.

Paul's understanding increased with time and study; and his writing, I believe, reflects this progress. As believers today, we can also grow and mature, as he did, and finish with a testimony similar to his. As we have seen before, his final testimony provided the reason he was able to fight the fight and run the race, which is found in this verse: "But the Lord stood beside me and gave me strength" (2 Tim. 4:17).

Progression of Truth...and Our Progress in It. Understanding of Scripture is progressive in a number of ways. There is a progression of the revelation of truth throughout the Bible, with seminal notions being presented early on, and fully-developed truths being disclosed as time progressed. Many times the key to understanding refined truths is found in understanding seminal ones. This kind of progression proceeds from illustrations, object lessons, and "shadows" or "types", to full explanations, descriptions, and disclosures of applicable truths.

I believe there is also a progression of the "understanding of truth" among believers at large, meaning that the understanding of one generation may proceed to deeper truths than the one that preceded it. This can be seen in history, as discoveries have led to an increase in manuscript acquisition and a re-

finement in linguistic scholarship, as well as a better grasp of historical contexts, the meanings of scriptural texts, and better translations of the Bible. These have enabled improvements in Biblical scholarship. Then there is individual progression, where deeper knowledge leads to new understanding. As we cited earlier, there are times when we have read a verse over and over, and then—on the 79th reading—we see something we did not see before. We weren't ready for it before, but now we have progressed to the point that we can see the deeper meaning in a passage.

Even in the New Testament, I believe there is a progression, from more basic concepts to deeper ones. The gospels anticipate revelation of truths for living, such as confession of sins. Jesus illustrated this concept in the “foot-washing” parable. Paul talks about the filling of the Spirit, but emphasized function over protocol, and behavior over procedures. He linked the power of the Spirit with divine production, but did not emphasize the way to *access* this power, which is by confession or repentance of sins. He cited it (1 Cor. 11:31-32, 2 Cor. 7:10), and applied it well through humility (a form of confession), but he did not elaborate on it. He and other writers did make it clear that faith *sustains* the power of the Spirit, once it is in place. Fortunately, more was being or would be developed from other writers as to how we *acquire restoration* of the Spirit's power, once it is lost due to sin.

Fellowship, or the filling and control of the Spirit, is acquired through confession. We cannot have fellowship with God if we have not been cleansed through confession. Before the time of Paul's writing, James had introduced this doctrine in his fourth chapter, but it was left to John, decades later, to bring it home. Paul and James set the stage for John, and then John brought their writings to a fine point, especially in his first epistle. This is where all the references to confession in its various forms by all previous writers was finally encapsulated and encoded into a simple and powerful technique. With the writings of Paul and Peter and James, we have practical, *spiritual* Christianity presented. With John, we have at last the clear statement of the *process* for *becoming* spiritual through confession. We see, then, how this doctrine progressed.

What does this notion of “progression” mean to us. It is this: The most important attitude to take into our regimen for study and growth, other than a hunger for the truth, is patience. You must allow yourself time to absorb important truths, and to *progress* into greater understanding. Concepts that seem elusive or confusing will often clear up with sufficient time and a sustained devotion to the truth. God wants you to know His Word and His will. What is missing is YOUR will. If you want the truth, you will be taught it, no matter the handicapping condition or hindrance. Human IQ is not an impediment to God's truth! (Caveat: If IQ is at some critically-low level, salvation is automatic, just as it is with children.) If we want it, it will come.

Scripture progresses, and so must we. We can never stop moving forward, no matter the events in our lives, nor even our own condition. Whenever we fall in a crack, we must crawl back out and keep moving. No matter how much we fail, we must keep growing. Confess, pray, and study. Every day. Strength and enlightenment and peace will come, if we will just not stop. The most important thing we can ever do is to grow. Every good deed we ever do and every sin we ever beat will be a product of our continued growth, and the practices of holiness that it enables.

E. GROWTH AND MATURITY

God Gives the Growth. Growth does not occur on its own. It is certain that we do not cause our own growth. Growth is not something we DO! It is clear that GOD CAUSES THE GROWTH, as per 1 Cor. 3:7, which says, “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” God infuses His nutrients into us to enable our advancement toward maturity. This comes from Him and not from ourselves. Jer. 32:39 adds, “I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.” The term “singleness” implies resolution and strength, which come to us as we grow. God “gives” this to the willing believer.

Just because God is “giving” us the growth does not mean that the process is easy, or that we don’t have much to do in the grace arena (remember that things done under grace are quite different from things accomplished through self-motivation and self-effort). The regimen for growth is rigorous, including consistent confession, studying, praying, trusting, enduring, and serving. These are grace techniques for accessing the full benefit of grace, including spiritual growth. If we do these faithfully, growth will occur.

But just because we are growing does not mean that life will thereby be easy and opulent. There are additional tests and trials for the growing believer, as there will be an increased level of temptation and deception from Satan. There is also increased pressure from the world to operate in arrogance and self-dependency. As God is giving us the growth, we must also rely on Him to give us the life that growth produces. The more we grow, the more we realize that Christian living is CHRIST LIVING...within us. Everything we aspire to spiritually can only be attained through persistent growth.

Growth is what Paul always prayed about and pushed for concerning his readers. In Col. 1:9-12a, he summarized his prayer for the Colossians, 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, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father...”

To live a life “worthy of the Lord” and to “please God”, we must bear fruit and grow, “being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might”. He causes the growth, and then he energizes and uses what this growth enables. This pleases Him. Doing His work through growing believers satisfies Him and makes the believers He is using “worthy of the Lord”.

Don’t Stop Growing. Prov. 1:28-32 gives us a picture of failing to grow, as opposed to continuing a consistent pattern of growth. This passage says this:

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. Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.

Those who reject God's direct message through His Word, who will not accept the training that spurns growth, and who refuse to respond to discipline from the Lord, will be "destroyed". On the other hand, there will be security and prosperity for believers who sustain a growth trajectory leading to advanced maturity. Those who love knowledge and accept and endure God's training will be blessed. This will not happen at beginner or intermediate levels of maturity, but believers who are at or near the time of maximum maturity, also known as the time of "surrender" will see the gates of grace open wide. (For more on "surrendering", see our book, *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*. And we will have more on this topic in this book.)

Where is our effort to be concentrated? On growth, which means on adding to our faith. This is what we see in 2 Pet. 1:5-9, 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, 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 near-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Adding to our *faith* is a building process that begins with *goodness* (fellowship), and then graduates to *knowledge* (growth), and then to *self control* (consistent use of grace techniques). As growth continues, we move into phase 2, which involves the following progressive stages: *perseverance* (training through endurance of tests, trials, and suffering); *godliness* (walking in the Spirit); *brotherly kindness* (fruit of the Spirit that comes with maturity); and *love* (result of the final stage of surrender). Notice verse 8, which tells us that possessing these qualities more and more will make us effective and productive as believers.

Keep in mind that the road to growth leads through the swamp and an evil black forest, where hazards and pitfalls are plentiful. It is not easy to follow the path of growth. But if we do not continue on, verse 9 tells us what will happen to us spiritually, repeated here: "But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins." We will lose sight of mercy, grace, forgiveness, and God Himself, if we sustain a practice of not growing. We will be blind, and will not even see that we have lost our way, nor will we remember how we have become so confused and disoriented.

Don't Look Back. The model for handling the inevitable review and reflection of our past that we all do...is Paul. He offers this good advice: don't look back. Phil. 3:12-14 says this about which direc-

tion we are supposed to be looking:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

We are to work toward maturity, never looking back at our failures, which means that when our sins have been confessed (thus forgiven), we should not go back and review them. They are gone. GONE! Our view and momentum is forward, and any time we spend looking back is time that could have been spent moving forward. We don't look back to move forward. And not only should we be doing what God prescribes for us to move forward, we should "strain" to do so. Our full attention is to be given to the grace techniques and assets that cause growth. Growth is our greatest objective, because it portends God's greatest glory. Whatever it takes, whatever God brings, we must give great priority to our growth.

Growth will Cause us to Struggle. We will weave the following thought into further discussions, as we have done already in some previous ones. This is it: Progress brings struggle. This is certainly true of struggle as part of our training, designed by God to cause growth, as we saw in our previous book on this topic (*God's Training Program for Believers*). But there is another aspect to this struggle that we have seen, and want to re-visit, which is this: the more we grow, and the more we walk in the Spirit and see divine good emanating from the life of Christ within us, the more we will see evil coming after us (Rom. 7:21).

It is likely that evil is interwoven with growth opportunities...dealing with temptation is part of our training...as God did with Job. John Owen made it clear, as cited in the last chapter, that believers who are not growing have no idea what you are talking about when you mention the difficulty and extreme pressures that come with growth. Carnal and immature believers do not experience such intense attacks. But maturing believers know exactly what we mean when we say this: The more you grow, the more you will feel the advancement of seduction and deceit to try to derail you and keep you off the road to maturity. It may come through philosophy, career advancement, competition, romantic love, popularity, loss of treasured people or things, health, and a myriad of attractive sin-patterns. Many things can cause us to lose sight of our path, and the challenges grow as we do. This is why we can never be smug about our achievements in growth...because when we grow, we just graduate to higher and more-complicated levels of spiritual difficulty.

If you do not feel struggle with your Christian life, then you have either reached that time of maximum growth when struggle subsides, or you are not growing at all. So, without a tug inside of you to doubt or sin that is so strong it leaves you feeling helpless to withstand it, one of two things exist: 1) You have grown enough that you have reached a point when Satan has given up, and you have been strengthened and blessed beyond anything you imagined. This is the time of surrender, which we will discuss later in this book. Surrender is the end of self and a capitulation to God. This is the highest goal

and the ultimate destination for our journey into maturity, but this pinnacle of all spiritual experiences will not be reached without intense struggle...tests, trials, suffering, and a panoply of encounters with intensified sin...sin empowered by the “law of sin”. 2) On the other hand, if you have not reached the level of super-maturity (and who has?), AND you do not encounter pressures and enticements that overwhelm you and seem to take you over out of nowhere, then this means you have a growth deficiency.

If we are growing, resistance will come in truck-loads. This means that we cannot be discouraged by the pressure we feel, and the failures that often come. Paul knew this. Remember our description of his progression from “wretched man” (Rom. 7:24) with a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7), to “victorious runner” (2 Tim. 4:7) for whom “grace was sufficient” (2 Cor. 12:9)? I believe that the “thorn in the flesh” from a “messenger of Satan” in 2 Cor. 12 was a recurring sin-pattern in Paul’s life. Whatever it was, it came from his “weakness”, and it tormented him. It is reasonable to conclude that this weakness had to do with a vulnerable spot in his sinful nature that Satan exploited repeatedly. But I also believe that Paul overcame this, as a result of his continual growth. This is why he could say, as he neared the time of his death, that he had “fought the good fight”, “finished the race”, and “kept the faith”, as per 2 Tim. 4. This is a far cry from his statement in Rom. 7:15, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” The difference is growth. Change will ONLY come through growth.

Getting the Perspective. We must believe in God’s grace more than we believe in the power of failure. When we fail, we must confess, and then we must BELIEVE that God FORGIVES. If we can’t accept this most fundamental premise as a crucial part of our growth and service, we can never be what He wants us to be, nor will we ever become what we want to be for Him. His “grace being sufficient” means that He has us covered if we take our failures to Him, NO MATTER HOW BIG THEY ARE! We must focus on GRACE more than trying to fix or end the FAILURE! Grace is where progress and victory over sin will be found; not in fretting over our sinfulness or trying to change ourselves. These will have no good effect. Only grace can change us through growth and all it entails, including confession, prayer, study, trust, endurance, and being exposed to an environment where gifts are operating (as well as the other “techniques”, seen in previous books, including acknowledging God, giving thanks, knowing Jesus *absolutely*, fear of the Lord, and waiting on God). This is why we GROW in KNOWLEDGE and GRACE. Wisdom and training bring growth, and growth opens us to grace. It is there that we will discover that it is SUFFICIENT for us.

Growth Strengthens Against Sin. We get a large portion of our growth from the intake of Scripture. We have done our best to explain how the Word becomes strength through Spirit-aided assimilation, so that the concepts in the Bible become nutrients in our soul. We have talked about knowledge becoming understanding when it is believed, and understanding becoming wisdom when it is truly treasured and welcomed into the heart. From there “knowledge-becoming-wisdom” can be applied to our lives in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:3-4 frames this process as follows:

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 powerful passage needs to be elucidated just a little. We have covered this in previous books, so we don't want to spend much time on it here, but we must understand what there is about Scripture that makes it powerful within us. The word "participate" means to "partake", and what are we to partake of? His divine nature. And how do we participate in the divine nature? Through knowledge and promises, i.e., by absorbing principles from the Word. So, how does this work? Here it is: The words in the Bible are just that—ordinary words. What makes them special is the power they refer to, which is the divine nature of God. The value of a message is the process or object to which it refers, which—in this case—is the operation and plan of God Himself.

The words in the Bible have no power of their own, but derive their usefulness from the Spirit, who takes the truths we learn and activates them in the lives of spiritual believers. If the Spirit is not behind the understanding and following of Scripture, then the words will fall flat and nothing will come from them except some imitated form of Christianity. All spiritual power in our lives comes from the Holy Spirit ONLY—not from us, or from the concepts we master. It takes both the Spirit and His truth to make us productive, and to cause our growth. When both of these are present, then we believe we can—at some point—"escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." But the power to learn and apply truth to enable divine good in a believer's life belongs exclusively to the Holy Spirit.

We talk a great deal about *spirituality* and *maturity*. Here we can see the two entities mentioned above (knowledge of the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit) coming together within us. Most importantly, the words in the Bible tell us how to ACCESS the Holy Spirit, who is always within us, but not always controlling us. By knowing how grace works and how we participate in it, we can come to acquire "everything we need for life and godliness".

Growth resulting from our acquisition of "everything we need" will strengthen us against sin, as per Prov. 2:12 and 16, which says, "Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse. It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive word..." Note: This refers to WISDOM...not just knowledge. How many people do you know who can quote the Word fluently, but have no power against sin in their lives? They have knowledge which has not been converted to wisdom.

Ps. 119:9-11 adds this:

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Words from God, once again, rely on His power for implementation and application. In the Old Testament, there was more emphasis on compliance and legalistic performance than now, so righteousness

was more dependent on self-motivation by using divine truth. In the Church Age, compliance depends one-hundred percent on the Holy Spirit. Still, the idea that MORE knowledge/wisdom leads to MORE spiritual power cannot be denied, simply because more wisdom results in more dependence on the Holy Spirit. In both the Old and New Testaments, however, knowledge/wisdom was valuable in understanding and countering sin.

The Word Helps us Deal with Sin. Prov. 5:1-5 gives us more on the value of knowledge in dealing with sin, saying this:

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.

Reliance on understanding alone for divine production occurred in the Old Testament; it provided “discretion”. Today, we can add the power of the Holy Spirit to wisdom, which gives us an infinite advantage. But knowledge of the Word is central to the entire process, because—if we did not have instructions for spirituality—we would not know how to access God’s incredible power.

There are many scriptures that extol the Word as an asset in dealing with sin. For example, Pr. 6:20-24 clearly cites the Word as a source for sin-resistance:

My son, keep your father’s command and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life, keeping you from your neighbor’s wife, from the smooth talk of a wayward woman.

There are many other passages in the Word that tell us how knowledge/wisdom helps us against sin; we give a sampling of these in the following:

- Phil. 1:9-10—“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight [wisdom], so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” Understanding and wisdom help us grow in fellowship (“love”), which enables us to distinguish and repel sin in the power of the Spirit. The result is righteousness that comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.
- Phil. 2:15-16—“So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out [hold on to] the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.” How do we become blameless and pure, and shine like stars? Hold on to the Word.
- James 1:21-25—“Therefore get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and

humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save [deliver] you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” James tells us what we are supposed to do: get rid of evil. Then he tells us how: learn and use all the divine techniques described in Scripture so that we can grow and become reliant on divine power to overcome sin.

- Deut. 6:6-9—“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” When we can follow this prescription for learning and guarding the Word, we will know that we are truly seeking God, and we can be assured that we will find Him. And when we “know” Him, we will know how to cope with sin.

There are many other verses that specifically tell us how the Word helps us deal with sin, but these have made the point well, and we will let these stand to represent the concept.

We believe that one of the great values of learning the Word is that it increases our consciousness of God, and the more aware we are of God’s presence in our lives, the more resistant we will be to sin. We said something to this effect in *Getting Closer to God: The Pathway to Power and Grace*, p. 50, where we were talking about the importance of thanksgiving. What we want to look for here is the steadfast focus we are to maintain toward God, one which is facilitated by knowledge of God’s precepts and principles. Here is what was said:

When we maintain God-consciousness, through Jesus Christ, we see Him with us, think about Him, draw closer to Him, and give thanks to Him. This makes it possible for Him to work through us, and for us to watch His power at work. If we are to DO what God asks us to do, it does not begin with our setting out to meet His requirements or in beginning some project on His behalf. No. It begins with our fixing our thoughts on Jesus in all the forms we have studied: prayer, confession of sins, acknowledgement, fear of the Lord, knowing Him, seeing Him, studying Scripture, thanksgiving, faith, and love. Anything we do without God-consciousness will be done by our effort alone and will not turn out right. And God will not be pleased. We thank Him because *He does it*.

Staying in the Word, studying in some form every day, will help us maintain such a consciousness of God, so that He is never far from our thoughts and activities. And the more we learn, the more He becomes, not just an important part of our lives...He becomes OUR LIFE, so that all we are and all we do is traced back to Him.

Is. 48:17 assures us that we do not need to be alone as we learn and progress toward maturity. This verse says, “This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go’.” We do not have to listen, but if we will, God will work His will in our lives and we will be great beneficiaries of His grace. This is what we see in the verse following verse 17: “If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea” (verse 18). When the Word becomes the center of our lives, we will see “righteousness” instead of “sin”; the sin that has come in avalanches will be washed away by the waves of God’s divine good.

The Word plays a big part in growth, as we have seen. Now we want to look further at the role of fellowship in our growth and maturity. We will also see more on the role of knowledge as it relates to fellowship and growth, and the place of training in our advancement toward the abundant life.

Being “Responsible”. It seems that we could just see the rules and obey them, as we do any other laws, such as speed limits (which translates “safe” limits above the established speed limits) and paying our taxes. These are a matter of reasonable agreement on and compliance with pre-determined norms, accommodated as a matter of common responsibility. But there is a difference between obeying laws in the world, and keeping divine laws, because God’s standards have a supernatural extension, which we cannot reach. We don’t just look at “right behavior”, as presented in Scripture, and behave according to the required patterns that correspond with them. We are flesh, while the standards, with all their underpinnings and outreaches, are divine, spiritual, and holy. They are beyond us.

It is impossible for us to be “responsible”, at least with notable success, when it comes to resisting or overcoming sin. Determination and resolution will not enable us to avoid sin...those who are maturing have learned this. Only those who have reached “super-maturity” will experience relief from the domination of the law of sin. The rest of us will not see our good intentions succeed, because the second we start to rely on ourselves, rather than God, we will see sin’s incursions pull us back and down. Unfortunately, the further we move along the maturity scale, the greater the intensity of temptation will be from the outside...and the more powerfully the law of sin on the inside will exert its dominance.

Deliverance through Growth. This is why it is so important for us to take our sins and failures to God...so He can forgive us and re-fill us to enable our continued growth. WHEN WE GROW ENOUGH, our relationship with the Holy Spirit will be so constant that we will find strength in His might to combat sin. In 2 Tim. 4:17 Paul gave his final testimony, which is this: “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.” What a beautiful portrayal of Paul’s growth pattern and the outcome it brought. Throughout the extent of Paul’s maturation, he had witnessed God standing beside him to teach him, feed him, strengthen him, protect him, and perform His work through him.

By being faithful to the steps God prescribed for his advancement, Paul had graduated from the helplessness and weakness of self-dependency and limited faith to complete reliance on the Holy Spirit .

Notice in verse 17 that Paul cited the operation of his gift (in the power of the Spirit) as the source of great spiritual fruit, and indicated that he had been delivered from the jaws of the prowling lion, who had dealt him such misery over the years. This, I believe, is the Christian life. Confronting our weakness and failures over and over is demoralizing and discouraging, so we must use grace assets; acknowledge the loving way in which God deals with us; grow through grace methods; mature; and in the end find deliverance and blessing. But these do not come through just being a Christian. We have to follow God's procedures for walking in the power of His Spirit and achieving maturity to move into a place where we can say with confidence: God is standing at my side and strengthening me.

As we mature, strength and grace will come to combat the ever-increasing attacks of the forces of sin. During the time of growth, we cannot be too hard on ourselves at the various stages of maturity. God is loving and infinitely patient, allowing us to make mistakes and stumble, which he will turn into growth opportunities, if we will not try to cover up our failures, but rather expose them to Him, saying, "Father, I am insufficient to stop sin. Show me the pathway of growth, so I can learn to trust you to overcome what I cannot prevent or sufficiently resist. You see my failure. I accept your grace in disposing of it. Now, bring me to your success, for your sake. Amen." It will happen. Do not slow down or give up. Strength will come...stability, consistency, self-control, noble thinking, and dedicated purity...these will all be seen. The flesh will not do this, because it is impossible for man. But God can do this through a mature believer.

Carnal or immature believers cannot resist temptation, while growing believers have *bigger* temptations. It never lets up. The temptation, however, will not outrun resistance when the believer reaches maturity. The temptations, tests, and trials may be unbearable in the meantime, unless focus is completely concentrated on grace and deliverance. There is help along the way, even though the trail is littered with dangers and detours. 1 Cor. 10:13 says this:

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

This does not mean that temptation will always be weaker than our ability to resist. The opposite is true. Temptation always outruns resistance when we slow down, which is why we must grow faster than temptation pursues. The phrase, "provide a way of escape", refers to growth. If we are consistently confessing, praying, learning truth, trusting, and enduring God's training, we will stay in front of temptation. But we must not minimize the devotion this requires in our search for truth and its application. This requires EXTRAORDINARY passion for God, and pin-point fixation on the growth goal. When we are growing and walking in the Spirit, escape will be provided...this is the only way we will tap into God's complete arsenal, which will provide ammunition against sin.

Distinguishing Sin so we can Deal with It. If we are truly growing, and if we are really loving and following God's true way, we will at some point learn to *hate* sin. Ps. 119:127-128 says, "Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold, and because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path." This was writing by a man (David, of course) who committed every sin

known to mankind, yet he “hated every wrong path”. This is why it is important to know just what is required of us as we grow. We cannot split our attention between God and self, or God and the world. Even though we live and operate in the world, and must care for practical demands, our hearts must constantly be attuned to God, and our over-arching desire must always be to move in God’s direction and adopt His perspective of reality and merit. We must “consider his precepts right”, which means to absorb the truth, live in it, ponder it, value it, and always seek more of it. With singular attention we must scrutinize and “breathe” His Word, with the same frequency that we breathe the air to stay alive. If air is removed for just a few minutes, we will die. God has breathed His Word out, and we must breathe it in with regularity, in order to stay alive spiritually...which is the only way we will ever out-run sin.

Heb. 5:14 offers a similar concept, saying, “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” When we “distinguish” evil, because we have matured, we not only *see* it; we *recognize it for what it is*...EVIL. Maturity also helps us recognize the sins we have committed, so we can name or cite them to God to receive His forgiveness. But, as we have seen repeatedly, reaching such an advanced level of maturity is not easy, and will only come after rigorous training...in the classroom (Bible study) and in the field (tests and trials). Please read Heb. 12:1-13, which describes this process very clearly. Then consider the following highlights from this passage:

- The goal is to “throw off” anything that hinders our growth and “sin” that so “easily entangles”. (v. 1)
- This will enable us to run freely “the [growth] race”, which has been “marked out for us” (God’s truth and God’s plan). We will move much further without the weight of sin, which will drag us down or stop our progress altogether, and even—get this—send us running the other way. Notice also that we must “persevere” in moving forward. (v. 1)
- “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus” is a phrase which calls for us to stay focused on our growth pattern. We “look” at Jesus by living in His truth. Notice again the word “consider”, which shows focus on our Savior by concentrating on His work and His message. (vv. 2-3)
- As we have STRUGGLED with sin, our resistance has been limited. This is why we must be *trained*, so we can acquire the assets we need to resist sin. The term “discipline” does not mean God is coercing us. He is just reminding us that He is there, and that we need to trust Him...and live according to His grace. Discipline in this passage can be either training (tests and trials) or correction (corrective consequences). Either way, our growth is the divine objective. (vv. 4-10)
- Discipline seems “painful”, but it will produce a “harvest of righteousness and peace”. It is obvious that no harvest will ever take place unless growth has occurred. When we grow, we can harvest...but not until. And who is it that has grown? “Those who have been trained...” (v. 11)
- When we are told to “strengthen” our “feeble arms and weak knees”, this means we are to

apply every doctrine we have learned that relates to our growth. God is the one who strengthens. (v. 12; see also 2 Tim. 4:17).

- “Make level paths” means to walk straight ahead. This corresponds with Prov. 3:6, which says, “...in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” We must keep our eyes on Him at all times, so He can open the way of growth for us. (v. 13)

Training to Grow. God trains the willing and the growing. Ps. 66: 9-12 puts it this way:

...he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

When a soldier in Napoleon’s army wrote home to tell about the day he had endured in battle, he said this: “Every damn fool with a horse rode over me today.” This is how we may feel at times as we endure God’s training. (For more on this, read *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*.) We must understand this: Training is not pleasant (Heb. 12:11), but it will yield great results. Notice what we saw above in Ps. 66: “You let men ride over our heads...” But what happened when it was over? “You brought us to a place of abundance.” Don’t just read the words “fire and water”, and the term “place of abundance”; understand them. Training is HARD, so if a Christian is living in nothing but ease and prosperity and not going through training, this would indicate that their “abundance” is coming from someplace besides God’s gracious bounty. But when a seeking believer grows and reaches maturity, the “abundance” that comes...physically, materially, spiritually, and in all other ways...is unimaginable.

All of Paul’s writings were inspired and are useful for our growth, but I have a particular confidence in what he said in 2 Timothy, because he wrote it at the peak of his maturity. In this epistle, he said this: “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” If we work through this verse in reverse order, we see the sequence for achieving enough growth to avoid sin, as follows:

1. “Pure heart” implies confession and cleansing, resulting in fellowship, which is the beginning point for everything we do in the Christian life.
2. “Call on the Lord” refers to prayer, which is done only after we have been “cleansed”.
3. “Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace” is a clear reference for seeking God and His truth, so we can grow to the point that strong faith, fellowship (indicated by “love and peace”), and righteousness (divine good) will be produced.
4. “Flee the evil desires of youth” is the final achievement, which is the spiritual strength and agility to side-step sin. This ability is not inherent, or even acquired, but is superimposed, when we are walking by faith, and thus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The avoidance of sin, therefore, is possible only through the workings and might of God. When we understand this, we will be encouraged to make our growth the most important thing in our lives.

Our main interest is in dealing with sin, and—eventually—in beating it. Our goal does not stop there, however, because we don't want to just eliminate the negative; we want to accentuate the positive...which is righteousness. By the time we have learned to deal with sin, we will also have the spiritual wisdom and resources to open our hearts to God for the imbedding of His righteousness. The ultimate is to beat sin, walk in God's righteousness, see His fruit produced in our lives, and live in His fullness and abundance. This is what we will see in chapters 4 and 5, coming up soon.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN OUR GROWTH

Conditions Affecting Prayer. It is very clear that prayer plays a big part in our growth, which makes prayer a significant component in our dealing with sin. Ps. 32:6-7 sets the stage for our discussion of this concept, saying this:

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

This request is part of a prayer of confession offered by David, in which he suggests that one important outcome of fellowship and a close walk with God is the ability to pray. And what was David praying for? "Mighty waters" and "trouble", in context, represent the troubling and invasive presence of sin, from which David wanted protection. In the middle of a plea for forgiveness, David asked for help in dealing with the type of sin he was already confessing. It is in *prayer* that David sought protection and refuge from the ravages of sin. The lessons to us from this passage are 1) that fellowship precedes effective prayer, and 2) that prayer is a legitimate source of strengthening and protection from sin...more on this shortly.

Another condition for effective prayer is related to our maturity. The truth we will examine is that the prayer of a mature believer can call out resources that will help us with sin. We must understand, though, that prayer will be of little help if we are not in a posture of growth, and to be *really* effective, prayer needs to be supported by *advanced* maturity. Maturity affects the efficacy of our prayers, which means that prayers aimed at stopping sin will provide the greatest gains for those who have reached the highest levels of maturity.

Growth—in its formative stages—carries with it a certain amount of suffering, meaning that God's training is working to bring about spiritual strengthening. The suffering that goes with training has the effect of trimming the presence and power of sin, as per verse 1 of 1 Pet. 4, which says, "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin." When we have endured suffering, coupled with faithful study of God's truths for living, we will be "done" with sin, because we will have reached a level of maturity that will enable us to deal with it. The line of connection is clear: We grow, so that our prayers can become more effective, and effective prayers give us greater resistance to sin. Faith is not excluded. Faith is still connected with our being able to stand firm against sin, as it operates throughout our training and assimilation of truth, and as it functions to support our prayers. Maturity is actually defined as

“greater faith”.

We will work through some other verses in 1 Peter 4 that further establish the relationship between maturity and sin, and show more clearly the part prayer plays in this connection. Verse 2 says, “As a result [of maturity], he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.” Maturity sets the stage for praying effectively, which increases power against sin. (We will have much more on “super-maturity” in the last chapter, where we will discuss ways to fully “defeat” sin.)

Maturity, then, is essential for prayers to be successful in helping us with sin. But we must also be in fellowship, as we have already suggested. This is what we get from verse 7, which tells us, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.” Here’s what we believe this means: When we are muddy in our thinking (out of fellowship) and without self-control (immature), we will experience (based on verse 3) anger, hatred, jealousy, sexual lust, greed, envy, egotism (pride), fear, approbation lust, laziness, self-pity, and so on, which will leave us UNABLE TO PRAY. If even one of these exist, we can’t think straight, and prayers will not mean anything. We must have some level of maturity AND be clean...to pray.

Maturity and cleanliness, then, are both conditions for effective praying. So, here’s the sequence: We must mature to pray effectively; we must be clean, to pray with a clear mind; and we must pray...in power and with intensity...that sin will be beaten...today, tomorrow, and every other day...in order to have a forceful push-back against sin. Verse 8 tells us to “love each other”, which is, in effect, telling us to stay in fellowship through cleanliness. Fellowship enables hospitality, the operation of gifts, and service in God’s strength (as per verses 9-11). These go hand in hand with effective prayer. In summary, when the conditions are right, we can find refuge, refreshment, and reinforcement through prayer, which will give us great assistance when we are dealing with sin.

A Closer Look at Fellowship to Enhance Prayer. If prayer is important in dealing with sin, then it is worth our while to ensure that all conditions are met to make our prayers effective. Being in fellowship is a crucial condition for praying in a way that gets results, so we want to isolate any condition that keeps it from working. 1 Pet. 3:12 says, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” God will NOT be attentive to the prayers of the unrighteous or those who are “evil”, which includes anyone who has not used the grace method for sin-removal. Unconfessed sin blocks prayer. This is confirmed over and over in Scripture, as we see in the following:

- Is. 1:15-16a—“When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean.” It is only when we have been cleansed that our prayers will be heard.
- John 9:31—“We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.” Sinners are those who have the stain of unconfessed sins on their record, while godly men, or those who have been forgiven and washed and are thus doing God’s

will, have a hearing before God.

- James 5:16b—“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” When our sin record is clean, and we are thereby “righteous”, our prayers will get results.
- 1 Sam. 12:8-10—“But they forgot the Lord their God; so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them. They cried out to the Lord and said, ‘We have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.’” And that is exactly what the Lord did. Notice the sequence: first came confession, then came prayer, which was finally answered affirmatively.
- 2 Chron. 7:13-15—“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.” Humility (implying confession) and prayer will bring forgiveness and healing to the land, because God will hear them...His ears will be attentive to the prayers offered.
- Prov. 1:27-29—“...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...” God will have no reply, offer no solution, and give no hearing to suffering believers, if they are not in fellowship and/or not growing.

Many other examples of prayers not being heard due to the presence of unconfessed sin have been given in previous studies. The principle is clear: Prayers go no higher than the ceiling, if they are prayed by a carnal believer. Be sure to confess before you pray (actually before you do *anything*). And keep growing.

Getting Help with Sin by Praying for Spiritual Improvement. The first thing we must have in our ongoing grapple with sin is wisdom. If we don’t know what sin is, or what resources we have to deal with it, we will be disabled in our attempt to resist it. So we must ask for wisdom, which we anticipate will improve our odds with the outcome of this battle. James 1:5-6a says the following:

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.

We ask for wisdom, believing without doubting that we will receive it, so we can have the capacity to overcome the onslaughts of sin. Wisdom is a major source for our help in dealing with sin. “Without doubting” indicates *advanced faith*, which is the characteristic of a mature believer, possibly nearing the point of super-maturity and surrender. It is good for any believer in fellowship to ask for wisdom, but

high-level, sensitive, and game-changing wisdom is going to be reserved for the mature. The kind of wisdom that James is talking about includes the most potent strategies God has ever given for dealing with the workings of evil and all its partners. Less-mature believers will receive wisdom commensurate with their understanding of God's truths and acceptance of God's training. But regardless of our level, we must KEEP ON ASKING while we are growing! At some point, we will have the wisdom of a mature believer.

We always pray for spiritual improvement (and—incidentally—improvement in all areas of life). We see this throughout Scripture. We see David praying for spiritual improvement through the guidance and leadership of the Lord, as follows: “Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make straight your way before me” (Ps. 5:8). We want to know “the way”, because we know that this *way* will lead to righteousness, that the way is in the Word, and that the way we seek is the way to God. When we ask for spiritual guidance, we are asking for *wisdom*. We want to *understand* how to be spiritual, how to grow, and how to cope with sin.

Prayer Helps us Control Sin. As we grow and depend on the Holy Spirit, we learn how He fortifies us against sin. In our discussion of one piece of the arsenal that He provides—viz., prayer—we see that it is a crucial component in our armor against Satan's attacks. Eph. 6 discusses the armor we are to put on for spiritual warfare, and cites prayer as a key technique for enabling us to become “strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (v. 1). In verse 18, prayer is featured as something to do “on all occasions” and “for all the saints”. It is like the one piece of armor that covers all the others cited in Eph. 6 (discussed thoroughly in previous books). We are to pray for and about many things, but one of the primary prayers we are to pray is for “deliverance from the evil one”, as per Matt. 6:13b. We should ask for everything that it takes to withstand the wiles of Satan; otherwise, he will stay ahead of us and lay traps for us as we advance. He will stop us, if we do not engage God's power to keep us moving.

Matt. 6:13a cites Jesus' request: “lead us not into temptation” (i.e., we want God to lead us *away* from it and not *toward* it). But testing will come, and once temptation or testing is there, Jesus gave us the prayer to pray: “deliver us from the evil one.” Wherever we are in relation to sin, we need God's help and *good information* on what to do. We are always at some stage of involvement with sin, even when we are in fellowship and growing. Sin is never *not* an issue; its guns are always loaded and aimed right at us. We must have help, so it is good that we can just ask for it.

One way to cope with sin through prayer is to pray about it before it comes. Ps. 119:31 says, “I hold fast to your statutes, O Lord; do not let me be put to shame.” David is asking for strength through the use and application of Scripture, which points to God's methods for avoiding the shame of sin. By the time David wrote Ps. 119, he had come a long way from his time of “sorrow” and “shame”, as expressed in Ps. 32. In Ps. 32, David's “bones wasted away”, he was “groaning all day long”; God's “hand was heavy” upon him, and his “strength was sapped”. In Ps. 119, verse 32, which immediately follows the verse just quoted above, he said, “I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.” David achieved victory over sin, through his prayer that God would “teach [him] his decrees” (v. 26) and “let [him] understand the teaching of [God's] precepts” (v. 27), and his plea that God would

“keep [him] from deceitful ways” (v. 28). When we pray for wisdom and understanding, we are, in essence, praying for victory over sin.

But when we fail, as we will, we must keep confessing and continue praying. Jesus taught His disciples that they should keep praying and never give up. He knew that “giving up” would be a problem, even for mature believers, because nothing is more demoralizing and discouraging than failure. This is what we see in Luke 18:1, which says, “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” What is left when we fail? We can only FACE OUR FAILURE before the throne of grace, where we obtain mercy and find grace to help, and PRAY for deliverance from ourselves and all the other forces of evil that embolden us to sin. When we stop praying, we know that failure has taken over, which will feed more failure. And down we go. But if we will keep praying, we will gain strength from the Lord to help us stand in the gales of sin, and we can then continue moving forward into God’s plan for our growth and divine production.

Prayer is the quickest, easiest, and most reliable way to fight sin. When we are riddled with sin, we must pray and pray and pray (after confession, of course), to invite divine power to strengthen us in our fight against evil. This is a simple technique...and so handy. But Satan wants to shroud the simplicity of this process in a whirl of complexity, and make us think that we must do extended penance or complete some list of righteous acts before we can pray. God has made prayer easy: Confess...then pray. That’s all there is to it. Observe any struggles you are having with sin; they can probably be traced back to the time when you stopped praying.

Satan will use every leverage he can to keep us from praying...especially a prayer for protection from him. He will give us any excuse not to pray, including pain, worry, loss, shortages, laziness, fatigue, entertainment, pleasure, recreation, friends, family, work/school demands, and even house-related (or other) chores. But whatever we do, in the heat of whatever battles we face, prayer should be like breathing. This is “praying without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), by which we bring God into every moment of our lives. In addition, we should have a certain time set aside, however brief it may be, when ALL we think about is God, and all we do is pray. We must pray, if we are ever going to have hope for holding sin at bay.

Prayer Strengthens against Evil. Prayer has many duties, but one of the most important ones is to shore up our defenses against all the forces of evil. If we are not praying, regardless of any other techniques that we may be using, we will not be able to resist sin. Not praying is one sure way to guarantee that sin will spin us around like a top, and send us off in the direction that evil wants us to go. Here are a few verses to strengthen our understanding of the place of prayer in our fight against sin:

- Col. 4:2—“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” When we are devoted to prayer, we will be alert to sin’s presence, and we will be better able to see it coming before it strikes.
- Col. 4:12b—“He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” Prayer can be used to solicit growth opportunities

from the Lord, as these will lead to maturity and greater resistance to sin.

- 1 Thess. 5:16-19—“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” By staying in fellowship (being joyful and giving thanks) and praying, we will fulfill God’s will, and when we are in His will, sin not be able to dominate us.
- Phil. 4:6-7—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” When we are anxious, it shows that we have forgotten God and are striking out on our own. Anxiety is one of the key routes to carnality, the answer to which is a life of constant prayer.
- Phil. 1:9—“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.” This is a call to fellowship (“love”) and growth (“abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight”). Staying in fellowship and praying as we grow give us the remedy for sin. If we are in fellowship with God, and committing our walk and way to Him, we will have the resources by which to resist sin.

These passages reflect prayer as a powerful weapon in our battle with sin. Prayer is our hotline to heaven, and we can stay in contact with HQ 100% of the time. Help will be dispatched immediately when we dial in to God’s frequency. Without this help, we are sunk.

G. LIVING BY FAITH

Faith is a Product, not a Process. Believing is the most important act a Christian can perform. So why don’t I talk more about it? After all, it is the central technique in regard to walking in the Spirit, getting prayers answered, doing God’s will, and accessing all the best that grace offers. The reason is that *faith* is the *result and outcome of spiritual growth*, not something we can attend directly to cause it to grow. This is why we emphasize *methods* for generating faith, as much as we do faith itself, knowing that faith will be the inevitable product of all growth procedures. When we are confessing, praying, studying, etc., faith will be generated. It is the depository for all our growth. Every bit of maturing that we do attaches to faith and makes it stronger. (For a complete discussion on “faith”, see my book, *Bible Basics on Walking by Faith: Pathway to the Promised Land*). So it seems appropriate that faith should be discussed as a *product*, and not as a *method*, even though it is cited as a “technique”.

Wanting God and Faith. Faith is an elusive and complex phenomenon, even though it is quite simple in its application. Understanding the nuances of faith is beyond the scope of this study, but I will briefly summarize what I believe about it. Faith begins at the time we are first aware of God, as seen in His creation (see Rom. 1). As we become aware of God we either WANT Him, or we are NOT INTERESTED in Him. This wanting of God...desiring to know Him...is the backdrop for the development of our faith over the course of our entire lives, beginning with the time we believe in Christ at salvation, followed by a pursuit of God’s face as believers. After we have become His children, if we want more of Him, we will move closer to Him, where we can bask in His love and light, and learn to please Him. If we don’t care about Him, we will keep our distance.

Any time we are aware of God, we have the option of “wanting” Him or rejecting Him. If we reject Him, we will simply walk away and forget about Him. This dilemma goes on for the duration of our Christian lives. See...want...believe (vs sense...deny...mistrust). If we WANT Him, we will BELIEVE Him. This is faith. It started out as a tiny seed: I saw creation, I wanted to know the Creator, and I believed that He exists. The gospel then came, and I believed its message, which resulted in my salvation. At that point, I entered the Christian life, and since that time, every day and every event has become a test that I must all face: Do I want God, or do I want something...anything...else? This is true for all of us. If we want Him...thirst after Him...we will seek Him and find Him, with the result that faith will grow in His light.

The advancement of faith traces back to our wanting God. This is something we decide at the core of ourselves, which neither God nor other men can cause or prevent. Desire for God and decisions concerning Him morph into our personal view of life and our perception of reality...our sense of meaning and purpose. In that mix, if we have a hunger for God, we will believe Him. If we truly seek Him, we will find Him...and find Him...and find Him. But when our passion for Him waxes cold, He will not be found. Do you want God? Then what are you doing? Search for Him! Where? In the place where He reveals Himself...in His Word.

Faith and Sin. Without faith, there is only sin, as per Rom. 14:23b, which says, “...everything that does not come from faith is sin.” And with sin there is no faith. What is suggested here is that the loss of fellowship results in the diminution or cessation of faith. Faith cannot operate when the sinful nature is in charge. And every thing that is produced by the sinful nature is *sinful*, regardless of how it seems to onlookers. Looks are often misleading and deceiving. It must be established: If a believer is not controlled by the Spirit, faith will flag; and God will be stymied. With carnality, the direction of faith shifts from the Spirit to the flesh.

Whenever we are in a “carnal” (out-of-fellowship) condition, nothing we do will be right. Conversely, any action done in fellowship, will be recorded as “divine good”; BUT the same action can be a sin, if it is done in the energy and motivation of the flesh. We don’t just “do right”; we do it “in the Spirit”...or it is not right at all. Mark 9:41 says that giving a cup of cold water to a fellow believer earns heavenly rewards, but only conditionally. This verse says, “I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.” Recall this: “...in my name” means “in fellowship”. Rewards will be lost, even for praiseworthy acts, if the “actor” is not in fellowship.

The key to the value of an act is the state of mind of the person doing it. The question is this: Is the believer doing the action controlled by the Spirit, or by the flesh? Even what we consider to be “righteous acts” will be “sins”, if they are not done in fellowship. Our flesh is virtually incapable of producing divine good, because it reflects arrogant faith in ourselves. We have seen this sequence over and over throughout our studies: Get in fellowship...and then walk by faith in God. This represents being “filled with the Spirit”, followed by “walking by the Spirit”...or walking by faith.

Living by Faith. 1 Thess. 1:3a gives us an introduction to this topic by saying, “We continually re-

member before our God and Father your work produced by faith...” Faith produces work, but that work is not the work of the flesh, but God’s work, as we see again and again in Scripture. Faith and work are opposites, so the only “work” we are actually called upon to perform is to “believe”...or have faith (which, of course, is not seen as “work” at all). Only then will great “works” be accomplished, but not by us...only by God. Living by faith is virtually trusting in God to perform His work, which is to produce the life of Christ in us, and the fruit of the Spirit from us.

Hebrews 11 provides a great discussion of faith. Heb. 11:1 tells us that “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” This begins with creation, which is the “visible” created from the “invisible”. Verse 2 tells us that, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” We are being asked to believe the invisible and make it more real than the visible. God’s greatest reality is in the invisible, which is why faith is so important. Notice the word “understand” in verse 2. Faith is more than a *condition* for receiving knowledge or awareness; faith is a *form* of knowledge itself. Faith is a way of KNOWING! “By faith we UNDERSTAND...” We *know* God, to the degree that we *believe* Him.

So much of the Christian life is trusting God, though He cannot be seen, and many times we have no idea exactly how He is working the circumstances of our lives for our good and His glory. But we trust Him, because we believe His Word, even though all may seem lost and hopeless, and even though we have no idea what is going to happen. *Seeing* God work is a great pleasure, but the greatest opportunities for growth and benefits may come to us in the form of challenges and tests. Sometimes, God’s dealings with us seem to arise from places other than grace or love or mercy, but from some heavy-handed, judgmental retribution against our humanity. But the opposite is true, and this is exactly the place where faith must work: When we see no solution or way out, or when we find ourselves incapable of moving forward, this is when we must stick with God. We must return to Him always, over and over, while we inch forward in our growth and build our faith straw by straw—and then brick by brick—until we complete the super-structure of our maturity.

Heb. 11 also provides some great examples of faith, as we see in the following:

Verse 4—By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings.

Verse 5—By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death...he was commended as one who pleased God.

Verse 7—By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

Verse 8—By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Each of these men applied faith under different circumstances, but all had one thing in common: they believed what God said. And—as a result—they were all commended and all benefitted. Many others are cited in Hebrews 11, and throughout Scripture, showing the value and efficacy of faith. Going back

to verse 6, in context with the commendation of Enoch, who was said to have “pleased God”, we see this: “For without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” When we come to God with “earnest seeking” (passionate wanting), it is because we believe He is there, and that He has something valuable that He wants to give us. When we seek Him, come to Him, and trust Him, we will please Him...this is our highest pursuit.

2 Cor. 5:7 continues in the vein of seeking an invisible God, saying, “We live by faith, not by sight.” There is always a temptation to drag God into an inquiry: “What have you done for me lately?” But people who demand that God “deliver” according to their own values, and accommodate them on their schedule, are not living by faith, but by sight. When the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” are coming in, and we have no hope for resolution of dilemmas or setbacks, this is the exact time when faith must operate. Many times, we will not SEE the solution for our problems, which is why we must TRUST in God for the outcome...knowing that what He does *with* us will be best *for* us.

The righteous live by faith. So says Hab. 2:2b-4, as follows:

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. See, he [the evil man] is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith...”

The unfolding of God’s Word and will and plan will take place in a perfect way at a perfect time, and the end or outcome will be worth waiting for. The man who is “righteous”, because he wants God (as opposed to the evil man, whose “desires are not upright”), will live and perceive his life according to faith. This should be true of all of us. Applying this to our current study, we can make the following statement: When we live by faith, we will bring to bear against sin and its entourage all the forces of the Creator of heaven and earth. It’s our best bet for dealing with the incredible constraints of evil.

H. THE OLD MAN AND THE NEW NATURE

The Inner Self. We have discussed the immaterial make-up of man at length in previous books. A good encapsulation of our inner self is found in a chapter titled, “The Inner Make-up of Man”, in the book, *Walking in the Spirit: Pathway to Production*, p. 3, with a summary chart on p. 16. I spent a great deal of time in that study delineating the parts of man’s inner nature, based on what I found in Scripture. According to this study, the inner parts of man are the mind, the soul, the spirit, and the heart. I want to add to this list a little, to include some additional components of the heart. These include the law of sin and the sinful nature; the Holy Spirit; and the “volition”, sometimes referred to as the “will”.

Each one of these aspects of our inner selves plays a different role in our inner experience. The law of sin and the sinful nature are representatives of Satan and his cosmic system, constantly trying to lure us into sin and/or self righteousness. The Holy Spirit also resides within us, occupying what serves as His “temple” in this Church Age. And our volition rests at the base or core of our inner being as the part of us that is either for or against God at any give time. We cite these parts of our inner man, but will not

embellish these further at this point. We want to focus on another aspect of our inner self, which we will announce shortly.

For now, we call attention to the “heart”. The heart is an entity all its own, as per the Bible’s description of it, but it seems to have a “superintending” role that subsumes all of our other inner parts. The heart is headquarters. And the heart will be either “good” or “bad”. If it is “bad”, the mind, the soul, and the spirit will also be bad. The condition of the heart will be determined by its “controller”, in the sense that it will be dominated either by the Holy Spirit or by the sinful nature at any given time. There is no such thing as “half-spiritual” and “half-carnal”. We are one or the other. If our sins are confessed, we are “clean”, and the Holy Spirit can control us. But if we have not confessed, we are not clean and the Holy Spirit will not have communion or companionship with us. (Incidentally, since we must confess as often as we sin, this is almost *continual* for immature believers, because their sin frequency is almost *constant*.) Our object in the Christian life is to stay clean, so the Spirit can control our hearts *all the time*!

The Bible also refers to a “new man” and an “old man” within us, the aspect of our inner life which draws our attention in this study. We want to see how these fit into our inner make-up. We hope to shed light on these largely misunderstood and misapplied entities housed within us.

The Old Man and the New Man. This discussion bakes down to the very kernel or core of what I believe, which is that God is God and we are not. In our arrogance, we cannot resist making the Christian life about who we are, what we can achieve, and the personal resources we have. We can’t see past our own ego and bodily needs and wants, and we are trapped in a cocoon of self-absorption, self-interest, and self-trust. These prevent us from seeing that we are NOTHING, that God is EVERYTHING, and that good will ever and always come ONLY from Him.

So, let’s talk about the old and new “selves”. The old self is easily dispensed with, because that is the sinful nature, which we have from birth to the grave. This “old man” has been thoroughly treated in previous studies. The new self needs more exploration. It is what we are said to get when we are saved. This “new man”, that is our new “spirit”, has—according to most—a propensity for good, and a hatred for evil. This is “new equipment” that we have to help us combat sin. But this is FALSE! We have no new occupant that will finally be the asset God needs to do His work, as though He were dependent on us to get His work done. The truth is that God does not need our help or our resources.

Many preachers and teacher see the “new man” in the Word, and assume that this is an acquisition at salvation that is the “good angel on our shoulder” to guide us into good. The assumption arises that we are not helpless after all and not completely dependent on God. With the “new man” we are no longer incapable of good on our own...we now have the capability to PRODUCE our own GOOD. The derivative of this is that we have some “goodness” dwelling within us that makes us a new person. Our “nature” has changed! It has been enhanced with transformed humanity. But we have talked so much about our inability as believers to produce divine good. Do we really have new personal assets that can operate on their own and please God? We still have the sinful nature within us, and the law of sin is still operating and dominating. So what does the Bible mean when it says so many times that we have a

new “self”, often suggesting that this new self is victorious over sin.? This is what we must figure out.

What is the new thing in us, really? Is it a new “us”, or is it something else? We have seen time and again what we acquire at salvation: the Holy Spirit. So what is new within us? The Holy Spirit. What is different about us is not US, but the fact that we have God inside of us. The new man is the heart **CONTROLLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT!** Everything we see in Scripture about what the “new man” can do is not a reflection of new *inherent* abilities that we now have; it is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who will control us...or step back from us...depending on our spiritual condition as “cleansed” or “not cleansed”.

Rom. 7:6b says we “serve in the new way of the Spirit”. The newness and the difference is in the Spirit within us, not in some new quality that disposes us to good and godliness. I believe we NEVER have the capability to do what only God can do, which is producing His own love and righteousness in us. Godliness can never originate in humanity, so this new self cannot be some part of our nature that is now independently pure. 2 Cor. 5:17-18a says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God...” What is the source and origin of this new goodness? God. Not us. The “old” in this case does not mean the sinful nature, but a heart that is without the Holy Spirit, meaning an unbeliever. We still have the sinful nature after we are saved, and the “new creation” is a *heart occupied by the Spirit*, hence we see the dichotomy of warring entities within us: the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit, not two antipathetic parts of ourselves.

When God created the world, He sustained it by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And when we become a new “creation”, we are also sustained by the Holy Spirit. As it was with original creation, without God there is only darkness. When we are in carnality, the “new creation” is in darkness, whereas when we are spiritual, there is light and goodness.

We must be firm: There is nothing good or salvageable about us, apart from God. This is the most important lesson we will ever learn, because it puts God in His supreme and rightful place. God accepts only His own worthiness, and nothing about us is inherently worthy of Him. This is why the cross was necessary...because we are incapable of righteousness that can either save us or please God. When we believe, the Spirit takes our faltering and useless humanity and gives Himself to it, becoming the NEW entity within us. Ez. 36:25-27 describes it this way:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit [Spirit] in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

This passage foretells what will happen with the Jews, but the application we want to make is that cleansing leads to the Spirit “moving” and motivating the believer, and that the “new heart” is the “new Spirit”. Anything new in our lives is either the presence of the Spirit, which we get at salvation, or the motivation of the Spirit, which we receive when we are “cleansed”.

Eph. 4:22-24 tells us the “old self” (the sinful nature) is “corrupted by evil desires”, while the “new

self” is being created to “be like God”. When the new self is being “created” because we are pure, the “old self” is disempowered. The new self is, remember, the heart controlled by the Holy Spirit; it is “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”. Gal. 3:26-27 adds, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” What is the new man? Jesus Christ. Not some aspect of our humanity, which can never be “new”, until we receive our glorified bodies for the eternal state.

Humanity will never have greater capacity for goodness on its own, or within anything that is received or acquired, apart from the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We “learn” newness to the degree that we use grace techniques and methods for more-consistent connection with and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Our minds, souls, and spirits can be “trained” through truth and God’s training, to rely on the Holy Spirit for renewal and empowerment. As we learn to draw on HIS power, we see His good produced through us. He is always the source for good; never us.

Other references for the new man/old man: 2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:15, Col. 3:9, Rom. 6:6, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 4 and 5, Rom. 7 and 8.

I. DISCIPLINE FOR SIN

The Purpose of Discipline. In the past, we have framed discipline as something harsh and intense, as we see in Hebrews 10, where discipline is described as “judgment and raging fire”, by which we will be “severely punished”. But we must understand, God’s justice has been satisfied by the work of Christ on the cross. He is not using discipline to placate His own justice (which was satisfied by the cross), but to get our attention. We believe discipline is a tool for correction for sin, which God disdains, but we have also learned that punishment is not the strongest motivation for dealing with sin in the Church Age. We believe God’s love, mercy, and patience are more powerful incentives for us to keep our sin slates clean than any form or level of punishment.

The Function of Discipline. Paul said the following, in Romans 2:4: “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” When Paul speaks to believers about “repentance”, he is not referring to salvation; he is speaking of confession...changing our minds about the sins we have committed. So what leads us to confess? God’s “kindness, tolerance, and patience”! This is the right perspective for discipline...not some vengeful retribution for offenses and wrongs, but an expression of God’s merciful grace. As we grow, we understand more and more the greatness of God’s love, and how much He wants us to get closer to Him, to honor Him, and to properly serve Him. He does not want compliance and morality for their own sakes, but as by-products of our burgeoning spirituality. The role of discipline is to encourage us to be *spiritual*; this is the objective of grace.

We have seen in previous studies that discipline in the Old Testament was harsh, and compliance was a bigger part of the lives of believers of that Age than it is now. For us in this Age of Grace we believe the objective of discipline has shifted, and is related now to our relationship with the Holy Spirit. We are disciplined to remind us to confess our sins, and to grow and walk in the power of the Spirit. Dis-

cipline is part of a “grace package”, that includes love, mercy, grace, patience, long-suffering, kindness, and guidance. It is a teaching and training tool. It can help us grow and become stronger against sin, not so we can avoid punishment, but as part of our participation in the grace operations of God. Discipline is an invitation from God that seeks our return to Him for restoration and refreshment. It is a reminder that grace is offered and waiting.

This view of discipline is explained in Heb. 12—introduced earlier in this chapter—which we want to examine here in greater detail, especially verses 7-11, quoted here:

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. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but 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.

We want to point out several important messages from this passage, as follows:

1. Discipline can be a “hardship”, but it is “all in the family”, done by a loving Father.
2. All sons of loving fathers are disciplined.
3. Those not disciplined (unbelievers) are not sons.
4. Discipline engenders our respect for the Father, and should elicit our submission to Him.
5. Our Father disciplines us “for our good”, so we can “share in his holiness”, which means that discipline reminds us to confess and return to fellowship, where holiness is acquired.
6. Discipline is no fun, but it brings about “peace”, which is reconciliation with the Holy Spirit—and “righteousness”, which is divine good produced by the Spirit.
7. Those who have responded to discipline and have returned to fellowship are those who are “teachable”...those who have been “trained” by it.

The idea we must grasp is that God is training us through discipline. Any suffering related to discipline will change in its nature after we confess. If the suffering continues, it becomes a form of “training through tests and trials” designed to help us grow. Until then, the suffering is designed to get us “back on track to growth” by reminding us to confess our sins and walk by faith.

Discipline is God’s form of guidance for erring Christians. We do not want to minimize the reality and even the severity of discipline, but we want to create an accurate image of discipline as an expression of God’s love. I believe our awareness of how much He loves us, and how merciful He is toward us, gives us a far greater drive to get back on the right path than any amount of chastisement.

End of Chapter Note. We have discussed the issue of “dealing with sin”. This involves coping, resist-

ing, avoiding, outgrowing, and even outrunning sin. But we want more. We want to see how to “beat” sin. We have already indicated that we can’t kill it altogether, but can we beat it? We believe the answer is “yes”, and we will offer our best attempts in the upcoming chapters at disclosing what Scripture says about our having victory over this super-nemesis. Victory is seen in two parts: 1) Clearing past sins and 2) defeating sin. These represent the topics for Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, which deal with sins past and sins future, respectively.

Chapter 4: Clearing Past Sins

In this chapter...

Section A. Redeeming Failure

Section B. God's Mercy

Section C. God's Grace

Section D. Confessing our Sins

Section E. Alternative Forms of Confession

Section F. After we Confess

A. REDEEMING FAILURE

Looking Forward to this Chapter and the Next. There are two stages of sin-treatment: 1) clearance of sins already committed, and 2) prevention of sins that are yet to be committed. These correspond with Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, respectively. Clearance of sins is a basic or intermediate level of the basic apparatus for divine forgiveness. Prevention is the product of divine strengthening through advanced growth. It is easier to have past sins erased than it is to find the strength to stop sins that lie ahead. But as we mature, we will want more and more to be rid of sin. With any growth at all, we can use techniques that bring forgiveness, whereas major resistance of sin will require super-growth.

This chapter (Chapter 4) will examine truths pertaining to the “clearance” of past sins, and the next chapter (Chapter 5) will deepen our understanding of God’s methods for “overpowering” sin *before* we are in its throes. Chapter 4 will be a well-traveled path for those who have conducted studies throughout our entire range of techniques for living, but note: a few new discoveries have been added, so it is best not to skip this chapter.

We will Fail. The question is not *whether* we will fail, but *when*...and it is much more frequent than we might think. We must understand, first of all, how desperately and miserably we fail; but we must also learn that God can build our spiritual lives on our failures. This is the conundrum. We don’t want to fail and we don’t value our shortcomings, but when we understand how we are failing, and how to correct them, we can build on them. The more we grow, the greater the deception and temptation—and even the tendency (based on the “law of sin”)—to fail; yet failure, viewed and dealt with properly, can be a great boost to our spiritual success. We don’t embrace failure as something to expand and practice with greater energy, but it is not the damning condition we have believed, if we treat it in the correct way. This may be the most important skill you will ever learn: using failure as a stepping stone to growth. We will fail, but we must not be deterred from our commitment to growth.

Facing our Failures. Psalm 73:26 says, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” This verse is not talking about our bodies, but the “soul” part of our “flesh”...i.e., our “non-material” parts. Even if we fail, God will be our strength afterward if we acknowledge our failure and expose our sins to Him. He will continue to be our “portion”, the sustaining force in our lives, if we face Him with our inability to surmount evil. Failure is actually a stepping stone to growth, if we keep moving. But if we fail, we cannot surrender to perpetual guilt and despondency; we must submit our failure and weakness to Him. He will fix it and restore us, so that we can move forward. “Don’t despair; just repair.” This is our motto as failing creatures. We must believe that God will forgive us if we open up to Him, and that He can change us, if we persevere.

Processing and dealing with our failure is a prime catalyst for our maturation. When we handle failure properly, we will grow. When we ignore our failures or persist in them without correction, we will suffer setbacks. If we persist in a posture and pattern centered on growth, we will change over time, and be empowered to deal with sin (as we examined in Chapter 3). Our only hope for dealing with sin

and failure is NOT to deal with it directly, but to give it away. Our failure must be acknowledged and PASSED ON to God! We will not find or apply this truth in our own minds or through the cosmic system; this principle can only be found in our divine education and training.

What to do When we Fail. There are specific things that must be done when we fail, to activate the “recovery-from-failure” offered by grace. And then, as we shall see in Chapter 5, there are things we can do to enable us to avoid failure. 2 Chron. 7:14 wraps up the whole process, saying, “...if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin...” The first thing for believers to do is “humble themselves”, a signal for confession leading to forgiveness; then they are to “pray”, followed by “seeking God’s face”, a signal for growth. The routine is repeated once again: first confess, then pray, then grow. When we do this consistently, we will at some point be able to “turn from our wicked ways”. Confess, build faith, walk in the Spirit, build more faith, and on and on until we reach super-maturity, where we can turn our backs on sin.

The point we are making currently is that we will fail, after which we must return, repent, and recover. Jer. 8:4b-7 describes the process well, as follows:

When people fall down, do they not get up? When someone turns away, do they not return? Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return. I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. None of them repent of their wickedness, saying, “What have I done?” Each pursues their own course like a horse charging into battle. Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the Lord.

The only reasonable response to falling down is *getting up*. The only solution for wandering away is to *return*. Or we can continue to “pursue our own course” and forget God. If we do not know God’s way and follow it, we will move, but in the wrong direction...into danger and destruction. The only way to get back on track is to first realize that we are *off track*. Ask the question: “What have I done?” Identifying our mistakes is the first step toward our return. Only when we *know* that we have failed can we begin the reparation process. The way back is through admitting that we have lost our way, or that our thoughts and/or behavior are out of bounds.

Areas of Weakness. In the book of Judges, chapters 14 through 16, we see an unmistakable pattern of weakness exhibited by Samson. That weakness was women. This was his blind spot and his downfall. And it wasn’t necessarily sex that motivated him, but romantic love. He was a sucker for “love”. Throughout his history, he was involved with one woman or another, until finally, his weakness became his undoing. The application to us is this: Our weakness and failure can rule us and ruin us, or it can be the place where God focuses His grace and power to give us strength to stop failing. Samson was undone, because he failed in certain *consistent* ways.

I believe this is what happens to all of us. We all fail, and our failure is often a repetition of specific pat-

terns, and these patterns always correspond with our greatest weaknesses. We tend to overlook and excuse behavior that comes from our areas of weakness, and become especially judgmental and critical toward areas of bad behavior that we avoid with ease. It is our area of weakness that most difficult to overcome, yet it is the area that is most often overlooked when we review our behavior.

Here's a strange statement: God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Does that mean we want to be weak? No. And another: Grace increases with sin (Rom. 5:20). Does that mean we want to sin? No. But we do have *weaknesses*, and these will be witnessed in ourselves repeatedly until we do what we will see in Chapter 5. This does not mean that we must let our failures and weaknesses define us. We can be defined, rather, by lives filled with mercy and grace, covered by forgiveness and restoration, and strengthened by the power of God Himself. If we do not deal with our weaknesses through grace, mercy, and forgiveness, our weaknesses will dominate us and destroy us. If you have not battled with ongoing patterns of weakness and helplessness, then you have either reached super-maturity...or you are too immature to be haunted and tormented by them. It is the *growing* believer who is most keenly aware of his own failures.

Failure is not the End. Failure does not need to be seen as a time of hopelessness, but as a time when Christ's work on the cross, which satisfied God's justice and freed His love, enables forgiveness through personal penitence. You can't fight failure, and you can't hide it. Look at what you've done and say, "Father, I have failed. Forgive me now and restore me." You would do well to be more specific about what you have done, but even this simple admission will do the trick. Acknowledgment of failure and sin is one of the most important things you will ever do in finding and using the keys to God's kingdom in your heart and life. (If you are interested, you can learn more about the "keys to the kingdom" in *Bible Basics on Sin and Mercy: Pathway to Forgiveness*, pp. 70-83, which is on-point with our current topic.)

B. GOD'S MERCY

Mercy is Offered. God's mercy comes from God's love for His own creatures. His mercy is in evidence for mankind, as clearly described in Scripture. His mercy for angels is likely similar, but this is not described in the Bible, except for those scriptures that discuss God's taking time to demonstrate His justice and fairness to Satan in condemning him to a lake of fire. (Once again, we refer you to *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, pp. 55-93 for a complete description of Satan's war against God). We know a great deal about God's mercy for mankind, which was demonstrated at the cross; and we have learned that mercy enables our participation in God's strength for living through the privileges, assets, and techniques of grace.

Is. 65:2 shows God's offering of mercy, saying, "All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations." He puts mercy right in front of us, and we are still reluctant to embrace it. We had rather be self-made and self-sustaining, rather than accept the benefits of God's grace. All day long...every day...God is waiting on us to find the pathway of faith and dependency on Him as the way to sustain our Christian lives. God is waiting for us to

claim mercy as our interactive medium with Him, rather than our self-styled methods for self-improvement. When we reject mercy, we are “pursuing our own imaginations”. In this passage from Isaiah, our imagination leads to “walking in ways not good”, which for the Jews meant worshiping idols and seeking holiness through man-made contrivances. When we reject mercy, we are no different from them. We choose our way over God’s.

Mercy Gives Hope. Our true hope rests in the mercy and grace of God. Salvation is based on mercy leading to forgiveness, but we sin after we are saved, so we must keep on looking for mercy. *Christian living* is based on FORGIVENESS, without which we will be living lives in our flesh, and not in the Spirit. We need mercy because we are sinful; we need forgiveness because we have sinned. We must depend on mercy to get what we cannot give ourselves. We cannot “forgive” ourselves, and we cannot “cleanse” ourselves, which means we must look to God’s superior quality of mercy to have the forgiveness we need. Jer. 2:22 shows us how futile our efforts at self-cleansing are: “‘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.”

We depend on mercy for us to have a relationship with God. Compare Jer. 2:22 with Ps. 32:5. The verse in Jeremiah tells us, “This is not the way to be cleansed,” while the verse in Psalms tells us how cleansing is done, saying, “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’.” When we acknowledge our sins, mercy comes into play, whereas self-cleansing prevents forgiveness and blocks mercy.

Ps. 103:2-4 and 9-12, quoted together, give us a good cross-section of mercy, saying this:

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... (v. 2-4). He will not always accuse, nor will he keep 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 (v. 9-12).

This passage applies to both salvation and to Christian living. In both cases, mercy is at work to enable us to bring about the following:

1. Have our sins forgiven.
2. Heal our diseases. (I believe these diseases are “spiritual”, meaning that they are “sins”.)
3. Through the cross (redemption) we are saved, after which love is our crown, the symbol of our elevation through His mercy.
4. The key to His treatment of us now is not seen in either accusing or excusing in regard to sin, but in mercy, whereby he “does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities”.

5. Why does mercy work? Because of his love, which is accessed by faith (fear).

6. The result of accessing mercy is the removal of our transgressions an infinite distance away.

Wanting God Precedes Accessing Mercy. If we want more of God, we will access His mercy. Wanting God is more important than wanting good, as we have said before. Wanting good will not lead to good, whereas wanting God will lead to His righteousness. Another implication is that wanting to stop sinning is less important than wanting mercy. We must not get the cart before the horse. We access mercy first, then we will be strengthened to go after sin. Generally, Christians try to be “good” first, so they will see themselves as qualified for mercy. But then they will flounder...and Satan will be happy. Seek mercy first!

Looking for Mercy. Ps. 140:6 gives us an appropriate prayer to offer concerning mercy, saying, “O Lord, I say to you, ‘you are my God.’ Hear, O Lord, my cry for mercy.” When we have acknowledged God we will be in a position to pray for mercy. Remember that we come to Him because we believe he exists, and that we will be rewarded for seeking Him (Heb. 11:6). We come for mercy knowing that His hand is extended to us, and that mercy is in His hand. We trust His mercy, and believe that justice has been absorbed by the work of Christ on the cross, meaning that we are not withheld from mercy...not ever. If we want mercy, it is there. Forgiveness is always available, when we come to God as those who KNOW WE NEED what He is holding and offering...His mercy.

We are invited to come directly to God for mercy. Heb. 4:14-16 shows us exactly how this works, as follows:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, 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 empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Because we have accessed the work of our “great high priest” at salvation, we are now told to “hold firmly to the faith” that we professed when we were saved. Jesus the Son of God is now our high priest, who knows us, and understands the struggle we have with sin. SO...we are now invited to “approach God’s throne of grace”, and we are told to do this “with confidence”, knowing that mercy is waiting for us where grace resides. And how do we appropriate mercy? By bringing our sins and failures to the throne, where we will “receive mercy”. Then we can acquire the add-on benefit of mercy and forgiveness, which is “grace to help us in our time of need”. Mercy and forgiveness come first, followed by grace. Grace made mercy available and now mercy enables access to grace that will help us in our time of need.

Ps. 25:11 says, “For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.” It is for His own sake and His own glory that He forgives us. When we access forgiveness through mercy, God is glorified and pleased. We discredit God by sinning, but we can turn that into glorifying Him through accessing mercy. Ps. 57:12 gives us this prayer for receiving mercy: “Have mercy on me, O God, have

mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.” The storms of sin rage against us, and God’s mercy and grace are our refuge.

God Wants to Show Mercy. God wants to show mercy. This is what He loves most, because it is His chance to showcase and use the work of His Son on the cross. He is able to forgive because His Son has paid the price for our sins, so when believers come to Him for mercy, he “delights” in dispensing it. Micah 7:18 says this about mercy:

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.

God looks forward to showing mercy; He is waiting to show it. We are free to go to Him to obtain it. There is nothing to stop us but our pride and/or disbelief of this clear message to us: God DELIGHTS in showing us His mercy and relegating our sins to the bottom of the ocean.

C. GOD’S GRACE

Introducing Grace. We have described grace in such detail in previous studies that we feel safe in omitting detailed definitions here, except to say that grace is God’s attitude toward man, based on His love. Love is free to operate because justice has been satisfied, and we can be recipients and beneficiaries of that love, if we are open to grace through faith. (For more a more detailed discussion of grace, see *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*, pp. 26-38.)

Grace is the operational phase of God’s love. Grace is the expression of love. God loves us, and nothing stands between His love and His grace. Grace is extended to man because Jesus Christ satisfied God’s justice, enabling His love to operate without impediment. The only thing that stands between us and the grace which God offers is sin, specifically the sin of unbelief. Once we “believe” and become “believers”, i.e., become saved and born again, we are free to access grace and God is free to dispense it. Once again, the only thing that stands between us and grace is sin, which is still with us even though we are saved. Sin blocks grace. Soon we will review God’s method for dealing with past sins, but first we want to say more about the grace that makes it possible.

Grace Applications. 2 Timothy, Paul’s last writing, gives some good examples of grace operations. The epistle begins with grace and ends with grace. 2 Tim. 1:2 opens the epistle saying, “Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” 2 Tim. 4:22b concludes the writing, saying, “Grace be with you all.” In between these bookends of grace, we see many examples of the workings of grace. We provide the following list to show some of the varied aspects or facets of grace, as seen in 2 Timothy. We offer the verses, along with comments, as follows:

- 2 Tim. 1:8b-9—“But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning

of time.” This passage tells us that God’s purpose and grace have “saved us” and “called us to a holy life”...all done through the operation of grace, which serves His plan. We are born again by grace, and then we live a holy life...by grace...“NOT BY ANYTHING WE HAVE DONE”!

- 2 Tim. 1:14—“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” Backing up to v. 13 we see what the good deposit was: It was what they “heard”. This was the “sound teaching” (also v. 13) that Paul had given to Timothy. This would have been the set of instructions given in 1 Timothy, which also begins and ends with grace. He is saying, “What you learned from me concerning grace, remember and follow.”
- 2 Tim. 2:1—“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul was reminding Timothy that strength for spiritual living comes from God’s grace and power, and not from ourselves.
- 2 Tim. 2:19—“Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.’” Paul is telling Timothy that believers (who are the ones God knows) must see as foundational to their lives a “turning away from wickedness”. Beating sin is basic to Christian living and production. Only grace can make this happen.
- 2 Tim. 2:21—“If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” This verse carries a great message about confessing to be “cleansed” (restored to fellowship), so that God can use us, make us “holy”, and equip us for good work. This is the only application I have made of this verse in the past. But now, I add that this verse is calling for us to become super-mature, surrendered believers, so that we can *live cleanly* and be *made holy in our behavior* and so we can *do good work*...all because we have mastered the routines of grace. At some point, we will be able to do these things virtually all the time, because our maturity will enable us to *walk by the Spirit* every moment of every day.
- 2 Tim. 2:22—“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart are those who access His grace provisions and operate in His power.
- 2 Tim. 3:12—“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...” Those who choose the way of grace will encounter great resistance, as we have stated in previous chapters and books. The closer we get to God, the more intense Satan’s attacks become...until we reach super-maturity, when he will finally give up on us. The grace-life is not a life of ease and comfort, as some project. This does not mean that it is not the best life possible.

- 2 Tim. 3:16—“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.” We learn about grace operations and assets in the Word, without which we will be ill-equipped to do anything good.
- 2 Tim. 4:8—“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” We don’t emphasize it enough, the rewards we will receive in heaven, and even here on earth. One of the beauties and great values of grace is that we will be rewarded for DOING LESS and TRUSTING MORE...allowing another to do the work.
- 2 Tim. 4:18—“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.” There is no question that we will suffer attacks from Satan, witnessed as temptations, deceptions, suffering of all kinds, and character assassination. This verse promises that we will be rescued from these attacks. Back up one verse to see exactly how this rescue occurs: 2 Tim. 4:17—“But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength...” Grace protects us and strengthens us, when we are God’s companions, and not His enemies (James 4:4).

We look to grace to provide the resources we need to control sin in our lives. It is hard enough just to *understand* how grace empowers us for God’s work, but it is even harder to *practice* God’s grace routines. We must confess regularly, pray constantly, study consistently, trust steadily, endure unwaveringly, and serve faithfully. “Resting” in our faith (Heb. 3 and 4) is certainly a lot of work. One passage that sharpens the difficulty of the task, and at once provides the source of our hope for surmounting it, is found in 1 Pet. 1:13-15, which gives us the following:

Therefore prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

The same grace that will reward us when Jesus Christ is revealed in the “last time” (1 Pet. 1:5) is the grace that is now offered to help us live. When hope is centered on grace, it becomes faith in God’s power, which replenishes us and qualifies us to be made “holy”...pure and filled with God’s Spirit. But we have to access grace assets—through grace techniques—over and over to keep us clean, build our faith, and keep us focused on Him. Without grace we will have no hope. We will give in to our evil desires, and we will be anything but holy.

Paul said it was ONLY by grace that he was able to execute the Christian way of life. He said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10). Paul acknowledged that all he was and all he achieved was predicated on grace...and it was no picnic...it was hard work,

the *work of grace*, taxing Paul's endurance to its limits.

Grace Increases with Greater Sin. We have mentioned this before: As infractions and failures increase, grace rises up to meet them. This is what we see in Rom. 5:20b, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more..." (Rom. 5:20b). There is no sin for which God's grace does not have a solution, or that cannot be forgiven...if we will follow the way of grace. It is not by making ourselves stronger or purer or more holy that we are able to meet the challenges of sin; rather, it is by engaging grace through grace methods that we will grow and be strengthened against them.

I want, at this point, to go into some tricky passages that I believe, when seen properly, can strengthen our understanding of the place and power of grace as it relates to our battle with sin. To do this, I will build on the concept given in Rom. 5:20 above that shows how grace increases as sin does. The next chapter in Romans (ch. 6) is, I believe, addressing mature believers, who are trained in grace and understand how grace works. This will become clear as we examine parts of Romans 6.

Rom. 6:1-2 says, "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?" We died to sin...so how can we keep on living in it? In verse 11 we see this: "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. It is as though we are divorced from sin, but still living with it. And the message is even stronger: we must count ourselves DEAD to sin. Somehow, I don't *feel* dead to sin. This is because sin is alive and well within me, unless I am filled with the Spirit, at which time sin is disempowered.

Where sin exists, it rules. In verse 12, we see this: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires." Paul is letting us know that there is a way to take sin (meaning the sinful nature) off the throne. Verse 13 adds, "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 can offer our bodies to sin, but we can also offer the "parts of our body" (immaterial, as well as physical) as "instruments of righteousness." Then v. 14 brings the command to its main point: "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." Where are going to find the solution for sin? In grace.

There's more. Verse 17 says, "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted." Those believers who actually functioned under grace did so because they had "wholeheartedly" embraced and followed Paul's teachings. This means they implemented the grace techniques God provided and thereby accessed His divine resources. The result of this is rapid advancement to maturity, which enables them to be "set free from sin" and to become "slaves of righteousness". (v. 18) If we ever hope to stop sinning, we must KEEP GROWING! To the degree that we lack spirituality and maturity, we are weak. This can change if we will just keep growing.

Rom. 6:19 continues Paul's message:

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer

them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

Just as “you [maturing believer] used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness”, so now our bodies should be offered “in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness”. This suggests that we must follow the pathway to maturity, with all its setbacks, challenges, and reversals, in order to achieve a walk in the Spirit (“righteousness”) that will eventually bring super-maturity (“holiness”). Verse 20 goes on: “When we were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.” When we are slaves to sin, we are *unhooked* from righteousness, and the Spirit is not in control. The converse is also true: When we are slaves to righteousness, the Spirit will be controlling, and sin will be blocked.

Verse 21 asks, “What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!” The things we did at one time (i.e., before we matured) leave us red-faced with shame when they cross our minds. Those things resulted in “death”, which depicts the spiritual deadness of carnality.

Verse 22 gives the converse: “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.” Once we are mature, verse 22 tells us that we will be servants of God, and at that time will be set free from sin. By becoming slaves to God, we are surrendering to Him, a mark of super-maturity...and the result is holiness (or the fullness of God) in this life, which we live now with a guarantee that we will live forever. (Kill the notion that the phrase “the result is eternal life” means that we must reach super-maturity to go to heaven. ALL believers will go to heaven, even immature and carnal ones. But this is a discussion for another day.) By being slaves to God, our benefit is His holiness, which comes to us through the functions of His grace.

We can offer our bodies as slaves to impurity, but Paul wants us to offer them instead as instruments of righteousness. This is a call to maturity, which will come only through the difficult process of spiritual growth. If we persist in our use of grace assets, we will some day reach a time of “surrender”, when we will be set free from sin. If we are unwilling to commit to the path of growth...if we are too consumed with ourselves, and do not want God, even though we are believers...we will never stop sin, and we will earn only defeat and spiritual deadness in our Christian lives. (v. 23) On the other hand, if we will turn to God and *want Him* with all our hearts...if we will genuinely *seek Him* from the inner core of ourselves...then we will overcome sin through His grace, with the result that we will not only *have* eternal life (v. 23), but we will *live* it right now.

Grace can prepare us and help us to live right. Titus 2:11-14 sums this up very well, saying this:

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Grace teaches us to say no. Can we do this without grace? No. Grace teaches how grace itself works. The object of grace is for us to conduct lives that are Spirit-controlled (correct interpretation of “self-controlled”), upright, and godly, and for us to be counted as those “eager to do what is good”. We can’t know how to become pure without the Spirit’s teaching, and we can’t stay pure without the empowerment of His grace. We depend on grace one hundred percent. We must not fail to go to the throne of grace, as many times each day as we must, to obtain mercy and to find grace to help us in our time of need.

D. CONFESSING OUR SINS

Falling into Carnality. When we think about carnality, or control of the sinful nature over our hearts and bodies, we tend to view this condition as consisting of large chunks of time: days, weeks, months, or longer. But how long does it take for us to drop off the spirituality wagon? It only takes a nanosecond, which is an unimaginably short measurement of time equal to one-billionth of a second. That’s how long it takes, perhaps less, to sin and switch from control by the Spirit to the control of the flesh. Once we sin, we enter a state of “deadness” or “being asleep”, when we have no proper spiritual capacity to do good and serve God. This is a time of non-productivity and greater sin, a time when faith is not operating and growth is not occurring. And this goes on until our sin-record is cleared.

If we stay in carnality, at some point we become blinded to our sins. We don’t see them or recognize them anymore. We cannot acknowledge what we cannot see, so we will plod along, blissfully but ignorantly, into further error and distance from God. Invisible sins don’t bother us, and we will not look for them, if we do not grasp this principle: We must treat and deal with sins, **EVEN IF WE CAN’T SEE THEM**. We know we cannot remove them ourselves, and that God is the only true judge of sin, so we must turn to Him for help in restoring our clean record.

The Removal of Sins. The removal of sins is God’s primary method for our maintaining a relationship with Him, including our *positional* relationship with Him at salvation, and our *conditional* relationship with Him during our Christian lives. This involves *faith* at salvation, and *confession* (an act of faith) afterward. Removal of sin is the application of mercy and grace to our position or condition, which results in regeneration for the first and restoration for the second. Removal of sin through the cross is God’s greatest plan and His greatest extension of grace to mankind. It solved His problem of dealing with His own justice, and enabled Him to adopt those who accept Him, thus freeing Him to deal with believers as His beloved children.

Sinful from Birth. We have grace, but we also have sinful natures, and the law of sin is always moving against us. We are born with wrong in our hearts, and we keep that tendency all our lives. Ps. 51:5 says, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” We received our sinful natures at conception, which means it is in our DNA. This did not begin with us, but is our plight. We are born with evil natures. The origin of sin among mankind was witnessed in the Garden, when Adam and Eve chose to walk away from God and exercise arrogant self-willfulness and independence. It is as though Satan injected Adam with his (Satan’s) own greatest defect...his pride...so that it be-

came a part of Adam's DNA. Since we inherit Adam's DNA, this also means we inherit his fallen nature, which gives us a tendency to sin and/or operate independently from God.

But, even though we receive another's "nature", we are still responsible for our own pride and wrongdoing. We must shoulder culpability for our own mistakes. It is a dangerous notion to rationalize away our sins, or to assume that we do not need to confess them. We must not assume that the sins we commit are already forgiven. As we have examined before in some detail, we are liable for our own sins as believers, even though our "permanent record" in heaven is already clean. It is our "current record" of sins that concerns us now as we are living on earth. The "permanent" record stays clear; the record in "time" becomes stained. The upshot is this: We must clear our "temporal" record in order for us to be clean, so we can qualify for fellowship with God and communion with the Holy Spirit. We can never ignore our need to maintain a clean slate through confession.

Denial of Sin. Jer. 2:32b with Jer. 2:35 gives us the following about not confessing our sins: "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'." It is never good to think or say, "I have not sinned." Job was one who refused to confess his sins after failing his third "test". At that time he said this: "I am innocent, but God denies me justice. Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound." (Job 34:5-6) But Elihu answered Job with this: "It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice." (Job 34:12) Elihu also told Job the following, which shows more of Job's refusal to confess:

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. (Job 33:8-11)

Elihu's simple response to Job's denial of his own sin was this: "But I tell you, in this you are not right." Righteous Elihu, who was speaking God's words in God's way at God's appointed time (as opposed to Job's three friends), let Job know that refusal to acknowledge sins is dangerous (see Job 33:19).

We see this concept again in Ez. 24:12-13, which says this:

It [Jew/believer] has frustrated all efforts [at cleansing]; its heavy deposit [accumulated sin] has not been removed, not even by fire. Now your impurity is lewdness. Because I tried to cleanse you but you would not be cleansed from your impurity, you will not be clean again until my wrath against you has subsided.

This "cleansing" is not about "cleaning up your act", or "striving" to do better. This is turning to God for cleansing and allowing Him to equip us for greater purity, which consists of products of HIS perfect self, plan, and grace...none of which come from our self-generated efforts. Without God's forgiveness and cleansing, things can only go downhill. Correction through discipline will surely await us.

Implications of Impurity. So what are the implications of impurity, as cited in the foregoing passage? For the answer to this question, we turn to the Word, citing verses which treat this topic, as follows:

- Rom. 1:24—“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.” Impurity leads to more impurity, and the cycle just keeps getting worse.
- 2 Cor. 12:21—“I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.” Paul was humbled when his teachings did not have the effect he wanted, as indicated by his audience’s participation in impure and immoral behavior, followed by their *refusal to repent*, which means their not confessing their sins. Paul was not so much concerned with their impurity, or upset with “many who have sinned”, as he was with those who had not *confessed* their sins, which is why his full statement reads, “many who have sinned earlier and HAVE NOT REPENTED”. Sin is bad; the only thing that’s worse is not confessing it.
- Rom. 6:19—“I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.” Impurity marks a state of carnality, whereas righteousness and holiness indicate the control of the Spirit. Whenever we are carnal (impure), we will be slaves to the sinful nature.
- Eph. 4:19—“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.” We see here again the pattern that impurity produces yet more impurity, which will persist until we are “purified”.
- Eph. 5:3—“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” What is the margin of error for sexual immorality, impurity, and greed? Zero. Why? Because sexual sins and greed, two prime examples of “bottomless sins”, are self-feeding and self-perpetuating. They start small and progressively get worse, until they reach a level of craven depravity.
- Col. 3:5—“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” The only *good* product of the sinful nature is a *dead* product of the sinful nature.

We must get the sequence right. We do not become spiritual by generating good works and avoiding sin. We generate good works and avoid sin because we become spiritual. The Holy Spirit produces righteousness (with love, joy, peace, etc.); the sinful nature produces “substitute goodness” and sin. We must get purified and presentable to God, so we can be filled with His power to make the patterns of our lives productive and pure.

Aspiring to Purity. We have looked at impurity now, and want to spend some time examining its opposite: purity. 2 Cor. 7:1 says, “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.” When we have a “reverence” for God, we are said to “fear the Lord”, which reflects mature faith produced by growth and a steady walk in the Spirit. Fear of the Lord leads to purity and holiness, because all techniques have been engaged, and grace and power are operating freely. When we reach “holiness”, purity will be in evidence.

We want to offer some verses dealing with purity, yet there are so many that—to do the topic justice—we need to compact our discussion into a “list” format. Here are some verses dealing with our call to “purity”:

- 2 Tim. 2:22—“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” The opposite of “fleeing evil” is “pursuing righteousness” which can only be done by those who practice all the techniques “out of a pure heart”. Pursuing all the outcomes of spirituality begins with God’s purification, which makes our hearts *pure*.
- Prov. 2:21-22—“For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.” The “land” depicts the place of fellowship and strength, which is cut off when wickedness occurs.
- 1 Tim. 5:22—“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.” Recognition and divine good will not occur when we participate in sins...unless we are purified from them through confession.
- 1 Thess. 3:13 and 4:1—“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. Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.” When God strengthens our hearts, and we become blameless through His power, we will live in a way that pleases Him.
- 1 Thess. 4:3-6—“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.” “Sanctified” means “purified”. It is God’s will that we be cleansed, because if we are not, we will live like unbelievers, commit numerous acts of “unrighteousness” (e.g., sexual immorality), and be in line for discipline.
- 1 John 3:3—“Everyone who has this hope in him [the hope to see Jesus] purifies himself, just as he [God] is pure.” We have learned that we can’t purify ourselves to the level of God’s purity; we are purified, rather, *by* God, who has given us His system for purification.

“Purifying self” refers to following God’s methods to bring about our purity.

So where does such purity come from? The answer is simple, and you already know it: from God. Heb. 1:3b ascertains this source, saying, “After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Purification is the work of God through His Son, a work that was completed, enabling Jesus Christ, as God-man, to sit down. This purification is available to us in ways specified in Scripture, i.e., through faith at salvation and by confession thereafter. But it is always God that does the purifying.

1 Pet. 1:22 adds, “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.” This verse suggests fellowship, not salvation, because the next verse says of these readers of Paul’s letter: “For you have [already] been born again...” They have “purified themselves” by obeying the truth, which called for confession and other techniques, leading to “sincere love”. This verse actually says they “purified their souls”, which shows that this is inner cleansing performed by God. The result is unpretended love, a fruit of the Spirit.

Getting Right to Stay Right. Is. 32:8 says, “But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands.” Nobility is attained by our relationship and fellowship with God. When we are spiritual, we make spiritual plans, and then we are able to stand by our deeds, because they are produced by the Holy Spirit. This is our application of this verse, which suggests privileges that we have now that were not actually available for the original audience of this passage (believers in the Old Testament). We have the advantage now of the indwelling Spirit by which we can experience nobility and achieve noble deeds. Righteous conditions bring righteousness. Of this Titus 1:15-16 says the following:

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. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Those who are “corrupted and do not believe” obviously applies to unbelievers. But this can also be true of believers. Believers can be corrupt and walk without faith. Only believers who are *existing* in a state of purity will *display* purity. Those who have not been purified are “detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good,” whether they are unbelievers or believers. It seems clear that, for us to ACT PURE, we must first BE PURE.

Confession vs. Improved Behavior. Most Christian messages nowadays call for us to do more and be better. We are to generate efforts that will please God and bring His blessings. But we can strain and sacrifice all we want...if we are not following God’s grace patterns and methods, our efforts will not be accepted by God. Lev. 22:29 says, “When you sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf.” Transposing this verse regarding unacceptable OT sacrifices, we can apply this today as a caution against making personal sacrifices of time, effort, and money in ways that do not please God.

Lack of Confession Leads to Greater Sin. So we see in the foregoing that—on one hand, we

want to please God OUR way (legalism)—while on the other hand, there is a tendency for us to ignore God and follow a sinful path that leads to degradation and decadence (sin). Ps. 36:1-4 tells us about such a condition:

An oracle is within my heart [David's heart] concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his [the wicked man's] eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.

When someone who was previously “wise” and “doing good”, stops attending his faith and wisdom and righteousness, a loss of fellowship has obviously occurred. This is not the time for this person to proceed with arrogance and assume that he has done well. There are bad things he has done that need to be recognized and acknowledged before God. So what does he do next, if he does not detect and change his mind about the sins he has committed? According to the foregoing passage, he continues to plot evil and move toward greater carnality.

Eph. 5:11 has some good advice for dealing with sins that are accumulating: “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” Who does he expose his “deeds of darkness” to? Does he show up on the courthouse steps to pronounce his failings? Or does he stand in church on Sunday morning to display his wickedness? Can you imagine what a mess Sunday church would be if ALL believers publically confessed their sins at that time...I mean, REALLY confessed...leaving out no lurid detail in the full account of each corrupt or shameful act? This is not what it means to “expose” our sins. Nor is this some kind of “morality” detective, scouting out the sins of other believers. No. This exposure is of one's own failings, which are laid out before God the Father, with no secrets kept from Him. Actually, He knows about them already, even before we commit them; He just wants us to agree with Him about our sins, and hate them as He does. When we expose our wrongs to Him, that is confession, and that is when He will forgive them.

Sequence and Consequence. Paul cited self-examination as a prerequisite to the intake of the Lord's Supper, and then extended this principle, as we see in 1 Cor. 11:27-32:

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Short analysis: This is Paul's reference to confession, in which he begins with the need for being clean before participating in “spiritual” activities. The first thing to do is “examine” oneself. And what happens with self-examination? Exposure of sins. And what happens when we don't confess before we en-

gage in “spiritual” events? We can’t do it right; for example, “eating and drinking” at “communion” without recognizing its purpose. And the result of not doing it right is discipline (weakness/sickness). The missing component is the recognition and acknowledgement of our sins. We must “judge” ourselves, so we won’t be “judged”. Our judgment is discipline, not eternal condemnation, which befalls the unsaved. If we confess, we avoid discipline.

Ps. 32:3-4 gives another “confess or else” caution, as follows:

When I kept silent [in context, “did not confess”], my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” If we do not confess, discipline is likely. We must understand that CONFES-
SION IS ALWAYS FIRST when it comes to spiritual activities! It is the gate to fellowship and ALL spiritual pursuits; without it, we will not move an inch. The sequence must be clear: Step one is confession. (For a good synopsis on 1 John 1, see *Bible Basics for Christian Living: Essential Foundations*, pp. 47-49.)

The sequence is for us to examine ourselves, admit the sins we find, and experience God’s cleansing, followed by spiritual provision which God makes available to the “clean”. Lam. 3:40-50 gives a good picture of this process; take time to read this passage, as follows:

Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: “We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven [because we have not confessed]. You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us; you have slain without pity. You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through. You have made us scum and refuse among the nations. All our enemies have opened their mouths wide against us. We have suffered terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction.” Streams of tears flow from my [Jeremiah’s] eyes because my people are destroyed. My eyes flow unceasingly, without relief, until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees.

If God looks down and sees unconfessed sin, there will be no relief, but if He sees our sins laid out for His treatment, He will forgive. Continuing the passage just given, we see the following in verses 55-56: “I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: ‘Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.’ You came near when I called you, and you said, ‘Do not fear.’” The clear implication is that self-examination and confession have taken place and relief has been given. So this is how it works: Confess, which leads to forgiveness, which leads to relief. That is the sequence.

Examples of Confession in Psalms. We see the following examples of confession in the book of Psalms:

Ps. 41:4—I said, “O Lord, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.”

Ps. 66:16-20—Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for

me. I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

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.

Ps. 51:1-4—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.

Examples of confession can be seen throughout Scripture, yet this is one of the most neglected doctrines in all of Christendom. Surely, Satan wants us to ignore this technique. (For a list of some sixty-two verses on confession, see *Bible Basics on Living in the Power of God’s Word: Vol. 2, Pathway to Wisdom*, p. 76.)

Jesus is Our Advocate. In his first epistle, John said, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1). This verse immediately follows John’s citation of confession as the way to have sins forgiven and removed. God does not want us to sin, obviously, but when we do, it pleases Him for us to bring our sins to Him. In 1 John 2:1, just cited, we are getting into the mechanics of restoration. Here is the drill: We confess, at which time Jesus turns to the Father and presents our case for dismissal, giving as Exhibit A the blood that He shed on the cross to obliterate our sins. Case closed. God forgives us. Forgiveness after confession is automatic and complete...because our lawyer is the Creator of the universe Himself...Jesus Christ.

But what if we do not confess? Is Jesus still pleading our case before God? I believe not, and I will show why I think that. In Matt. 10:33, we see that Jesus indicated that He would not acknowledge those who do not acknowledge Him. He actually says He will “deny” those who deny Him. (The NIV incorrectly translates the Greek word “*arneomai*” as “disown”, which would suggest we would no longer be the children of God. But Thayer gives the correct etymology of this word, in my opinion, defining it and translating it as the English word “deny”, suggesting a temporary loss of privilege or refusal of permission to acquire an asset.)

How do we know this verse is not referring to unbelievers, who will be “denied” at the judgment of the Great White Throne? 2 Tim. 2:12-13 answers this question for us, saying this:

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him [implied: “*because we died with him*”], we will also live with him [these are believers!]; if we endure, we [believers] will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”

We “died with him” at salvation, and now, as saved people, we are to *endure*. If we endure, we will have

rewards and key positions in Christ's kingdom in the Millennium. As believers, we have eternal life, no matter how poorly we have lived the Christian life, but we will lose rewards that we could have had.

Notice the word "disown" in the last half of verse 12. Once again, this translation misses the mark; it should read, "deny". If we deny him, we will lose the privileges of "more grace", which we could have had if we would have remained in fellowship with God. But, even though we may be out of sorts at any particular time, our eternal position is secure and safe, no matter what our failures. This is because God is faithful, even when we are not. But to our point: The term "deny" in Matt. 10:33, and in this passage, refers to a *believer* who is rejecting God and mercy and grace, and is living with unforgiven sins on his record. So when do we deny Christ, with the result that He will deny us? It is whenever we sin, or any time we trust in ourselves or the world for righteousness and security.

The upshot of all this is that Jesus Christ will not represent us before the Father, if we are out of fellowship and thus not acknowledging or trusting Him. This means that, when we sin, we have no defense until we apply mercy to the sin by confessing it, thus enabling grace operations to kick in for us once again. When we fulfill 1 John 1:9 by confessing our sins to the Father, we can count on the promise of our defense in 1 John 2:1. We will have a friend at the Judge's table.

E. ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF CONFESSION

Different Ways to Confess. My analysis of confession as being potentially more than just naming sins drives those crazy who want confession to be ONLY a mental citation and/or a vocalized taxonomy of identified sins. Confession can be a simple acknowledgement of sins, for sure. All we have to do is NAME them. But the implications of confession are much broader. The key variable in any kind of confession is the condition of the HEART. If the heart reflects humility and a true change of mind about the sins that we have committed, forgiveness will be forthcoming...because *God is looking at the heart!*

For a list and summary of alternative forms of confession, please see *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*, pp. 44-47. What you will see there are variations on naming our sins, such as asking for forgiveness, pleas for forgiveness, being sorry or contrite for sins, turning away from evil, forsaking evil, lifting up our soul to God, showing humility, repentance, and generic naming of sins. Some of these may seem a little "lightweight" to do the job of confession leading to forgiveness, but seen in context, they are supportable, because inherent in each of these is a heart that is agreeing with God about the sin(s).

We want to offer just a few scriptures that show some of these alternative forms of confession at work. These strengthen our conclusion that God looks at the heart and honors genuine contrition. (Many more verses are given in *Bible Basics for Living*, cited immediately above).

- Is. 57:15—"For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'." The terms "contrite" and "lowly in spirit" always have to do with those who are coming to God with

sin in their hands. Being humble and sorry for one's sins is an alternative form of confession.

- Is. 66:2—“Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came in to being?’ declares the Lord. This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” Being esteemed by God is higher than being loved by God. More than just loving us, He is actually *pleased* with us and *proud* of us when we are contrite before Him.
- Is. 64:6—“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” This is a suitable confession, extended in verse 9, “Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people.” God notices the sins of believers, and it is appropriate for us to seek pardon for the sins we have committed. If we are going to God with the trash of our sins, we’re going to the right place...He will dispose of them.

When we approach God, what is the first thing He wants to see? Our sins. Does He want to see how many cups of cold water we have given, or how well we have behaved in some area of strength, or even how much we have loved and served? No. He wants to see the sins we have tucked away in our pockets. Until we empty those pockets and show God what we have done, anything else we do means absolutely NOTHING. Step 1 in approaching God is this: Empty your pockets! Show your sins to God in the best way you know how, and—if you keep doing this, even if you don’t do it “perfectly”—you will succeed, because your heart is repenting and God will see this...and He will honor it.

F. AFTER WE CONFESS

Many Things are Renewed After Confession. Things that take place after confession are compelling and numerous. We want to delineate a few of them here, so that we can see the advantages we have, just by confessing our sins. Keep in mind that carnality is but one sinful-heart-beat away, and that confession will need to be repeated over and over and over, especially while we are in the beginning and intermediate stages of maturity.

Routinely, we get cleansed, get dirty, get cleansed again, get dirty again, and the beat goes on. But does God get tired or feel irritated at seeing us haul our sins in to Him for processing...time after time? No. His mercy and grace are infinite. He welcomes...in fact, insists on...our bringing our mistakes to Him. This “delights” Him! It is when we hide them, guard them, and hang on to them that we draw His displeasure and get into trouble.

Restoration. The first thing we get when we confess is restoration. This means the control of the Holy Spirit is restored and we are back in fellowship. (We will say more about the implications of this later in this sub-section.) In 1 Sam. 15:23-31, we see an account of Saul’s confession of his sins of arrogance, divination, idolatry, and rejection of God’s Word...and the results of his admitting them. In v. 24b, Saul said, “I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your [Samuel’s] instructions.” Saul wants his sins forgiven so he can return to his “worship of the Lord” (v. 25). He repeats the process in

verse 30, and finally we see Saul's restoration to fellowship (which did not necessarily include the control of the Spirit in those days) and to an ability to worship the Lord once more (v. 31). It was too late to save his kingship, but his most important status was reclaimed...his relationship with His heavenly Father. Grace prevailed in the life of Saul after all.

Service. Another thing that is restored when we confess is our ability to serve God. When forgiveness comes and God's grace is once more in full operation in our hearts and lives, then we can return to service. No matter what we have done, we can...and must...return to service, meaning the operation of our gifts. We see many cases of great and productive purveyors of God's truths who come under great attack and fall into carnality. Yet many of these return to service, and bear fruit, even though their sins were great. This is what God wants us to do. No matter how serious or public our errors, we must return to service as quickly as we can. This is what grace promotes. Is there shame? Probably, but it will not last forever. Grace is sufficient for full restoration, when we can forget what is behind and look forward to further service.

This is what is called for in 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." So what should we do when we have sinned? Go hide in shame? Or perhaps continue in the same pattern of sin? No! We are to admit our "evil" and then keep on turning toward the Lord...staying in service and carrying on AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED! This is what God expects. When we are restored with Him, He will work out any details of whatever mess we have made, but one thing is certain: We are clear with Him, so we can worship Him and serve Him...with all our hearts. Sins will hinder us, but they cannot stop us, if we take them to God.

This is summarized in verse 24 (still in 1 Sam. 12): "But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you." This means we should walk by fear, or faith, and serve God consistently...once again, with all our heart. And "consider what he has done for you". Does this mean we should recall the new car or a promotion or better health that we might associate with God's blessings? No. What he has done that is so wonderful is sacrificing His Son for us so that we can have eternal life with Him, and even today we can be forgiven for our failures as saved people, no matter how horrible or despicable or foul they may be. No sin is too great for God to forgive. NO SIN!

A Forward Look. Another thing that comes after confession is the ability to look forward, rather than back. Have you noticed how hard it is to move backwards...it is impossible not to stumble and fall at some point, because we can't see where we are going. The grace apparatus of confession gives us the assurance that forgiveness has been given, and that we need not look back. We see a solid promise of this in Prov. 28:13, which says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." When we find mercy and experience forgiveness, there is nothing more to do or think about. We can go forward. God has removed our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). Confess it and forget it. Confess it and move on.

Return to Fellowship. We are also returned to fellowship through confession, so we will, as we

have seen repeatedly, be filled with the Spirit at that point. A perfect portrayal of restoration to fellowship is seen in Ez. 11:17-20, which we will take time to quote here:

Therefore say: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again. They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. 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. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

When we confess and are restored, we are returned to fellowship and sin is, for the moment, overruled. We will have a renewed spirit, our heart will be softened toward God and His truth, and we will experience God as OUR God.

Renewed Purity. When we confess and experience restoration, we are also given a renewed purity. Ps. 18:20-29 talks about our purity after we are returned to fellowship, when we can say, “The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me” (v. 20). Then notice in verse 29 how we can have and produce this righteousness: “With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.” Anything is possible when we are purified, and—applied to us in this Age—when the driving force for our behavior is the Holy Spirit.

Ability to Grow. We also grow after confession...or, at least, have the capacity to grow. I Ki. 8:35-36 describes our growth opportunity in fellowship as follows:

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

According to this passage, what takes place after confession? Teaching. And those who are restored can learn “the right way to live”. And as we learn, what happens? We grow. The rain represents prosperity in our hearts as we grow in grace and knowledge. That is our privilege as spirit-filled believers.

We see again the prospect for growth after confession in Ps. 119:25-32. This passage connects forgiveness with an understanding of God’s truth. When we confess, we have the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, and hearts that are prepared to receive His truth. Verse 25-27 illustrate this principle, as follows:

I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word. I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

Answers from God. When we “recount our ways”, or confess, He will “answer us”, meaning He will

answer confession with forgiveness and cleansing. Then we will be equipped to understand His Word and will walk in awe at His power (“meditate on His wonders”).

Effective Prayer. After we have been restored, we can also pray. We saw this renewed privilege earlier in this book, and merely remind ourselves here that prayer is a product of restoration. Ps. 4:3 shows us who gets his prayers answered, saying, “Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him.” The “godly” are those who are in fellowship, who are right with the Lord...and clean. These are the ones who will be heard when they pray. The other side of the coin is that those who are not right with the Lord, who are “ungodly”, will not be heard. The moral of this story is that we **MUST** make sure we confess **BEFORE** we pray.

Production. When we are in fellowship, we can also be “productive”, referring to the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, operation of our gifts, and so on. Micah 8:*b* says, “Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.” This is the result of sin, but a growing believer will know that—even after he has failed, or *while* he is failing—forgiveness can happen. This assurance serves to bring focus back to God and gives the impetus to confess the sin and leave it behind.

Then look at what verse 9 adds (still in Micah 7): “Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord’s wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.” When we acknowledge our sins, the Lord will plead our case, be our light to which we will be brought close, and show us His righteousness. I believe this righteousness is the fruit we will bear when we are operating in the Spirit’s power. God’s righteousness will be seen emanating from us.

Justification. When we confess, we are justified. So the question arises: Are we not already justified at salvation? Yes. But that justification refers to our eternal position, not our temporal condition. The justification that is required while we are living is designed to remove impediments to our fellowship with God. So we must get regular “updates” on our justification, to keep it current. If sin is showing on our record, we are living as unjustified, unforgiven, and unspiritual believers. Gal. 2:15-16 helps us grasp this truth, as follows:

We who are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners” know that a man is not justified [at salvation] by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we [believers] too, have put our faith in Christ that we may be justified [in life] by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

We see two applications of faith: faith at salvation, and faith for living. But the faith for living will not work if we are not cleansed through confession. Why? Because we will be controlled by the sinful nature, and faith cannot be generated by the flesh. After confession, faith is renewed and a state of justification can be sustained by faith. This is done only by faith, not by something that we *do*. When we exhibit faith toward His cleansing, accept the truth of His Word, and receive the benefits of His mercy and grace, we will live in His “justice”. After all, it is God who justifies, and—as 1 John 1:9 says, He is

“just” in forgiving our sins, which means His justice has been satisfied and He is free to “justify” the penitent believer.

Control of the Spirit. As we have declared, the filling of the Spirit also takes place at the time of genuine confession. Eph. 5:18 commands us to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit, and it is clear that He will not force His control on us without our invitation. And no matter how much we want Him to help us with our Christian living, He will not be able to do so if sin is present in our hearts. We cannot be controlled by the Spirit if we have not confessed. By citing our sins, we are inviting Him to control us, recognizing that we have been unable to produce the “good” and avoid the “bad” on our own. We need Him.

Opportunity to Walk in the Spirit. After confession, faith sustains fellowship, commensurate with our growth. And while we are in fellowship, faith can grow. We must not neglect either our need to confess, or the need to grow after we have confessed. Confession is the gateway to the filling of the Spirit; faith is the walk-through. Confession is the beginning; faith is the follow-up. Confession sets the stage; faith is the actor. Confession clears the trail; faith moves us along. When we learn to walk by the Spirit...by walking by faith...we will be accelerating our progress toward a maturity which will enable us to serve the Lord without reservation and without wavering, a time when we will be pure, strengthened, and full of faith.

Final Thoughts on Confession. When we confess and move back into service, it is because we have grasped the grace methods that unlock the power of God. We understand the following:

Humility and confession “validate” God, reflecting a belief that He is there and that He is God...knowing that He will reward us with the truth we are seeking and give us the maturity we crave. Refusal to confess is a simple denial of God’s reality and grace, proclaiming that God is not valid and is therefore of no consequence. When we do this, we extol our own self-importance and pursue our own self-justification, thus refusing the justification offered by God. Elihu became very angry with Job for “justifying himself rather than God” (Job 32:2b). On the other hand, when we confess, we are saying to God, “Yes, you are the one who lives, and forgives...the one who justifies.” We must acknowledge the vast difference between the infinity of God and the infinitesimal smallness of man. We must surrender our arrogance, and let God be God. We must admit our helplessness to be “godlike”, and appeal to Him to be the God He is...in us. Stand down, O man. You are not God.

My Prayer of Confession. If confessing sins is problematic for you, a mnemonic device may help. My prayer of confession is shown in Appendix F.

Chapter 5: Defeating Sin

In this chapter...

Section A. The Killing of Sin

Section B. The Role of the Holy Spirit

Section C. The Impact of the Fullness of God

Section D. Victory through Surrender

A. THE KILLING OF SIN

Introduction. What tall orders we have...to kill sin. Defeat it. Stop it. Mortify it. We have already suggested that we can't, haven't we? But this needs more elaboration. Sin is the biggest problem that God ever encountered (as far as we know), and is the biggest problem facing mankind in all of human history. We know that the power of sin is not infinite; it is finite. But it is "supernatural" in origin and nature, and well beyond the scope of our resources to conquer it. So anything we say about killing sin must be centered on ways to find and use assets beyond our own, to fight a force that far exceeds our ability to fight.

We have looked at surviving sin and at clearing our sin record. But we want more. We want to do more than just "cope" with sin at some minimal level. And mercy and forgiveness alone will not hold our heads above the sin tsunami. These *prepare* us to be equipped, but we need more. When we get forgiveness, we are at crossroads; we can move toward God, or back toward sin. Our *preparation* will determine our direction. But until we are *fully equipped*—EMPOWERED—to BEAT sin...DEFEAT it...KILL it...it will easily pull us back into patterns of sin and rebellion. This is why sin must be completely disabled. Full destruction is what we seek! We want to swim; not just stay afloat! And doing that certainly requires more than we have learned so far. After forgiveness, there is much yet to do to beat sin.

When the Bible talks about sin, it presents two major areas of consideration: 1) sin's clearance, which eliminates past sins, and 2) sin's stoppage, which purports to prevent its perpetuation. We have looked at *clearance*, which occurs first through faith at salvation, and then continues through confession during the Christian life. These make us eligible for more, which is what we will need to become enabled to STOP this enemy.

Material Resources Cited. We drew from John Owen earlier in this book in our discussion of the "law of sin". Once again, we want to draw from his work to inform us regarding the "killing of sin". To reconcile what you will see as Owen's views with our views is difficult. Permit some rambling as we work through the nuances of "killing sin" in this section. To help us conceptualize Owen's message, we turn to John Thune, an Omaha pastor, who provided an excellent outline of John Owen's *Mortification of Sin*. We will rely extensively on Thune's outline in our discussion of the killing of sin. All references to and quotes from John Owen regarding this topic can be found in Thune's meaty, twelve-page outline. (Endnote 2)

Mortification of Sin. Thune stated this: "To mortify sin is not to utterly kill it, root it out, and destroy it." He then quotes Owen directly, saying, "It is true that this is what is aimed at; but this is not in this life to be accomplished." Thune then adds, "You should desire and aim at sin's utter destruction, while remembering that such victory will not be had in yourself, but only when you are presented complete in Christ." What is concluded is apparently that the actual killing of sin is not going to happen, yet Owen elsewhere repeatedly uses the term "mortify" to indicate that it can. He seems to be referring to the killing of the *practice* of sin, while admitting that the *principle* of sin will never die com-

pletely. I depart slightly from Owen in that regard, in that I believe the “practice” of sin will never be completely annihilated, simply because the “principle” of sin never stops operating. My application of mortification is that it entails a “kill-it-for-now” strategy, based on our spiritual capacity to engage grace assets to do this.

I believe sin will dominate believers most of the time, unless we reach super-maturity and total surrender, which is rare. Even then, I do not believe Scripture supports the absolute extinction of the practice of sin, for as long as we are alive. There are principles of *victory* over sin, the “dead-to-sin” notion, but we must understand that only super-mature believers will be equipped to apply these principles completely. We will see more about this later in this chapter.

We must distinguish at this point the *destiny* of sin vs. the current *operation* of sin. Sin will *ultimately* be wiped out in our lives, either when we die and join the Lord, or when Jesus Christ returns to collect His saints. Either way, some day sin will no longer touch us, and we will be completely free from it. But while our feet are on the ground, it will plague us and follow us around like a bad penny. It will trick us and entice us and constrain us beyond our limits. We will continue the “practice” of sin as an extension of our humanity...because we are earth-bound humans. Our position seems almost paradoxical...kill sin...but we can’t kill sin. Some of our statements seem almost contradictory. It is difficult to separate. Ultimately, we CANNOT kill it. But we are going to show just how close we can come to wiping it out of our lives by becoming committed to God, as a result of our fiercely clinging to His growth plan.

So...we will “practice” sin (1 John 1:8 and 10). And, in my view, it will control us most of the time. It is unfortunate that 99% of Christians miss this. It is only among those who recognize sin’s power, and who have learned *how much of God’s involvement* it will take to withstand it, that we see those who have a shot at overcoming it. Generally, sin is able to operate freely because it is underestimated.

Based on our expressed view, the practice of sin will be conducted throughout our lives. Our objective is to minimize the work of sin by maximizing the provisions of grace, which give us hope for protection from evil. Because there is hope, we must not be discouraged by setbacks. John wrote the verses cited above from 1 John 1, in which he says we WILL sin; yet he followed them immediately with 1 John 2, which he began with, “I write this to you so that you will not sin” (v. 1). So we are asked *not to do* what we *cannot stop doing*. Our challenge is to find out how this impossible task can be done.

Owen spent much of the latter part of his life trying to advance the notion that mortification could be done (I disagree slightly), yet he stated that this would not be easy. I agree that achieving control of sin is the hardest thing we will ever do. We will see again and again that the grade and slope of this uphill battle against sin becomes increasingly steep as we grow. Sin is powerful and active, and can actually get stronger, given the opportunity. Here are some verses corroborating the power of sin:

- Rom. 7:23—...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.

- Gal. 5:17—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.
- James 1:14—...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.
- Heb. 12:1—Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Sin never lets up, which is why Owen called for “daily mortification”, saying, “...yet sin doth so remain, so act, and so work in the best of believers, while they live in this world, that the constant daily mortification of it is all their days incumbent upon them.” Thune cautions us on what can happen if we do not mortify sin, saying, “Sin will bring forth great, scandalous, soul destroying sins,” citing Gal. 5:19-21, which he uses to build on the following point from Owen: “Sin aims always at the utmost.” I fully agree that sin is always out to destroy us, by attacking any modicum of faith in our hearts; he will stop at nothing to incinerate it. This destroyer must be stopped!

Note: Any points of departure from Owen are inconsequential. The various levels of “killing” sin, pinpointing exactly how far it is POSSIBLE to go in laying it to rest, is not our greatest concern. Our singular goal is to see how far EACH ONE OF US can go in his/her personal quest to control sin. And if Owen is right and we can, indeed, kill it completely...all the better. We want to move now in that direction by seeing our most serious Bible-based recommendations for defeating sin.

Fight or Flight. There are many things that can be done to combat evil, and we will explore all methods and techniques at our disposal to overcome it in all its forms, but sometimes a good run is better than a bad stand. There comes a time when the best thing for us to do is to take flight. We see several references to “fleeing sin” in Scripture. 1 Cor. 10:14, tells us, “Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.” 1 Tim. 6 cites a variety of sins, especially the love of money, and in verse 11 exhorts, “But you, man of God, flee from all this [sin], and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.” 2 Tim. 2:22 backs this up, saying, “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Notice the fellowship implications in fleeing (“faith”, “love”, “peace”). Fleeing and fellowship are concomitant. Without fellowship, there will be no flight.

A viable alternative to fleeing is standing and resisting. James 4:7 tells us to “resist the devil”, saying, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Sounds easy, but wait a minute...we believe, and will demonstrate, that fulfillment of this passage applies, not only to believers in fellowship, but to *super-mature* believers...those who have surrendered to God. These will operate in a different environment from those of us still struggling in the “intermediate” growth phase. Such a believer will have new privileges that are not available to beginners or intermediate believers.

We cannot consistently “resist” until we have reached an advanced level of maturity. It seems that intermediate believers can flee, if they are in fellowship. But only advanced believers can resist.

Fleeing, one of many techniques, is for those who do not have the resources to *resist* sin, and are limited to intermittent fellowship. The problem we must be aware of is this: As we grow, we run faster away from sin, but sin picks up speed, as well. This is why we cannot slow down. This is also what makes growth so difficult. Any commitment to spirituality and maturity will be met with increased temptation, as we have seen before. But we must continue to pursue God and His righteousness, and stay in fellowship, so we can continue to increase our speed away from sin. Only by persevering in our run away from evil can we ever have a chance to grow into maturity. If we will stick with this plan, we will eventually have sufficient faith to enable complete reliance on the Holy Spirit, so that He can stand between us and sin. In the meantime, if you see sin coming, confess, pray, and move away!

Wanting God. If we really want to stop sinning, and we keep on growing and growing, God will eventually weaken the power of sin. But it will not come easily, nor will it stop or even slow down, just because we want it to. There is a condition that forms the underpinning of our entire spiritual health and advancement, and that is this: We must WANT GOD...FIRST...AND ONLY...because it is only by Him that we can be fortified against sin.

If maturity can really happen in the lives of believers, and the Bible says that it can, then we must throw every wish, hope, dream, aspiration, and desire within us into the pursuit of growth. We must *want* God, *seek* His kingdom, *pursue* His righteousness, and *thirst* after Him. We must crave for Him above fame, fortune, family, and self-fulfillment. If He is merely tossed into the “mix” of our lives as an add-on or adjunctive feature, then we will not mature and we will be slaves to sin...and friends of the world...for as long as we live. But when we truly want Him, all else will become secondary, and though we face foes who were once friends, and strangers who were once family, our desire for God overshadows all...and endures. When we want only God, we will grow, and—at some point—we will be victorious over sin. Sin won’t be completely dead when this happens, but it will be severely diminished.

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.

Thune drew some points from Owen regarding this topic, saying, “A due apprehension of God’s greatness, and of our infinite distance from him, shall fill our souls with a holy fear of him, so as to keep lust from thriving.” When we want God, and realize who God is, we will be awed at His mercy, grace, love, compassion, and patience, and we will want more of Him, which will create an aversion to evil. If evil is persisting, it is because we have not yet wanted God enough to prevent it. Prov. 16:6b tells us

that awe of God averts sin, saying, “through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.” Fear of the Lord connotes a fixation on God, and an awe at what our spirits witness in Him. With mature faith and complete reverence for God, evil can be thwarted.

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.

Faith as a Deterrent. Thune gives us a summary of Owen’s views on the place of “faith in Christ as a deterrent to sin”, and tells us how this is done. Here, in part, is what Thune provided on this in his outline, with my comments appended:

- “By faith, fill your soul with the consideration of the fullness that is in Jesus. In Him you are provided with all you need for the work of killing sin.” We will see more about the “fullness” of Christ and of God later in this chapter. For now, we see the importance of faith.
- “Jesus says, ‘Without me you can do nothing’ (John 15:5); mortification of sin is a work of grace, and he has promised to give us grace out of his fullness of grace (John 1:16).” We are dependent on grace for fullness and the deterrence of sin.
- “Consider Christ’s mercifulness, tenderness, and kindness as our Great High Priest. He pities us in our distress” (Heb. 4:15-16). It is our awareness of God’s great love for us that motivates us to draw nearer to Him. Once we are close to God, our resistance to sin will come through knowledge of His compelling grace.
- “Expecting Christ [in the form of His Spirit] to help us in our fight against sin has two eminent advantages:
 - ◊ It moves him to assist us quickly, for he is pleased with faith.
 - ◊ It engages our heart to be diligent about using the means that Christ uses to communicate himself to our souls (prayer, Scripture).” This connects our resistance to sin with the use of grace techniques and assets to strengthen our faith through spiritual interaction with Him.

Thune then quoted Owen, in conclusion, “Christ by his death destroying the works of the devil, procuring the Spirit for us, hath so killed sin, as to its reign in believers, that it shall not obtain its end and dominion.” There is hope in the cross and the access it gives to the Spirit; this is what Owen is saying. The Spirit is the power that will beat sin.

The Holy Spirit Strengthens Against Sin. Owen cited the role of the Holy Spirit as an agent in defeating sin. We have, of course, studied this before. It is repeated here, first of all for emphasis, and

secondly because the efficacy of the Spirit was emphasized by Owen. Once again, we present what Thune concluded from Owen. Thune introduced the points he gleaned by saying, “Remember that this whole work of mortifying sin is effected, carried on, accomplished by the power of the Spirit, in all its parts and degrees.” Then he elaborated, as follows:

- The Spirit alone convinces the heart of the evil and guilt and danger of the sin to be mortified. And this is the first thing the Spirit does in order to move us to mortification: convince our soul of the evil of it. [I am convinced that the Holy Spirit calls attention to our sins, so we can confess them. This works, unless we become insensitive to the still, small voice of the Spirit.]
- The Spirit alone reveals to us the fullness of Christ for our relief” (1 Cor. 2:8).
- The Spirit alone establishes an expectation of relief [to be obtained] from Christ” (2 Cor. 1:21).
- The Spirit alone brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power; for by the Spirit we are baptized into the death of Christ.
- The Spirit is the author and finisher of our sanctification; He gives us grace to strive for holiness.
- The Spirit supports and empowers our appeals to God (Rom. 8:26).

Why is this not emphasized more by pastors and teachers? We see clearly in Owen’s writings, as outlined by Thune, the might of the Spirit...the incomparable power He wields...which, when we engage it through growth and faith, becomes our answer to sin. We are learning this: The ability to say “no”, when the flush and heat of sin are really turned up, will not be our own; it can come only from God. And no matter how much sin increases to match our growth, God is always bigger. Our task is to stay connected with the power He offers, and to continue growing so that we are more plugged in to this power than we are the power of sin.

Being Moral. 1 Cor. 6:13-20 gives a good treatise on morality, citing *sexual immorality* as a common form of departure from moral standards. We will refrain from quoting the entire passage, and will, instead, cite key points in it. Verse 13 tells us that the body is meant for the Lord. What does this mean? It means that our bodies are the “temple”, or dwelling place, of God on the earth. Verse 15 queries, as follows:

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 he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Verse 19 continues this thought by saying, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” The point is that our bodies are dwelling places for God himself, so how can we take the temple of God into activities that God prohibits? We

are told to “honor God with our bodies” (v. 20). We dishonor our bodies, and thus God, when we engage in sexual immorality. We virtually “sin against our own bodies” (v. 18), which means that we sin against the presence of God, which is housed in our bodies.

Sexual immorality is, of course, not the only sin against God, but it is a perfect illustration of how the holiness of God is dishonored and offended when we sin. He is in us...in our spirits (v. 17), and in our bodies (v. 18)...so how can we ignore Him and proceed so handily into sin? How can we violate His standards, when He is right there, listening to every word we say and every move we make (not only that, elect and fallen angels are also watching...specifically to see what we do)? The answer is this: We do it with ease. We are simply NOT “moral” creatures. This is because we have an “immoral” nature. It is the easiest thing in the world for us to depart from moral proscriptions and enter into decadence and depravity. It is “natural” for us.

We have seen, time and again, the futility of self-effort when it comes to avoiding thoughts, actions, and speech that offend God, and that separate us from fellowship with Him. Attempts at morality are based on an arrogant notion that we can be good, and that we can beat temptations to become immoral. The call to morality is high-sounding and persuasive, but it is actually a call to failure. When we respond to the message of morality, we are surrendering to our own fleshly propensity for self-sufficiency. Trying and vowing and agonizing in dark closets will not yield the morality that is commanded for us. Our biggest test is whether we will energize ourselves toward moral compliance, OR toward growth and spirituality that will actually bring about morality. Moral behavior is the product of a spiritual condition, and without the Holy Spirit, attempts at morality are simply practices of legalism.

So we see that sin, which is seen in this part of our discussion as immorality, will not be killed through efforts at self-improvement, even though we have God’s presence within us, which should remind us to cling to moral principles. But learning all the moral principles in the Bible, memorizing all the forbidden actions, knowing what is wrong...is simply not enough. We must know the sin taxonomy, of course, so we can know when we err...and so we will know what to confess. But we can never know enough or be determined enough to stay moral...if we do not follow the steps to *divine empowerment for good*. Throw your morality checklist away. It will not help you.

(Much) More on Killing Sin. If trying to be moral will not disrupt sin, what will? What is it that will set us free? What can we learn that will solve the sin problem? If you are not maturing, you are probably not so concerned about this. But when you start maturing, and experience the power of “increased” sin, your awareness of this power will sharpen, and you will understand better why we are conducting this study. We could stop now and know enough to cope, but we still need more. We want to breathe the clean air of unadulterated spirituality, rather than choke on the polluted air of sin.

Have this in mind: With more understanding, there is greater challenge. If you can do ten push-ups today, you will be expected to do twenty in a few weeks, and fifty in a few months. At some point, you can do a hundred. You get stronger, yes, but the challenge grows to meet your greater strength. As we mature spiritually, the weights get heavier, the drag of sin more resistant.

Luke 12:48b says, "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." As we grow, the more the power of sin will contest our advanced standing. And with greater challenge comes greater responsibility. Our growth efforts must intensify...and not be halted just because sin is a growing problem. Previously, we were pulling a Radio Flyer toy wagon; now we are pulling a seventy-five car train. The plot just gets thicker. But this is not a time to stop, because we will only succumb to greater evil. We must keep adding fuel, and keep moving forward.

If we give up, we will enter a phase called "hardness of heart". This is a surrender to sin. At any point along the plot line of our growth, we can sell out to sin by turning our backs on God. Heb. 3:12 says, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." Having a sinful heart is a frequent occurrence, but when it causes us to "turn away from the living God", we are in trouble. This is when sin's deceitfulness coils around us and grips us tighter and tighter. Verse 13 says, "But encourage each other daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." If the sun came up this morning, this is the day to get back on the growth path. If we do not keep growing, as depicted in the use of gifts to teach and edify each other, sin will distract us and pull us into a disinterest toward God. And when we are neutralized toward God, we will become hardened in our hearts.

Owen proposed this: "The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin." Even the believer who reaches super-maturity will need to continue practicing all the things we are learning in order to maintain his distance from an all-pervasive sin. Otherwise, the "power of sin" will re-emerge.

Something that I observed is that, if you use the term "confess" in place of "mortify", as it applies to sins-past, it fits very well. When we confess a sin, it is dead! Confession reinvigorates the filling of the Spirit and equips us for growth. That works until the next sin. It's that "next sin" that needs our attention; we must learn how to prevent it, which deals with sins-future. "Mortification" then, does not fit as well, though we use terms like "defeat", "disable", and "beat".

Owen said, "Mortification [translate "defeat"] from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the substance and soul of all false religion in the world." The role of self, according to Owen, is excluded as a means to "mortifying" sin. He added, "One will never mortify sin by striving aggressively against a particular sin while being lax in other areas of obedience (reading, prayer, meditation, worship, etc.)." In other words, anything we do that is effective in beating sin will begin with attention to all the techniques we have learned: confession, prayer, study, trust, endurance, and gifted service.

In that vein, C. S. Lewis said the following:

Prayer is either a sheer illusion or a personal contact between embryonic, incomplete persons (ourselves) and the utterly concrete Person. Prayer in the sense of petition is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and

enjoyment of God its wine. (Endnote 3)

What a perfect statement on prayer, and do you see how well it comports with what Owen said, and what we have taught? Through confession, prayer, fear of the Lord, and a walk in the Spirit, all implied in what both John Owen and C. S. Lewis have said, we have the gateway to all other processes we will master that enable power over sin. What we know now of confession and the other techniques will provide a foundation for more. And as we learn more, we will have more to apply. Hopefully, you are applying what you have already learned. The steps are clear: Step one is God's forgiveness, followed by growth, which leads to empowerment and deliverance through grace.

When we faithfully apply the techniques, we anticipate sufficient growth to allow grace to operate in our behalf. Regarding this, Owen said the following:

But now let the heart be cleansed by mortification [confession], the weeds of lust constantly and daily rooted up...let room be made for grace to thrive and flourish...[and then] every grace will act its part.

Grace will work, and—as we have seen—self-effort will not. Here is how Thune framed Owen's assessment of self-effort, as opposed to the methods of grace.

This is the problem with the Roman Catholic approach: “they call men to mortification instead of to believing.” Owen castigates pastors who “bid men vow to abstain from their sin for a season...Perhaps with great perplexity they keep their word; perhaps not, which increases their guilt and torment. Is their sin at all mortified hereby? ...If such directions should prevail to change men's lives, as seldom they do, yet they never reach to the change of hearts or conditions. They make men hypocrites, not Christians.”

It is the spiritual side of our lives where change will be found, because this penetrates to the heart. The heart was originally and still is—on its own—a dark place that needs changing, and this will only come through spiritual engagement. Once our hearts are empowered and spiritualized, they will then be in a condition to allow the Spirit to work toward quelling the darkness our hearts have harbored. The point is this: All transformation will come through growth, which opens us to grace, which allows power to flow. There is no other way.

Owen said that there is a tendency, when believers sin, for them to “promise that they will never do it again. They are watchful for a season; then they fall back into the same patterns. But spiritually sick men can not sweat out their distemper by working.” He then contrasts the futile and endless labor of beating sin through self-determination...with the work of the Spirit.

Looking for Answers on Sin. We must look to the Word for the best solutions regarding sin, because that is where they are. But not everyone can take the words in Scripture and draw out the full truth that is resident there. Scholars speak of “common-sense meanings”, yet flood Christendom with arcane *processes* for understanding what God wants and expects. They generally make truth complicated and academically abstruse. There is one correct way to get to the bottom of God's truth, and that is through the gifts of those who have found the answers. A few of them might even be Bible

scholars. Gifted teachers of the Word, those God has given grace to see what He is and what He wants, is what we must find. If those we listen to are not gifted...if they are wrong...deceivers, as it were...we may learn from them, but we will *not learn the right things!* We are better off remaining ignorant.

As for my own ministry, I believe I am correct in what I have seen concerning confession, prayer, the acquisition of wisdom, maturity, the extent and value of God's training, the fullness of God, absolute surrender, and now...sin. If I am correct, and if I have a gift for discernment of Scripture, however many mistakes I may make because of my own human nature, then I am right in concluding that we have greatly underestimated the power and scope of sin. This is why John Owen's work is so valuable to me, because I believe it recognizes the potency of sin and how much is going to be required for us to beat it. He brought in the "law of sin", and he addressed at length and in great detail the ways to suppress it.

For example, as we have mentioned, Owen felt that the power of the Holy Spirit is essential in dealing with sin. He said that mortification of sin is a work of the Spirit because He is promised by God to be given to us for this specific work. Owen cited Ez. 36:26, which says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." He also said the following about the work of the Spirit in removing sin, as provided by Thune: "Mortification is a gift purchased for us by the Spirit of Christ."

Owen, as per Thune's outline, attempted to explain HOW the Spirit mortifies sin, and gave the following points as methods by which He does this:

- By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh.
- By consuming the root of lust and sin. Hence he is called a "Spirit of burning" (Is. 4:4).
- By bringing the heart of Christ into the heart of a sinner by faith.

He asks this very pertinent question: "If mortification of sin is the work of the Spirit, then why are we commanded to do it?" Here are Owen's reasons:

- All graces and good works in us are his. He works in us....
- Our obedience is the means of his work.
- He works in us and with us, not against us or without us.

Owen also implied that dealing with sin cannot be done unless we are in fellowship. Here is what he said, paraphrased by Thune, about our awareness of and attitude toward our own sin: "The Spirit is convicting you so that you will deal with that sin by mortifying it [confessing it AND beating it]. If a man seeks instead to relieve himself of that conviction, 'his condition is very dangerous'." His point is this: By being "convicted", or *convinced*, of our sins, we can then confess them and move on. But if we try to erase our own sins or the effects of them by ourselves, we place ourselves further out of fellowship, at which point all we can say is what the ancient map-makers once said about the edge of the flat

earth—"beyond this point, there be dragons".

My respect for Owen is pronounced, and—coupled with my own independent study of the Word, I find him an excellent source on the topic of beating sin. I conclude that his view of sin is largely accurate and applicable, noting certain differences. As with Murray, Keathley, and a few others, the gift of discernment is evident, and there is much he can teach us.

Fear of Discipline Is not Enough to Stop Sin. Owen believed that fear and avoidance of punishment are inadequate to curtail sin. Thune characterized Owen's view of this as follows: "Fighting against sin only with arguments from punishment" will not be effective. He stated, mixing in Owen's words, "If you avoid sin due to fear of embarrassment or hell, you are 'sufficiently resolved to do the sin as if there were no punishment attending it'." This means that fear of discipline is neither designed for, nor effective in, the reduction of sin. It is to get us to return to God, where refuge against sin can be found.

Owen, through Thune again, gave us the following profound statement: "Those who belong to God, by contrast, detest sin as sin. They are motivated not by fear of shame or punishment, but by love for God (2 Cor. 5:14)". The verse Owen used says, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." We deal with sin, OUR sin, because we are aware of God's compassion for us, which *compels* a loving response that makes us hate our own sin and rebelliousness. When we have *enough appreciation* for God's love, we will have *enough disdain* for our own separation from Him (due to sin) that it will be easier for us to escape the grip that sin has on us. Love also represents the presence of the Holy Spirit, which invites us to notice Him and walk in fellowship with Him. What a wonderful thing it is: our relationship with a loving Father, whose Spirit is always in us and beside us, waiting to work His love through us. When that relationship is close, sin has to diminish. Walking in the power of the Spirit can do what fear of punishment cannot.

Because a parent loves a child unconditionally, that parent will love the child the same when the child misbehaves as he or she would if the child's comportment were impeccable. But that love takes on a different look and purpose when the child is out of line than it has when that child is pleasing the parent. Love for an errant child takes on the form of correction, which can be unpleasant, but such training is never done outside the parameter of love. God's grace operates, even when discipline is going on, but it serves a different purpose. The most important thing for God concerning us is that we stay clean and in fellowship, so He can do His work in and through us. The expression of grace that is seen when sin is present is different from the function of grace we experience when we are in fellowship. So different, in fact, that we have stated that grace, in a sense, is actually cut off.

So what is different about grace for an out-of-fellowship believer? It is corrective, rather than purely instructive. It nudges us awake, sometimes not so gently, so that we can open our ears and receive God's teaching. When the training of the Spirit becomes correction by the Spirit, God's love is still operating, but it changes to bring about a believer's awareness of his own sin, and his need for confession. Grace and mercy are not inoperable when a believer is out of fellowship, even though, as we stated, we have suggested this somewhat in the past. When we are carnal, grace and mercy just have a differ-

ent objective. When a believer is in fellowship, the objective is to teach him. When a believer is out of fellowship, the objective is to dress him up and get him back to class. (For a thorough discussion of training in all its aspects, see *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*.)

Abuse of Mercy and Grace. A believer in fellowship will not sin, for as long as he is walking in the Spirit, with the length of that time depending on the strength of his faith. When he falls out of fellowship, he confesses and jumps back in. If faith is stronger due to growth, resistance to sin will be greater. The most important thing we can do is to *build* our faith through spiritual growth (quickly), *while* we are in fellowship. This will make faith stronger. Remember that, at any time along the growth scale, sin can take over, prompted by our desires and longings, and encouraged by Satan and the world. This process reflects the normal pattern and usage of mercy and grace.

But can we use mercy and grace in a way that is “abnormal”? Abuse is often cited when we use a technique for our own purposes. Confessing, praying, and even trusting can be misused, it is claimed, if our objective is to use them selfishly. Here’s an example: If we deliberately sin with full knowledge that what we are doing is wrong, this might be seen as “abusing grace”, because it assumes that “I can always confess it later.” But get this: Abusing grace is just another sin, and must be disposed of as any other sin...and that is through confession. So, indeed, all I have to do is confess it. Don’t leave now; we’ll see how this is resolved, shortly.

Abuse has also been seen as confessing, followed by sinning, with more confessing, followed by a continuation of the same sin. If we are not serious about the confession...if it was not genuine...then it would not have been received as confession in the first place, and forgiveness would not have been forthcoming. As we discussed earlier, the condition of the heart determines the quality of the confession. A “false” or insincere confession might be viewed as abuse, but it doesn’t actually touch grace at all, and is actually a *useless practice*, so it is probably not abuse after all. Remember that any practice “not of faith” is sin. Improper confession will also need to be confessed.

What about when we know something is wrong, and we are aware that God and the angels are watching us, but we seem *helpless* to stop it? It just seems to take over, and we do it again and again. For example, we know that coveting is a sin. But there is this house that we drive by on the way to work. The guy that lives there is succeeding financially beyond belief, while we are struggling to make ends meet. He is acquiring cars and furniture, taking trips around the world, and entertaining lavishly. And he could care less about God! Every morning when we go to work, we look at his driveway and see his expensive automobile and his chauffeur waiting for him to come out. Wow! What we could do if we had his success and money, instead of the limited income we are working with. But every morning, we see evidence of his success, no matter how much we determine not to look! The impulse to look and compare just seems to take us over, and we are helpless to stop the madness in our soul that surrounds our need to have what he has. The stage is set for abuse. We’ll explain.

There are greater “addictions” and “worse sins” and “more heinous practices” that can enslave us than the ones given. But stick with sins that seem to “possess” us and drive us to sinful behavior against which we seem to have no defense. Following the example above, every morning we commit the sin of

coveting (or whatever, whenever) and we know to confess, so on the way to work we confess our sin. We are certain we are forgiven, because this is what God promises. But we do this morning after morning, and nothing changes. Here is what we must understand: **CONFESSION RETURNS US TO FELLOWSHIP, NO MATTER HOW OFTEN OR HOW SEVERELY WE SIN!** And confession will make our faith operable...until sin comes again...but it will not—get it—**NOT** make our faith stronger. Confession *prepares* us for growth, but does not *cause* us to grow. But grow we must, since it is only through stronger faith that we can *walk* in the Spirit. This is leading somewhere.

Since stronger faith is the only thing that will sustain our walk in the Spirit, it becomes as important what we do *after confession* as it is what we do *during confession*. After confession, all techniques must be engaged, especially praying and listening to God from His Word...**SO THAT WE CAN GROW AND BUILD OUR FAITH!** Only with stronger faith will spirituality become more consistent, which will keep us stronger against sin.

I exemplified possible abuse earlier as essentially “continuing to sin”, knowing it is wrong, and knowing that all we have to do afterward is confess it. But I am narrowing the view of abuse. In my opinion, the only way to abuse mercy and grace is to confess our sins and then refuse to follow up with routines that lead to growth. If we expect to confess and then stall out spiritually by ignoring all the other techniques of prayer, study, etc., then we will be indulging ourselves and exploiting grace in ways that will *keep us in sin’s grip!* We must not be confused! We must confess, and then we must follow this immediately with growth. Otherwise, we will never outgrow our sin, and we will not understand why we keep doing the things we wish we didn’t.

“Know Thyself” and Then Figure out What to do with What thou Knowest. The problem with spiritual ignorance, as well as spiritual “hardness”, is this: knowledge of one’s sins is either absent or obscured. It is hard to confess what we do not see, so the most important piece of self-knowledge a believer can have is knowledge of his own sins. Many believers are blinded to their own erroneous ways, while they can easily recognize when their particular area of strength is violated by other believers. Individual weaknesses and failures go undetected by believers who have not learned enough about themselves and the forces that rage within and around them to see when sin is happening. They are operating in darkness. Ignorance is bliss, because they simply don’t know what they are doing wrong.

Citing Owen, Thune said, “Thus a man must know the besetting lusts and sins of his own heart.” Then he quoted Owen, saying, “Very many have little knowledge of the main enemy that they carry about with them in their bosoms.” It is only when we start maturing that we are able to recognize our own weak areas. Weaknesses just keep getting stronger, because these are the areas that Satan exploits, which increases our sense of helplessness to overcome sin. Job one is knowing our sins. We can’t change what we can’t see.

Sin is the enemy, and it is formidable. Our problem is this: how can we neutralize it? This is where the struggle becomes acute and seemingly insurmountable. And this is when we realize that our only hope is to grow faster than the monster within is chasing us.

The Christian Life: Why Stay we on Earth but to Grow? Growth is exceedingly crucial to our success in beating sin. And growth entails a litany of routines that will keep us moving. We want to pause momentarily, to get an overview of our growth pattern. Here is the Christian life, flashing before our eyes. Fortunately, there is a passage of scripture that depicts the proper growth pattern, which is what we are looking for. This is found in Colossians, a book written after Paul had reached maximum maturity in his own growth trajectory. We will not quote this entire passage, but will draw from parts of it that illustrate the blueprint for our growth. Please read Col. 3:1-17, which reflects the following:

- Verses 1-4 indicate that Paul is talking to believers, who have all died with Christ positionally, and should therefore be focused on spiritual matters, rather than on things in the world. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is said to be our very *life*, which supersedes all else.
- In verses 5-11 we see the issue of the “earthly nature” and its propensity for the sinful activities of the world. The sins we must “rid ourselves” of are enumerated. I believe the term “used to walk in” refers to a time when these believers were living with retained sins, or unconfessed sins, thus perpetuating them; “rid” refers to sins that have been removed through confession. Once again, confession is essential in our Christian lives; it is the key to our “being renewed in knowledge”, a condition which fellowship enables. “Avoiding” sin, as opposed to “ridding ourselves” of sin, is a separate task all its own.
- Verses 12-14 contrast life lived by the sinful nature with that lived by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is obvious in these verses, seen virtually as the expression of God’s love through us. This implies fellowship and a walk in the Spirit.
- Verses 15 cites fellowship as our “calling”. This is suggested in the word “peace”, which means “reconciliation”, implying reconnection with the Spirit and restoration to fellowship.
- Verse 16 cites the necessity for growth, which is enabled by time spent in meaningful study of the Word, and in interaction with fellow believers who give and receive gifted services that encourage growth.
- Verse 17 caps our look at the Christian life with a pervasive guideline, one that applies to “whatever you do”. This guideline is to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. This means we should do everything in fellowship and through the power of the Spirit, by whom we walk. When we find this life, we can only give thanks, as we see here and in verse 15.

This passage is an excellent, though perhaps not comprehensive, overview of our Christian experience on earth. We see in this passage the function of sin, confession, fellowship, study, and the fruit of the Spirit. These are essential components in our preparation for the battle against sin.

Our main duty in this life is to “perfect holiness”, as we see in 2 Cor. 7:1, which says, “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.” “Purification” is fellowship; “perfecting” is growth; “holiness” is a walk in the Spirit; and “reverence” is fear of the Lord, or advanced faith. Here is

what is being commanded: “Confess your sins to stay in fellowship. Keep growing, which develops strong faith (fear of the Lord). And walk always by the Spirit.” This is the pattern for the Christian life. This is our blueprint and roadmap.

In that vein, 1 Pet. 2:1b-2, a favorite passage of ours, says this: “...rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...” As saved people, we are to aspire to growth through acquisition of the truth. Peter calls on us again to keep growing in 2 Pet. 3:18a, saying, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” After confession, growth is central to all else in our Christian lives.

Growth implies renewal, which leads to a transformation of our minds, as per Rom. 12:2a, which says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This is our choice: Grow daily to move forward spiritually, or be absorbed into a sinful and rebellious lifestyle. Apply what you know...and keep learning about God and His ways.

Persistent Sins. If you don’t have some sin that nags and haunts and sometimes throws you around like a rag doll, it is likely that you have not matured enough to be bothered with it, or perhaps to even recognize it. This would also mean that you are not a big enough threat to Satan for him to bother with you. It is when sin won’t go away, when it grinds us up and wears us down, when we feel its repugnant influence most strongly, that we can be sure the forces of evil are aligned against us *because we are growing*. This is because mature believers can do damage against Satan in his war against God, and he must go after us to stop us.

This is an internal experience. Externally, what is recognized as sin looks the same coming from a mature believer as it does for one who is immature. Sin looks like sin. But sin begins, and is frequently conducted, on the inside. For the maturing believer, there is a severe struggle and agony and sense of helplessness inside—in the heart; the immature believer is often oblivious to the error of his ways.

Don’t be too harsh when you see a mature believer struggling with a sin pattern that persists, one that may even be scandalous; he or she has stepped to the front of the battle line, and faces foes the rest of us cannot know...until we, too, have matured. Are you getting the feeling that the Christian life is one long set of battles? That about sizes it up. But there is an upside: God’s promises for provision...and our destiny. In the meantime, we are becoming increasingly aware of our own clashes with sin...and this is not the time to give up. The more we grow, the more we become convinced that sin is horrible, and therefore the more we want to avoid it, but also the more aware we become that—for too much of our lives—it is our master.

Owen sharpened this concept for us, saying, “He who finds not opposition from [sin]...is at peace with it, not dying to it.” Growth increases our angst about sin. At some point, sin will be so bothersome that we will actually hate it. Antipathy toward sin becomes more concentrated as we become stronger spiritually. But we must know this: hating sin is a *consequence* of growth, and *not a way to beat it*. Owen said, “It is evident that you contend against sin merely because of how it troubles you.” But this is not

enough to cause us to stop it.

The reason sin overpowers us is that we are still not applying the techniques for spirituality well enough to insulate ourselves from the ravages of sin (i.e., our armor is not fully donned). Thune paraphrased Owen's view on this, saying, "A strong, particular besetting sin or lust commonly issues from a careless, negligent spiritual life in general." Spiritual advancement destines us for greater temptation and testing, but it is our *only hope* for ever beating sin. Why? Because only wanting God, fear of the Lord (great faith), and awareness of God's compassion for us brings greater hope and maximum strength. When we have achieved these, we will start to feel the strength of that One who alone has the muscle to slam our enemies to the ground. Our foes, alas, as we have seen so well, are Satan and his world, along with the "law of sin" and our very nature. We are no match for these.

Whose Battle is It? "God, fight this battle for us," we pray. This is reminiscent of a prayer offered by Jehoshaphat (and its outcome), which is given here (in part) to illustrate the power of God to deliver:

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 on you." All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord. Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'" Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. (2 Chron. 20:12-19)

Jehoshaphat told the Jews: "Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets [God's Word] and you will be successful." As a result of this prayer and message from Jehoshaphat and the resulting faith of the people, God delivered them from the invading armies. This is exactly the kind of invasion we face. And we, like Jehoshaphat, must say, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." Our faith must get stronger; we must pass the battle on to the Lord...give it up. He alone can win this fight. We can't. If there is a single phrase to encapsulate the message of this whole book, it is this: THE BATTLE IS NOT OURS, BUT THE LORD'S.

If we do not heed this, we will attempt to deal directly with sin ourselves, which does no good. External appearances may change, and small gains may be made, but these are not pervasive, and sin reduced in one area will only lead to the introduction of new sins in other areas. It is like the old saying:

“I never make the same mistake twice...I just make worse ones.” Concentrated effort is not the secret. It is spiritual *leverage*. This comes only through spiritual growth, burgeoning prayer, and increased faith. Pride assures us that we are capable of defeating sin, but realistic humility recognizes that we are out-gunned against sin, and that only God can control it. God will not do this, however, without our participation in His grace assets, which means that all our attention must be aimed toward Him, Who is our hope. All we can do is this:

- Observe our sins.
- Confess them frequently.
- Pray, study, trust, and endure.
- Witness our growing disdain for sin.
- Keep growing.
- Participate in God’s victory over sin.

There is yet more we can learn about killing sin. We have seen repeatedly in all our books the importance of the Holy Spirit in all spiritual operations. We don’t mind reiterating previous messages concerning the Holy Spirit, and we are sure to introduce some new truths about the way He works, so we can see further how our relationship with the Holy Spirit can give us victory over sin.

B. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Victory through Christ. We have seen the role of the Holy Spirit in dealing with sin, but now we are digging for truths beyond what we have studied before. We will see many things that have been thoroughly covered previously, as we said, but there are some new things coming out that we want to integrate with former examinations.

We begin with Col. 2:15, where we see this: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” The victory over Satan and the world, and the sins they promote, was achieved by the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session of Jesus Christ. His work makes it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. Without His sacrifice, we would not have access. Our participation in His victory is made possible by His gracious gift, through our faith in Him. These are well-known facts to us.

Celebration of the victory that we are guaranteed is on hold for the time being, while Satan is appealing his sentence to eternity in a lake of fire. (For a description of Satan’s fall, trial, sentence, appeal, and future, see “The War against God”, pp. 55-93, *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*.) Human history is Satan’s opportunity to prove that his sentence is unjust by disproving God’s truth, during which time He is free—within certain limits—to roam and wreak havoc on the earth. All conditions for Christ’s victory have been completed as an eternal *fait accompli*, which is eternal in scope. But in this bubble called “time”, we witness a war and not a victory...EXCEPT in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

While we await the final celebration of Christ's victory, when Satan is finally cast forever into the lake of fire, we have the potential to enjoy it now...in time. This is made possible by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who resides in believers. Christ ascended from the earth when His work was done, and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father, where He is serving as the legal representative for believers. When He ascended, He sent His Spirit to be the presence of God's holiness on earth, a task to be accomplished *near* believers before Christ, and *within* believers after Christ. What we have now, as a result of the victory of Jesus Christ, is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us to equip us for the battle that is being waged on earth.

At any given time, we are fighting for...or against...our God. When we sin, we are fighting on Satan's side, because we have been infected by his greatest "biological" weapon: temptation. This is why our spiritual armor is so important...and what is this armor? It is the Holy Spirit. And this is why we must learn every trick in the book for keeping Him in charge, so that we can resist the "powers and authorities" that are aligned against us.

The Control of the Spirit in Beating Sin. To see the empowering of the Spirit, we will look at Romans 8. We are not talking about the indwelling of the Spirit, which goes on for the full duration of our lives. We want to describe the empowerment, or "control", of the Spirit. This control comes and goes, based on our fitness for it. We are made fit for His fellowship and control through confession, and we stay clean by walking in the Spirit, etc., et al.

We want to extract truths from Rom. 8:1-16 to see more about the control of the Spirit. We will not quote the entire passage, so we ask you to take time to read it before going further. Once you have read these verses, read our analysis below. Keep in mind that this is not scholarship; it is simply a search for the truth. Our interpretation may not be correct in all its details, but we believe our conclusions are accurate and true. Here is our breakdown of this passage from Romans 8:

- Verses 1-2 let us know we have been released from eternal condemnation because of Jesus Christ. As believers, we are now set free from sin through the power of the Spirit, without which we will not be free. The "law of the Spirit" is the law of spirituality. The "law of sin" is the overpowering impulse to sin in one form or another. When we operate under the law of the Spirit, we are free from the law of sin.
- Verses 3-4 tell us that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was a sin offering for us. This offering satisfied the justice of God and relieved us from eternal condemnation. This sacrifice also had the effect of condemning our sinful nature, which awaits our physical death or Christ's return to meet its final end. The purpose of our release from eternal death and a new life is so that God's righteous standards can be fulfilled in us. But this can only occur when we "live according to the Spirit", rather than "according to the sinful nature".
- Verses 5-8 give us a distinction between the control of the sinful nature and the control of the Spirit. Both the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit can affect our minds, souls, spirits, and hearts, giving us a "mind-set" that is disposed either toward sin...or toward God. Control

by the sinful nature brings “temporal” spiritual death and can never please God, while the control of the Spirit brings “life and peace”. The sinful nature hates God, whereas the heart controlled by the Spirit will love God.

- Verse 9a tells us that we are not controlled by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, IF the Spirit “lives” in us. The term “lives” means to be “fixed and operative”, according to Thayer. The Holy Spirit is fixed or *stationary* within us, since we are indwelt by Him for as long as we live. But He will not be *operational*, if we are out of fellowship. His control is conditional, based on our being pure. The Spirit only exercises His power within us when we are clean, which gives Him access to our hearts.
- Verse 9b changes the theme from the control of the Spirit to the indwelling of the Spirit. It states that “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” Okay...this is straightforward: If we do not have the Holy Spirit living within us, we have not become a child of God and do not “belong” to Him. And this much is obvious: If the Holy Spirit does not indwell us, He can’t possibly control us. And, of course, you already know this: if you have been saved, you are indwelt.
- Verses 10-11 are quite interesting. Paul is saying that the presence of Christ within us gives us two parts: a spiritually dead sinful nature, and a very-much-spiritually-alive Holy Spirit. In other words, any time sin exists, the body (and soul) are without the functions of spiritual life. On the other hand, if “righteousness” exists, the Spirit will be “alive” operationally due to “righteousness”. And where does this righteousness come from? From the cleansing of all UN-righteousness, as per 1 John 1:9. The Spirit live in us, but He will not be feeding His life and power into us, if we are not clean.
- Verses 12-13 tell us that our obligation is not to our sinful natures, but to the Holy Spirit. If we are living according to the sinful nature, we will be spiritually dead; whereas, if we engage the power of the Holy Spirit (through confession, as we have learned so well), then the “misdeeds” of the sinful nature will be wiped out. We believe this goes beyond forgiveness due to confession and extends to our walk in the Spirit, whereby He diminishes sin. The Holy Spirit can KILL SIN!
- Verse 14 tells us why we can engage the power of the Spirit: “because all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.” We are His children; therefore, we have the privileges of grace which allow us to be led by His Spirit. If we are led by the Spirit, He will control us and empower us. If we are not, we will be carnal and thus controlled by the flesh.
- Verse 15-16 adds that we did not receive a Spirit that will cause us to sin (e.g., “fear”), but One who makes us sons of God, so that we can confidently call Him “Father”. The Holy Spirit confirms that we are God’s children. This shows that Paul is talking about believers, who can be “alive” or “dead” spiritually in time. But they remain God’s children forever, regardless.

The dichotomy between the functions of the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit are clearly separated, according to the discussion above. We are coming to understand where the power can be found to defeat sin. We must understand and believe that the Holy Spirit is the only Force which can overpower sin in our lives. Once we know what is available, our task is to learn how to access it, which is why we are spending so much time trying to discover it and disclose it.

But knowing about it is not enough. We must know how to use it. Illustration: It provides little enjoyment just reading and knowing about all the wonderful features of a vacation spot that we are drawn to, if we never figure out how to get there. A great deal of the teaching and preaching that is done cries out for believers to live right and honor God and stop sinning. But precious few tell us how this is done. I grew up in a church that gave the gospel, which is great, but then all else they did was about proclaiming a myriad of standards for Christian behavior, focusing on a few favorite taboos that must be avoided. But there was almost no direction as to how this was to be accomplished. Such misdirected zeal leads to spiritual disablement, legalism, and ineffectiveness. We must know more; we must know HOW! (That is my purpose...finding out how to do “good”, beat sin, please God, and bring glory to Him.)

More on the Control of the Spirit in Beating Sin. Contributing to our discussion on the control of the Holy Spirit, as it applies to sin, we see Eph. 3:17b-18a, which says this: “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints...” Paul is praying that the Ephesians will have “power”, the power that comes from the Holy Spirit. This follows another prayer in the same passage, where Paul says, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...” (Eph. 3:16). Paul knew that the power of the Spirit was the key to everything. We have seen this before. So how important is it that we receive the power of the Spirit? Crucial! It’s like asking how important gasoline is to an engine. Or even more apropos: how important is an engine to a car?

Nothing in all of the universe operates without the power of the Holy Spirit. Even the Bible has no power apart from the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, knowledge of Scripture and compliance with its commands were central to “obeying”. That suggests a certain power in the Word, but even then the potency of truth came from the Holy Spirit. Now that we are in the Church Age, we not only have the truth...we have contact and divine connection with the Author Himself, and He gives us not only instruction...He gives us “everything we need” through His power (2 Pet. 1:3).

Is. 46:4b gives a strong statement on the power of God to sustain us. Is 46:4b says, “Even to your old age and gray hairs 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.” With this promise, how can we give up? He will sustain us and rescue us. If you are maturing, you know how important this is. We need His deliverance in so many ways. What buffoons we are to think we can take a single step without Him. And how foolish we are to think we can stop that “besetting” sin through self-strengthening.

Gal. 5:25 (again) gives us this: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit.” Gal. 5:16 adds, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” It is only by the

Spirit that we can hope not to be slapped down and dragged off by sin. Are we doing this...walking by the Spirit? Too little, I fear. We walk in the Spirit for two steps, and then our minds wander, or we get waylaid by some compelling, illicit image or event, and off we go. And we can't stop! We are falling and failing, even though we long for spiritual success. "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" When will we see the boot of the Savior on the neck of our enemy?

There are answers. We will find them. We can reach freedom and comfort; it is potential. 2 Cor. 3:17 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." This is what we want, "Dear Heavenly Father. We want freedom from sin. Release us from it. Give us power against it. Deliver us from this death." Solutions are on the way. Wait for them. Pray for them. God delivers and He will pull us up.

2 Thess. 1:11 says, "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." And why is this important to God? Because when we give Him the opportunity to do His work through us, even if only the angels are watching, His Son is glorified. 2 Thess. 1:12a presents this truth exactly: "We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him..." And how is this done? Verse 12b gives the answer: "...according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Even God's glorification is done by God...by His grace.

The Law of the Spirit. The law of the Spirit is the same as the law of Christ. After all, Jesus Christ and His Spirit are ONE. In 1 Cor. 9:21b, Paul introduces us to this law, saying, "...though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law..." God's law includes all of God's standards, first for the Jews, and then for the rest of us. Our attachment to this law yields nothing that pleases God, not because God's standards are bad, but because we are unable to follow them. Our attachment should be to the law of Christ...or of the Spirit...which is also the perfect law of God. Why? Because the new law provides a way to satisfy the old law; it provides the means for satisfying God's standards. So Paul says he is under Christ's law, and this is the law we also want to be under.

Christ's law is a law of freedom. Gal. 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free [from the old law]. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery [to the old law]." The freedom Christ brings is from the old law. Under the law of freedom, rather than trying to "keep" the law, we stay clean by "confessing" failure. Staying clean and growing: these are our two big orders, around which all other Christian commands circulate! As we have studied before, we live under grace, and we are "free", though this freedom involves "strict training" (1 Cor. 9:25). The Christian life is not one of ease and frivolity, though many churches falsely espouse prosperity and comfort as hallmarks of the Christian faith. Endurance (maintaining faith, whatever suffering may come) and perseverance (sustaining our spiritual walk, in spite of temptations), not notoriety and fortune, are keys to freedom.

The law of the Spirit is similar to the law of sin, in that both carry authority, and both have power. There are differences, however, the chief of which is that the law of the Spirit is aimed at good, while the law of sin promotes evil. Another difference is that the law of the Spirit gives choice, whereas the

law of sin wants to take away choice. We are free to confess, pray, study, etc., or we are free to go our own way. But when sin gets you in its grips, any choice you make will be directed by sin. Even the best “human good” you can produce is directed by sin. And have you ever thought, after you have done something wrong, “I just couldn’t help myself?” This is because sin empowers and perpetuates itself; once it takes over, it is tyrannical.

We are incapable of staying free when we act alone. Humanity might fight against certain “evils”, but this is “substitute righteousness”, a satanic counterfeit. Our objective is to operate under the law of the Spirit, where freedom of choice exists, and where we have reliable leadership. This is where we find “good” power. This is life under grace.

When we operate under the law of the Spirit, we are tapping into infinite power for supernatural tasks. We are reminded of a verse we have seen many times, Eph. 1:19, which says, “...and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength...” This is the power we need to help us with sin. This is the power we want to walk in and live by. This is the power without which nothing truly good can happen. This is the power which gives us wisdom and truth. This is the power that gives hope to our calling. This is the power that answers prayers. This is the power which conveys to us all the benefits of grace. This is the power for fruit and righteousness. This is power for living.

Luke 6:43-45a frames it this way:

No good tree bears bad fruit nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. 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.

The “good stored up” in our hearts is the Holy Spirit. The “evil” is the sinful nature. From the Holy Spirit, good comes. From the sinful nature, evil flows. Or, as verse 45b says, “For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” If the Spirit is in control, good overflows. If the sinful nature is in charge, sin overflows. The obvious solution is to keep the Holy Spirit in control of our hearts.

We need supernatural forces for good in order to combat supernatural forces of evil. Human strength and goodness will not stand up against evil. 2 Cor. 10:3-5 provides a description of this battle, as follows:

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 [the law of] Christ.

We certainly live in the world, but we do not live by the world’s standards, even though—most of the time—we think we do. (See verse 2: “...some people think we live by the standards of the world.”). If we try to resist the forces of evil which reside in the world, we will be overpowered. They are “strongholds”, with potent “arguments” that convince us, and “pretensions” that trick us. We need di-

vine power to demolish such crushing forces and to see through such syllogistically-sound assertions, which extol the values of evil. Worldly weapons will not weaken or degrade other-worldly attacks.

I want to quote something I wrote in 2010, when I first started writing. I started at that time talking about sin, and what I said then still applies. This is taken from *Getting Closer to God: Pathway to Power and Grace*, p. 10. Here is what I said in a paragraph from that page:

The big question about sin is whether we should focus more on obtaining the *power* to stop sinning, or whether it is more important to concentrate on shoring up *determination* and *self-discipline* to change our behavior and thought patterns. Given the presence of our sinful natures and the pull of the devil and the world, which give us this non-stop propensity to sin, we can probably guess that we are not going to be able to stop sinning all by ourselves. Our belief is that God's power will have to be the enabler to help us slow down this run-away train. Sin is the most divisive and destructive force in our experience. It wrecks everything. This question may be the most important one facing Christians today: How do I fight sin?

We have come full circle. We have written more than a dozen books, where we have repeatedly tried to find an answer to the question of how to fight sin, and have ferreted out all the techniques for growing and advancing spiritually. We don't want to merely manage it or co-exist with it or tolerate it...we want to actually DEFEAT it.

We always seem to return to the same answers. Perhaps we already have all the information we need; we just need to sharpen our focus on the answers we have. We know this already: God is the solution for all sin, both before it happens, and after. He can certainly forgive it, as we see in Is. 44:22: "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you." And He can prevent it, as we are discovering. It all depends on who is in control of our hearts. We are rooting for righteousness, but the opposing team, with our own nature as a team member, will beat us every time...if we keep our star player—the Holy Spirit—on the bench. For a breakdown on the flow of control, from the Spirit to the flesh, and back again, see the "Spirituality/Carnality Flowchart" in Appendix D.

Get Freed from Sin or Be a Slave to It. We have said that we can't kill sin completely, but we must *pound it into the dust* until the life left in it will be reduced to mere twitches and spasms. So let's call what we are doing "trouncing" sin, whereby it is beaten senseless and left with a weak pulse. "Mortification" of sin, then, can be defined as MAXIMUM DISRUPTION, DISEMPOWERMENT, AND DISABLEMENT. We call it "mortification", knowing that this is a misnomer. But if sin can't be dead, it can at least be quiet. Achieving this maximum damage to sin will require every resource that grace makes available.

We have seen that it is God who must DELIVER us from the evil one. We provide here some verses that prove this principle:

Matt. 6:13—And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

2 Tim. 4:18—The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his

heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Gal. 1:4—...who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...

Prov. 2:12—Wisdom will save [deliver] you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse.

2 Thess. 3:3—But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

Deliverance is God's part. Our part is to grow. The basic idea of beating sin revolves around a simple premise: If you mature enough, build your faith enough, and walk in the Spirit enough, you can do maximum damage against sin, and experience God's greatest protection! Self-action will not accomplish this. Self-anything will not control sin. Credit is given to the world for curtailing certain immoralities and addictions, but it only does this in order to convince people, even believers, that they are okay. This is a satanic ruse, to persuade us that our abilities and strength are sufficient to enable us to produce good. But our "best" still does not meet God's standards. Even faith, when it is weak, and spirituality, when it is only intermittent, will not fix these. We need *maximum* faith producing *maximum* spirituality to fix the sin problem.

A Final Case for Embracing the Power of the Spirit. We are making another plea for believers to embrace all the advantages of grace, offered and implemented by the Holy Spirit. We must give Him the reins. He is the difference. This is God, as distinguished from us. He is good; we are not. God is strong; we are weak. God in us can make us good. We cannot make ourselves good. Don't look now, but the person you are was not made by you. You did not make yourself and you can't make re-make yourself. Leave improvement projects to God. Is. 45:8 puts it this way: "You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the Lord, have created it." Almighty God creates righteousness; our part is to keep growing into it, as He brings the rain.

Reflecting Owen's view, here is what Thune said about the Holy Spirit: "...the cause of the duty [mortification of sin] is the Holy Spirit." Then he quotes Owen:

All other ways of mortification are vain...it must be done by the Spirit...Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self invention, unto the end of a self righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.

Four hundred years ago, Owen reflected what Paul preached two thousand years ago. And this is what we are saying today. No amount of determination will generate enough strength to kill sin. In fact, when we develop faith in ourselves, we have established our own righteousness and set up our own kingdom, and guess who we install as the god of this universe that we have made? "It is I and I alone," we say, thus declaring, "Stand back. I've got this." Really?

Indwelling Sin, the Holy Spirit, and You. Only the Holy Spirit can kill sin. Owen said that in-

dwelling sin has “wisdom, craft, subtlety, strength”. This is a comprehensive description of sin. And this is what needs to be beaten. Indwelling sin is the “principle” of sin. This principle is composed of the sinful nature PLUS the law of sin. This is a powerful combination. It is sufficient in size and potency to be an acknowledged adversary of God in the life of a believer, as per Gal. 5:17: “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.” The sinful nature directly influences and prompts the actions of the body and the mind, and has us doing things WE DO NOT WANT TO DO. But aren’t I in charge of my own body? Yes. But we are weak and cannot control this leviathan within our hearts. That is why we must rely on the Holy Spirit.

When we talk about “mortification of sin”, we mean controlling the “indwelling” sin, or the principle of sin. This includes both the law of sin and the sinful nature, as well as the practices that these produce. Behavior-correction is an outcropping of killing the “root”, which is indwelling sin. If you have no clue what this means, and have not experienced sin’s power, you are not ready for the rest of this book. Read, or re-read, the previous three books: *Bible Basics on Living*, *God’s Training Program for Believers*, and *Step by Step toward Surrender*. When you truly get onto the maturity trail, you will experience the intense power of indwelling sin, but take heart, because this lets you know that you are growing.

Owen believed that “...the vigour, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.” I depart from this, I remind you, only in the conceptual usage of the term “mortification”, which I transpose as “near-death” with respect to current or future sins, and as “confession” with regard to past sins. We won’t grow when we sin, but we can resume growth when we return to fellowship, so we see dealing with past sins as just as important as fortifying ourselves against future sins. When past sins are erased, then our faith can keep increasing, whereby we will attain a stronger connection with God’s power. This power will at some point bring victory over sin. The key is the Spirit. Owen said, “A man may easier see without eyes, speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is the only one who can kill sin and control the sinful nature. Usually, we are in the way, trying to fight our own battles.

Back to the Basics. Being “dead to sin”...what does this mean? From what we have learned, we are not the deadly force that brings about this demise. It is the Holy Spirit. For as long as we are spiritual, sin and its origins will be quelled and stymied. When we are spiritual, sin is dead. 2 Cor. 5:17-18a, which we have seen before, says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God...”The newness that comes is from God, not from us.

The rest of verse 18 in 2 Cor. 5 says, “...who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...” The reconciliation this verse speaks of is the regeneration we receive at salvation...and then it is the restoration we receive when we confess. In both cases, we are joined up with God, the first (called “regeneration”) being immutable; the second (called “restoration”), which fluctuates based on the re-introduction/elimination of sin. The newness we receive is not only *from* God; it *is* God. When He controls us, the sinful nature stays under His boot. But one simple act of self-will can take us out from under that control, and the forces that follow (pride, lust, temptation, de-

ceit, trials, sinful urges, etc.) coax us to move away from God. We can kill the sin (in a certain sense), but—as one person said—“the only sin we can defeat is that which has been forgiven.” In other words, the only sin that really dies is that which God forgives and cleanses with His holy antiseptic. And his cleansing is not 99.9% sin-free; it is always 100%!

But we must still deal with our nature, and that will come only with continued growth and the abiding power of the Spirit. Owen said, “The life, vigour, and comfort of our spiritual life depend much on our mortification of sin.” (Again, translate this as, “our confession of sin”.) In this same vein, Thune extracted this:

Strength and comfort, power and peace, are what we want! All of our troubles stem from a lack of one of these things. Without a constant course of mortification, we won’t have either power or peace.

When we are at peace with God, we will have the power He provides. And this power is sufficient to beat sin.

The question is this: Are we accessing the power? If we are failing to do so, it is not just because we are weak...that is well-established. It is because we have lost contact with the power that is available to us. The only thing that will ever compensate for our weakness...is God’s strength. God’s standards demand our “duty”, but only grace can empower us to perform it. Sin disconnects us from this power and robs us of all enthusiasm for God, with the result that we remain in sin’s grip...until the cycle is broken by genuine confession. If we don’t confess, we can’t pray effectively, study meaningfully, or exercise our gifts efficiently...and we can’t slow sin down. We must confess our sins daily, and keep growing, if we are to have hope for ever beating sin.

C. THE IMPACT OF THE FULLNESS OF GOD

Definition of Fullness. Fullness is completeness. It is the sum total of the essence of a being or thing. Anything that is “full” has reached its maximum state of existence. When the moon is “full”, it has reached the highest point of brilliance that it can attain. When a debt is paid completely, we say that it is paid “in full”. When a gas tank is “full” there is room for no more.

When we speak of “fullness”, we speak of a condition in which the most extreme state has been reached. When we apply “fullness” to God, we can only mean His highest and most-complete purpose, power, and plan for our lives. Relative or fluctuating fullness does not come from God, as He is always...only what He is. Incompleteness comes from us...and our oscillating spirituality and variable maturity. Fullness is the “greatest access to God and His resources”; this is what we need.

Fullness is abundance and entirety. To introduce and illustrate these and other qualities of fullness, we offer the following verses, which show how the term is used in Scripture:

- Rom. 11:25—I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

- Col. 2:9-10—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.
- Rom. 15:29—I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.
- Eph. 3:19—...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
- John 1:16—From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.

We will see some of these verses again in this section, and probe their rich meanings as we proceed. In the meantime, we are going to add a couple of additional verses illustrating the use of “fullness”. The first is Gal. 4:4, which says, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law...” The other is Acts 13:52, which gives us this: “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” Totality is suggested in fullness. It is an end-point...the ultimate.

Fullness is the protraction of a *process*, which must be played out for fullness to be reached. This “process” is what we are interested in exploring. We want to know how it is acquired or achieved. We begin by looking into the great book of Ephesians, where we see Paul using “fullness” many times, with various applications. Here are some of the ways we see fullness used in Ephesians:

- **The fullness of time:** Eph. 1:10—“...to put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”
- **The church as the fullness of Christ’s body:** Eph. 1:22b-23—“...appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”
- **The fullness of God:** Eph. 3:19—“...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”
- **The fullness of Christ:** Eph. 4:13—“...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.”
- **The fullness of the Holy Spirit:** Eph. 5:18—“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

Ephesians (along with Colossians and Philippians) is a book written late in Paul’s career, at a time when he had reached full maturity, a time when his conscience was “clean”, as per 2 Tim. 1:3. We will see that maturity is the pathway to, and the evidence for, having attained the “fullness of God”. We can have God’s fullness. We just need to see the process for getting it.

The Fullness of Wisdom. The first step in beginning to implement a process is understanding the *steps* in the process. We must KNOW the process and how it is activated in order to acquire its bene-

fits. Related to the fullness of God, the Bible presents “wisdom” as a primary, key ingredient in the process for getting it. Col. 1:9-14 tells us how wisdom leads to everything good in the Christian life. Here is what this passage says:

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.

Look at the process, which is what Paul is praying will work for the Colossians: God fills them with “knowledge of his will through wisdom and understanding *that the Spirit gives*”, and what is the result of this? It is this: Living a “life worthy of the Lord” and pleasing Him “in every way”. And what comes next? “Bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, and being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might.” The outcome of these is “endurance and patience and thanksgiving”, all indicative of a stronger faith. Summary: We come to know God’s will by learning His Word, so we can do His will—by His power—with the result that we will grow and bear fruit.

Fullness through Maximum Faith. Faith is the ultimate key to attaining the fullness of God, so our main attention will be given to growing our faith. Col. 1:19-23 gives us the scriptural basis for our discussion of the role of faith in getting God’s fullness. Here is what this passage offers:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. 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, and do not move 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, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in His God-man Son, Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God reconciled us to Himself, first at salvation through faith, and then repeatedly throughout our lives as Christians through confession, mixed with faith. We are interested in the second condition, which is our being presented “holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” within the scope of our Christian walk (we know, of course, that we are also presented “holy” in our eternal “position”). We see immediately that this unblemished condition cannot possibly reflect our performance, since we know we will be riddled by sin all of our lives. “Unblemished” has to refer to our condition following God’s cleansing. And this will continue unabated, IF our faith is strong enough to undergird our walk, so that we retain the Spirit’s power and leading.

Notice the term “established and firm”. This refers to strong faith, which is the key to the fullness of God. We must not only be saved through faith; we must be *advanced* in our faith to the point that we are full of wisdom and have become spiritually stable. This calls for unusual advancement and growth, but this is what it takes to acquire the fullness of God. To do this, you must commit to God and growth against a tide of human objection. You will be seen as slanted, narrow, monomaniacal, eccentric, and downright weird. You will not be popular and sought out, because your stand is firm, and your commitment is clear. As Paul said, if you are “out of your mind”, be sure it is “for the sake of God” (2 Cor. 5:13). More and more, Christians at large are being ostracized and marginalized. And for those of us who are true seekers for God’s great truths for living, this condition is even more pronounced; we are practically alone. We must remain firm. The outcome that we hope for through this kind of growth is clear: that our faith will become strong enough for us to see the fullness of God.

The Fullness of the Spirit, of Christ, and of God. Earlier, we cited verses in Ephesians dealing with “fullness”. Now we want to narrow our focus to see fullness as it relates to each member of the Godhead: the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and God the Father. The fullness of each of these is expressed in a little different way, and we will look at all three. But this consideration will keep us in Ephesians, where we will see fullness applied distinctively to each person in the Trinity.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit is cited in Eph. 5:18, which says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. In stead, be filled with the Spirit.” The assumption is that whatever is filling us will also control us. When we are filled with the Spirit, we will be controlled by the Spirit, the same way that—if we are filled with alcohol—we will be controlled by it. With the filling of the Spirit, we will have strength. Without it, we will be weak and feckless.

We need a little background for this. Chapter 5 in Ephesians begins by saying in verse 1 that we are to be “imitators” of God. This is something that is readily impossible for us, yet it is commanded, so the easy conclusion is that the Holy Spirit must generate His character through us. We can’t; He can. The chapter continues in verses 3-7 with conditions that reflect what human nature can produce (sin), followed by verses 8-14, which tell us we need to break away from our nature’s control, in order to avoid bad behavior. The Holy Spirit is the means for this.

Up to verse 15, man’s incapability to imitate God has been demonstrated. Paul says, in verse 15, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” He is saying we must take advantage of every chance we get to advance ourselves in God’s wisdom. He then adds, “Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” And what is that will? Look at verse 18 (deliberately repeated) for the answer to this question: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit.” This is the outcome of wisdom. We learn how to be filled with the Spirit!

Look, then, at two things that happen when we are filled with the Spirit: 1) proper, heart-felt worship (verses 19-20), and 2) submission to one another as a result of faith and fellowship (verse 21). So this is what the filling of the Spirit enables: closeness to God and good fruit. What follows verse 21, continuing through verse 18 of chapter 6, expounds and elaborates on other evidences and outcomes for

the filling of the Spirit. This includes marital cooperation—an illustration of Jesus Christ and His church—(5:22-33); parent-child relations (6:1-4); favorable master-slave interaction (6:5-9); and living with a full suit of God’s armor (6:10-18). The filling of the Spirit is central to everything we will ever do as believers.

We shift now to the fullness of Christ. This fullness is the deity of God, which was given to the humanity of Jesus Christ. Col. 1:19 says, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...” Since Christ did not have a sinful nature, as we do (He had no human father, so He was without an Adamic nature), He was always filled with the Spirit. He was always in fellowship with His Father. Col. 2:9-10 says, “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.” We can do the same thing Christ did by staying in fellowship with our Father. (This presumes a pre-existent “union” with Christ, given to us at salvation, which amounts to *positional* fullness.)

Christ has His own “filling” connection, as per Eph. 1: 23, which says, “...which [the church] is his body, the fullness of him [Jesus Christ] who fills everything in every way.” Eph. 4:13 tells us that His “filling” can be directed at us, which implies that we can have the same “fullness” that He had. The “fullness of Christ” is the “fullness of God” that was given to Christ, and that can become ours. Eph. 4:13 tells us, “...until we become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” To get the same fullness that Christ had, we must “mature”!

When maturity is complete, we will be filled with the same fullness that Christ had, and then we will be able to resist sin. Eph. 4:14 (following the verse we just saw) says, “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 schemes.” Once we have the fullness that belonged to Christ, we will be able to deflect false teachings and deceptions, and we will be able to detect the lies that Satan and the world launch against us. We will, in effect, be equipped to guard against sin.

Our object is to acquire the fullness of God. The filling of the Spirit enables it, and the filling of Christ exemplifies it. But the fullness of God is what we seek, because it is the ultimate experience a human being can have with the Almighty God. We want God...all of Him. We want His divinity at work in our lives. We want His character portrayed in our thoughts and speech and actions. We want the totality...the completeness...of God. We want to imitate Him, please Him, and do the work He has prepared for us to do. We want to walk in His light, and do His will by His strength. We want His best...every bit of it. We want the very perfection of God, and we are beginning to see that relating to Him to a greater degree depends on our increasingly being purged of ourselves...as we are concomitantly filled with Him.

When we sum Christianity up...all that it is and all that it can be to us, and all it can do with us...we see that it is encapsulated in this one thing: the fullness of God. When we have His fullness, He becomes all in all. He does it all, because He IS it all. It is all about Him and for Him. We have no other goal, and there is no higher purpose. God in us, filling us, moving us: that is our quest and our passion; that is what we are waiting for and what we believe can be ours. It is also what God offers, and prom-

ises to those who want it enough to go through the training and endure the pains of growth. If we persevere, at some point there will be victory...now, in time, on earth...a precursor of the ultimate victory we expect to see when we are face-to-face with Jesus Christ. We must look more closely at the ways that we can have this now.

Getting the Fullness of God. We have seen the sequence of events leading up to reception of the fullness of God. Fullness of God is the fulfillment of all the steps we have taken along the line to advance us to this point. Fullness is the end, which is made possible by maturity, and maturity came through growth (prayer, study, endurance, gifted services). Growth came through fellowship, which occurs because of cleanliness, the result of confession. The progression is clear. No step can be omitted for us to reach the fullness of God. And so much in the quality of our lives and the caliber of our production awaits this fullness.

Eph. 3:16-19 provides the scriptural underpinning for our treatment of this topic. Here is what we see in this passage:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

The ultimate outcome is to do more than be filled with God, or to be filled with the fullness of God, but to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”. This is the zenith of Christian experience...to be filled to the top with ALL the fullness of God. This is the “much more than the most” that Scripture speaks of...the “above all that we ask or imagine”...and that which the “eye has not seen nor ear heard”. This level of enrichment is possible only through sustained and intimate contact with God. This is “full fullness”, the pinnacle of the touch of divine holiness and the pulse of God's power.

Combing through Eph. 3 16-19, quoted above, we see certain truths that help us understand how to get the fullness of God. In verse 16 we set the stage with the “power” that comes—through the Holy Spirit—into our inner being, or our hearts. Through this power the Spirit, seen in verse 17 as “Christ”, manages the events of our inner man...He “dwells” there, or occupies and manages the space within us. The condition required for Him to be in charge there is “faith”. We are talking about control, not indwelling, as indwelling is a permanent condition that began at our re-birth. When God sees faith in our hearts (instead of sin), He will take over our inner-household. (If He sees sin, He will go to His room in our hearts where He stays for as long as the sinful nature prevails.)

In verse 17 we see something added to faith to advance us into “fullness”. Faith is needed for “spiritual management” by the Holy Spirit, but for the “fullness of God”, we need something more, and that is love. The second part of verse 17 tells us that we are to be “rooted and established in love”, meaning to be in fellowship, so that we can graduate to a full participation in the love of Christ...to “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ”. We will be rooted in love when we mature, but

when we reach maximum maturity, we will understand the workings of Christ's love. Understanding this love is to fully comprehend and embrace all the long-suffering, patience, mercy, forgiveness, grace, and compassion of a loving Father. Then we will see just how much God loves us and how much He has done for us...and then we will appreciate Him as never before...and genuinely worship Him in awe and true reverence.

When we understand what Christ's love is, we will be motivated to serve Him. 2 Cor. 5:14a says, "For Christ's love compels us..." The love that Christ has for us gives us impetus to move closer to Him, where we claim His assets as our own, and move out to do His will in the strength He provides. We *want* to serve Him, because we see what His love is doing and has done.

We must understand this love before fullness can come. It is as though the last lesson in our course for maturity is on the love of Christ. His love, and our seeing it for what it is, stands out as the most crucial truth we will ever learn. Here are some verses that will enable you to independently study Christ's love in more depth:

- Rom. 8:35—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" Nothing can pry Christ's love away from a believer.
- Eph. 5:2—"...and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." If we are operating whole-heartedly in the operation of our gifts, we are sacrificing to God.
- 1 Thess. 3:5—"May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance [patience]." We can pray for God to call our attention to Him and His love.
- 2 Tim. 1:2—"To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Grace, mercy, peace are operational aspects of the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. "Peace" is fellowship; mercy brings forgiveness which allows fellowship; and grace is the direct provision which implements God's loving plan.
- Eph. 6:23-24—"Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." Three levels of the Christian life are seen here: "Peace to the brothers" calls for the Ephesians to stay in fellowship. "Love with faith" reflects two operational components, consisting of fellowship and a walk in the Spirit, both of which are "from God" as grace mechanics. "Love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love" is a soul-condition indicating profound maturity.
- 1 Tim. 1:14—"The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." "Grace" is poured out on the growing believer, along with "faith and love". Love comes from God to the believer in fellowship who is growing, which means his faith is getting stronger. The actual mechanic of growth involves our following growth protocols, through which faith is dispensed to us by God as we mature.

- 1 Cor. 16:23-24—"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen." Those who are born again and walking in communion with God can experience His grace and love.
- Phil. 2:1-2—"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." We are united with Christ through salvation and are now comforted by His love, which functions through fellowship and a continuous walk by faith...i.e., a walk in the Spirit.

The love of Christ is seen over and over in Scripture, and any study of the Word points to His love and grace. It is a full understanding of this love which leads to acquisition of the fullness of God. This is because we understand *operationally* the meaning of grace and mercy and forgiveness...and the mighty strength of God. In essence, we are saying that when maturity reaches a certain level, and faith has developed to a certain point, the fullness of God will have been acquired. It is that measurement which can no longer be calculated in human terms, but is calibrated within eternal parameters. When we have such great capacity for grace and faith and power, we will have reached a level that can only be measured by infinite means. This would indicate that we have been "filled to the measure of the fullness of God".

Verses on the Fullness of God. The fullness of God is the condition of being at a pinnacle of spiritual maturity. It is being completed in Him, in time, here on earth. This fullness is all there is. We cannot have more than God's fullness. So what do we yearn for and search for and wait for? God's fullness. Here is a list of verses that cite this fullness:

- Col. 1:19—For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...
- Col. 2:9—For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...
- Col. 2:10—and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.
- Eph. 1:23—...which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.
- Eph. 3:19—...and to know the love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
- Eph. 4:13—...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.

To be filled with all the fullness of God is to be wholly empowered *against* sin...and *for* righteousness. We can't completely cease being bad without fullness, while we can achieve ultimate good when we have it.

Once we have the fullness of God, which perhaps seems like a distant possibility, even though it is

available to all of us, we are ready for the final state of spiritual actualization. That state is one of absolute surrender to God. This is what we will look at next, to see the greatest deterrent to sin we have found.

D. VICTORY THROUGH SURRENDER

Introducing Surrender. We want things to be simple...for answers to be given in pithy phrases...for solutions to be instantaneous. But solving the biggest problem in the world—the problem of sin—will not be done easily or quickly. It will take time, devotion, and perseverance. It involves going through the basics of God’s grace operations, enduring God’s training, and following all the steps to God’s fullness. (We have books covering each of these steps.) When we have arrived at maximum maturity, we have the privilege of taking one final step in our growth posture, and that is surrender. We covered this topic in our book: *“Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God”*.

I do not consider the fullness of God as occurring concomitantly with surrender. I am convinced that the fullness of God brings us to the threshold of surrender, but that surrender does not actually occur without a deliberate and qualified act (or acts) of commitment. Once we have crossed this rite of passage, we will have all the benefits of grace and the fulfillment of all the promises, many of which are reserved for the surrendered believer.

The argument might be made, and has even been suggested by me previously—with some justification—that “fullness” and “surrender” are essentially the same thing...but I now see a clear difference. “Fullness” is all about receiving extensive assets from grace to bring us to an exalted place of maturity. We are there because God enabled us, gave understanding to us, and brought us to the site of His fullness. “Surrender”, on the other hand, is giving it all back to God. It takes the resources God has given to us and returns them to Him. This is when we shed our human clothes completely and put on the full armor of God. This is when we become His devoted and unwavering servants. This is when we reach the point of greatest closeness to Him and absolute dependence on Him.

Ironically, it is at this time of giving ourselves back to Him in exchange for His giving Himself for us, that we experience the greatest gifts and blessings and strength; these are “beyond all we ask or imagine”. He *gave* to us, enabling us to reach His fullness, and now we can *surrender* to Him. As a result of our surrender, He will *multiply* His gifts and empowerment. This is when all the bounty of heaven will open to us and God’s riches will flow into our lives time after time, and day after day. Blessing is not our motive for growing—we grow because we want more of God—but it will be the outcome.

Why is surrender so important in this discussion of trying to defeat sin? It is because surrender is the time...and the only *way*...that we will ever truly take sin down. We may cope with it along the way, but we will never beat it unless we reach the ultimate maturity experienced when we surrender. This conclusion will be bolstered by Scripture as we proceed.

Definition. “Surrender”, as a term of its own, is not used much in Scripture, except in context with military conflict. But I believe it has great usefulness in the modern vernacular, and it certainly has many brothers and sisters in the Biblical linguistic family. Surrender means this: offer, present, submit,

commit, and volunteer. It is the act of will performed in the strength of the Holy Spirit after a protracted period (related more to intensity of growth than to any “length of time”), when study, training, and receiving the encouragement and instruction of gifted believers has brought us to the point of great spiritual maturity.

The term “surrender” is *paristami* in the Greek, *deditio* in the Latin. Thayer’s definition of the Greek version of surrender is this: “To place a person or thing at one’s disposal, e.g., oneself.” *Deditio* means “to cede one’s title or right.” I framed “surrender” as follows (from *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, p. 105):

Surrendering is “giving up”. When surrendering takes place, the custody of your “person”, your possessions, and your power is transferred to another person or entity. This is a time of divesting all your resources into the care of someone else. Your treatment after you surrender will depend on the character of the one to whom you are surrendering. It is likely that surrender to a person or a world-connected entity will bring pain and loss. Assuredly, there is uncertainty as to what will happen when we surrender, and we must weigh the feasibility of either giving up...or resisting. The question that arises is this: Will we lose everything when we surrender and—if so—will we ever gain it back? Or is it possible that we might even improve our condition by surrendering, even if we give everything up?

We are not describing surrender to an enemy whenever we talk about surrendering to God. Surrender is a great and highly-coveted station for a believer who has reached super-maturity. Attainment of this level of privilege brings about great and multiple benefits. Our greatest goal in life is to reach the point that we have sufficient faith to surrender completely to God. (For a complete discussion on “surrender”, please read pp. 105-168 in the book, *Step by Step toward Surrender*.)

Failure before Success. I believe my headstone will read, as follows, to describe my Christian life:

I failed,
I failed,
I failed,
God forgave.

I am at the stage of my growth that I see more spiritual failure than success. I believe this is what we must all go through, before we come to a time when we will reach and recognize success, know it is from God, and know that we are finally in a place where He is doing His work through us. Most Christians that think they are succeeding do not realize they are actually failing. Maturing believers know when they fail, but casual Christians do not see their own failure. Our goal: to reach the point of success...to grow into “surrender”.

In *Step by Step through Surrender*, on page 167, we said the following, as part of a call for us to continue growing, regardless of failure:

So, you get it now, and you want to surrender, to reach this place of ultimate blessing and output. And maybe you’ve tried to surrender, but have failed again and again. We must understand

this: True surrender will come only after many false starts and aborted attempts, because we must reach a certain level of maturity before it happens for real. We will inevitably fail along the way, and if we admit our failures to God, He will convert them into growth, and we will move higher on the scale toward full surrender. We must persevere, through great set-backs and reversals, and never give up or be discouraged. We are on a road with many U-turn lanes, but we must never turn back or slow down.

Regarding our failure to reach the point of surrender, Andrew Murray said this:

I pray you learn the lesson now. If you felt you could not do it, you are on the right road, if you let yourselves be led. Accept that position, and maintain it before God: 'My heart's desire and delight, O God, is absolute surrender, but I cannot perform it. It is impossible for me to live that life. It is beyond me.' Fall down and learn that when you are utterly helpless, God will come to work in you not only to will but also to do. [Murray's source: Phil. 2:13] (Endnote 4)

In another place, Murray added this, which makes my point beautifully, and actually provides a great conclusion for this book:

...another must do it for me. And that is the secret of the spiritual life. A man must learn to say: 'I give up everything; I have tried and longed and thought and prayed, but failure has come. God has blessed me and helped me, but still, in the long run, there has been so much of sin and sadness.' What a change comes when a man is thus broken down into utter helplessness and self-despair, and says: 'I can do nothing!'" (Endnote 5)

Nothing good will come from our humanity, because that part of us is characterized by sin and selfishness, regardless of how we dress it up with platitudes and pleasantries. We are bad ON THE INSIDE. So we are incapable of the preliminary steps toward surrender, and there is nothing in us intrinsically that qualifies us for a close relationship with God. Performing divine good is *impossible* for us. Regarding this, Lewis S. Chafer said the following (repeated from *Step by Step toward Surrender*):

It is often the "beginning of days" in a Christian's life, when he really believes and heeds the Word of God enough to be made aware of his own limitations, and seriously considers the exact revelation as to what he of himself can or cannot do, and attempts to do the work we have engaged another to do. We naturally *rely* on the person we have engaged to do it. Have we ever learned to *depend* on the Spirit for anything? Are we intelligently counting on the Spirit to undertake those particular things which, according to the Scriptures, He is appointed to do? Do we really believe we are just as helpless as His Word declares us to be? Do we really believe He is able and waiting to do everything we cannot do? Having begun in the Spirit, so far as the divine undertaking in salvation is concerned, are we now to be perfected by the flesh? In meeting the impossible issues of a true Christian life, are we consciously living upon a *works-principle*, or upon a *faith-principle*? The Bible emphatically declares the believer to be upon a *faith-principle* when he is really within the plan of God for his daily life. These uncomplicated teachings are on the pages of God's Book and an attentive Christian can hardly avoid them.

When we read commands to “do” this or that in Scripture, we automatically think it is meant for us to accomplish what is called for. But believing we can do this is the opposite of humility, a wrongful sense of self-capability that rules out the place and function of God’s power in our performance. Chafer says the Holy Spirit is engaged to do the work, and our role is to trust Him. Such faith is the mark of advanced maturity, and is exactly what we hope to develop.

God will keep showing us our weakness, repeating again and again the message that we are weak and impotent without Him. When we finally come to understand this, we will be nearing the point of super-maturity, the fullness of God, and surrender. Until then, we can expect more and more exposure of our weaknesses through tests and trials, initiated or allowed by God, and intensified levels of temptation that will be staged for us by Satan and the world. The experiences these bring can help us grow if we respond to training with perseverance and faith, and to temptation with humility and reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit. We covered these topics completely in *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*.

Preparation for Surrender. Learning the Word, enduring the training, and using all the techniques for spirituality will have the inevitable result of preparing us to surrender completely to God. The greatest impediment to surrender is *lack of preparation*! If we do not go through the steps of preparation, we will never be able to surrender, and we will live as unwitting slaves of sin.

What is it that prepares us for surrender? This involves using the techniques we have learned over time, most of which are also cited and expounded in this book. These include the following:

- Confession of sins to be cleansed.
- Acknowledgement of God, or God-consciousness.
- Prayer, with faith and thanksgiving.
- Growth through the assimilation of truth and the effects of gifts.
- Trusting in the Lord.
- Maintenance of humility.
- Growth through perseverance and the endurance of tests and trials.
- Fear of the Lord (advanced faith).
- Drawing nearer to God and believing His promises.

We can add to these seeking God, walking by the Spirit, waiting on God, learning the will of God, and fully understanding the workings of God’s love (i.e., His forgiveness, grace, compassion, mercy, patience, etc.). We have thoroughly studied all of the techniques and have shown how to use them...and we have seen the benefits derived from each. These are the processes that prepare us for surrender. There is no “easy route” or “shortcut” to surrender. We must go through the fire. And why is surrender so important? It is because it is in surrender that we will finally have victory over sin!

The grace asset that most lends itself to engagement of the Holy Spirit (spirituality) is fellowship with Him, and spirituality creates conditions and operations for growth. When we are spiritual, we can progress toward maturity. When we sustain our march toward maturity, we will eventually be qualified for “surrender”. Andrew Murray said, “He can, and does indeed, come and take actual possession of us, and gives unbroken fellowship all the day.” (Endnote 6) When we surrender, we can anticipate continual fellowship. And from this vantage point, we can watch sin get creamed.

Like most grace assets, fellowship and growth do not come through self-effort. For example, we do not “cleanse” ourselves. Being cleansed, or forgiven, is an activity of the Spirit; all we do is confess, which is NOT “works”...it is an acceptance of the work of Christ and the operation of His grace. We can try to substitute our techniques for God’s, but the effect will not be the same. We can focus our minds and say we will “try to love God, try to love God, try to love God”. But this is not the way we learn to love God, except in some artificial or superficial way.

When we faithfully use the grace techniques, and do not stop, the requirements of Scripture will be met. This is GUARANTEED! It will just happen! And if we continue on this path, we will find ourselves some day at the threshold of surrender, ready to enter the greatest time available to earth-bound man. At that time, complete submission, full acknowledgement of God, strong faith, and God’s rest are legitimate and imminent events, that will usher us into the realm of surrender. And one great benefit of this: This is where we will find the greatest deterrent to sin, as we shall explore thoroughly.

Forms of Surrendering. “Surrender” is a catch-all word, which encompasses many words seen in Scripture that mean virtually the same thing. We use “surrender” as a noun...the result of the verb “surrendering”. We reach the point of surrender (noun), at which time we surrender (verb). Terms or phrases that denote surrender are given in the following, along with verses where these terms can be found:

- **Drawing near to God:** Heb. 10:19-22—“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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.” Drawing near through honest confession (“sincere heart”) and advanced faith (“full assurance of faith”) occur as movements in the direction of surrender.
- **Yielding (KJV)/Offering (NIV):** Rom. 6:12-13—“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.” “Offering” is essentially a practice run for “surrendering”. We keep offering our bodies (this includes our souls) to God by using His techniques and accepting His grace assets and provisions.

- **Submitting to God:** James 4:7a—“Submit yourselves, then, to God.” Submission is essentially a synonym for surrender. We may have submitted over and over, but when we make the final submission, we will be surrendering.
- **Committing ourselves to God:** 1 Pet. 4:19—“So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” There is no harder time to remain faithful and continue our growth than when suffering comes. Like Job, whom Satan said would curse God if his comforts were removed—and Job eventually did—we can be fair-weather warriors. Or we can continue to stay in fellowship and grow; we can “do good”. This kind of commitment to the process of growth and grace will keep us moving toward surrender.

Offering or submitting or committing are prototypes of surrender, which is “super-submission”. These are parts of the process preparing us for surrender, as we learn and observe the declaration of God’s will in His Word, and practice the fulfillment of His will through His grace techniques. We are here to do God’s will. Jesus Christ is the model for our submission to this will, as per Heb. 10:5-7, which says this:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offering and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’”

This is why He said in His model prayer, “...your will be done” (Matt. 6:10b).

Our responsibility to submit to God’s will was discussed in *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, which we quote in the following (from p. 109):

When we commit our will to His, we will have reached the pinnacle of maturity, because we are saying to God, “I know that your plan is perfect, that your power is absolute, and that all outcomes belong to you.” We are not giving God permission to be Himself; we are interjecting ourselves into His heavenly picture by submitting ourselves to Him. When we give it all to Him, we demonstrate the kind of faith that enables us to do incredible things by His power.

The choice to commit is minute-by-minute, and if we are constantly attending to our spiritual condition and growth, we will be choosing to commit to God’s will.

Conditions for Surrender. For surrender to occur, certain conditions must be met. These are all indicators for—and the means to—super-growth, which leads to surrender. We will do the following prior to or at surrender:

Cast all anxiety on God
 Make the Most High your dwelling place
 Trust in the Lord with all your heart
 Don’t be afraid

Pray in faith
Seek God first and foremost
Learn about God's love: grace, mercy, compassion, etc.
Love God with all your heart
Acknowledge God
Fear God
Be righteous
Be pure
Be humble
Confess all sins
Be still
Wait on God
Learn and process the truth
Believe the promises

Christianity is, for the most part, an incremental process. We do these things intermittently or partially while we are growing, but when we reach the point of super-faith, we will do them all—all the time. This is surrender. Our spiritual lives move from intermittent to perpetual, from incomplete to absolute. This is our hope...our goal. When we reach surrender, then we will fulfill the first and most important requirement in the life of a believer, as commanded by Jesus: "Love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment." (Matt. 22:37b). At surrender, we will love God without reservation, because we will have come to "treasure" Him, as per Matt. 6:21: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This is the time when we will know what God is all about, and what He means to us...and we will love Him.

Things that Exist or Happen at Surrender. The conditions for surrender given above are encompassed within a larger compilation of causes and results surrounding the time of actually letting go. Surrender is a time when ALL of the following is true, either as a *cause for*, or as a *result of*, our surrender:

1. **We have entered God's rest.** Heb. 3:16-19 tells us when and why the Jews in the desert could not enter God's rest:

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Follow this with Heb. 4:6a, which says, "It still remains that some will enter that rest...", and Heb. 4:9-11a: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later

about another day. There remains, then, 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. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest..." At surrender, we enter God's rest, but notice: this is not on day three of our growth; it is on the seventh day.

2. **We receive all the benefits of God's power.** Benefits of grace come through advanced faith in God's promises. 2 Pet. 1:3-4—"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." This happens at surrender.
3. **We see the promises fulfilled.** See Ps. 91 for an example of promises that are fulfilled through surrender. Go to Appendix E to see more of the many things we are promised.
4. **Satan flees.** James 4:7b—"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Resisting Satan comes through complete reliance on the power of the Spirit. When we resist, Satan flees.
5. **We "find" God.** At the end of extensive "seeking", we find Him. 1 Chron. 16:11—"Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." Also, Deut. 4:29—"But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul."
6. **We are "waiting" on God.** Ps. 130:5-6—"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."
7. **We walk by the Spirit.** Gal. 5:25—"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." All those who are saved must also "walk" in (or *by*) the Spirit. This is the result of faith operating in fellowship. (Endnote 7).
8. **We live by faith.** 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."
9. **We exercise our gifts effectively.** 1 Pet. 11b—"If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." For gifted service to be effective, it must be rendered in the power of the Holy Spirit. (See also Eph. 4:1-16.)
10. **We show humility.** James 4:6b—"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (See also Matt. 18:1-3; Luke 18:27; 1 Cor. 15:10b; Phil. 2:13; Gal. 3:3.)
11. **We "see" God.** Job 42:5—"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."
12. **We know the meaning of helplessness.** Andrew Murray said the following about this:

- A. “*Apart from Me*—you nothing. Lord, I gladly accept the arrangement: I nothing—Thou all. My nothingness is my highest blessing, because Thou art the Vine, that givest and workest all. So be it, Lord! I, nothing, ever waiting on Thy fullness. Lord, reveal to me the glory of this blessed life.” (Endnote 8)
- B. “...another must do it for me. And that is the secret of the spiritual life. A man must learn to say: ‘I give up everything; I have tried and longed and thought and prayed, but failure has come. God has blessed me and helped me, but still, in the long run, there has been so much of sin and sadness.’ What a change comes when a man is thus broken down into utter helplessness and self-despair, and says: ‘I can do nothing!’” (Endnote 9)

11. **We know we can’t do good, and that God can.** When we reach surrender, we will know that we are equipped for full participation in His good, at last. Heb. 13:20-21—“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Because God *can*, and because He *will*, we become equipped “with everything good for doing his will....”

12. **We receive enlightenment.** Enlightenment comes by knowing three things, as per Eph. 1:17-20, which says this:

I keep asking 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...

The three things we receive are these:

- A. We understand and practice the faith which He desires for us to have.
- B. We know the riches of his “glorious inheritance”, starting at the time of surrender, which are given to mature, spiritual believers (“holy people”).
- C. We grasp His power, which is “like the working of his mighty strength”.

13. **We receive the fullness of God**, according to Eph. 3:16-19, a familiar passage by now, which gives us 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 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.

When we reach this maximum closeness to God, we will witness a power that does “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...” (v. 20)

14. **We have continual fellowship with God.** Andrew Murray said of this, “He can, and does indeed, come and take actual possession of us, and gives unbroken fellowship all the day.” (Endnote 10)
15. **Our salvation (deliverance) is finally “worked out”.** Phil. 2:12-13—“Therefore my friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—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.” It is as though God’s will becomes our will at surrender, which causes us to “will and to act according to his good purpose”.
16. **We access the power to surrender, when the time finally comes.** Chafer says the following about God’s power:

Your obligation is not to do it [obey God] in any strength of your own, or to try to do it, but to do it in the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit... You will do it in the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit and this is where the believer’s responsibility brings him. That is the thing that constitutes the ability to live the spiritual life and that is none other than the ability to walk by means of the Spirit in your daily life. That is the salvation from the reigning power of sin... Therefore you fall back upon the *infinite* power—think of it—the infinite power of the indwelling Spirit. (Ital. orig.)

We draw on the Spirit’s power through a simple prayer of dependence in which we acknowledge our inability to accomplish anything for God apart from Him. We tell the Spirit, ‘I cannot do this in my own power. I give myself to You for You to enable me to do what You want me to do and I thank You by faith that You will keep your promise to me to enable me to obey and serve You. (Endnote 11)

17. **We receive exceptional blessings**, such as those seen in Deut. 28:3-8 and 12-13:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you.

The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.

18. We will be recipients of “more grace”. James 4:6-10 gives us the following:

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace 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.

The key to receiving more grace is to “submit”, with surrender suggested as the consummation of submission. When we surrender we get additional grace. That is what it says. We will then “resist the devil” (more on this shortly) and come near to God, and He will come near to us. We will stay pure and clean through the cleansing of grace, which is prompted by sorrow for sins...or confession. And we walk each day and through all events and decisions in a spirit of humility, amazed at the tremendous love and power and provision of “more grace”. And it is then that God will lift us up, and we will be at the top. It is interesting that when we reach the top, we will not be looking down on those who are behind, but up toward the One who is lifting us.

Remember also that surrender is the time when Satan realizes that we are covered by grace, and accepts that he cannot defeat grace. This is when he goes after lower-hanging fruit, since we are hanging high on the branches, virtually beyond his reach. At this point, he will leave us alone, and move on to more-manageable projects. We will see him “flee”, which is what he always does when God’s power threatens him.

19. We will receive the full armor of God. Take time to read the following, from Eph. 6:1-18:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

The big issue at stake in having the armor of God is vulnerability to the attacks of Satan without it. When we are completely covered by God's armor, none of Satan's arrows can get through. Study and grow, and the individual pieces of armor will be put into place. When we have the "full armor", we will have perfect and impenetrable protection.

20. **When we surrender, it is because all failures have been processed.** It is not that we MUST fail; it is simply that we WILL fail. Thankfully, our God, rather than castigate us for our failures, forgives us and *builds on our mistakes and weaknesses...if we let Him*. And we let Him by our humility, which is the automatic outcome of greater faith. Hope and faith and fear of the Lord...these let us see ourselves as God sees us...as helpless and dependent. We repeat a quote from Andrew Murray to illustrate our helplessness:

Apart from Me—you nothing. Lord, I gladly accept the arrangement: I nothing—Thou all. My nothingness is my highest blessing, because Thou art the Vine, that givest and workest all. So be it, Lord! I, nothing, ever waiting on Thy fullness. Lord, reveal to me the glory of this blessed life. (Endnote 12)

This is the crux of the matter. This is the center of all we hope for, coming together with all that is available. Grace and provision are offered. But we must know that God is everything and we are nothing. We must wait on His fullness to fill the void of our emptiness. Emptiness cannot fill itself; we must let God fill us with Himself and be Himself through us. "Lord, reveal to me the glory of this blessed life"...the life of surrender.

Satan's Defeat. We want to say just a bit more about Satan *after* we surrender. Satan is the strategist and commanding general for evil. When Satan has access, he has power, and when his power is present, his operations in the world are devastating to believers. He is the driving force for sin from the outside, with fully-cooperative human nature on the inside. Sin is an inside job, with external sponsorship from the outside. For sin to be defeated in a way that we will actually witness tangible outcomes of freedom from sin, Satan must be kept away. Satan defeated is sin depleted. So his removal is a crucial step in beating sin.

We have seen very well that removal of sin and keeping Satan at bay will only be accomplished through divine power. And divine power can only be accessed through a walk by the Holy Spirit, sustained through mature faith. The essential variable that makes empowerment possible is our spiritual growth. We must keep moving. The means is given, and the stage has been set through the use of divine techniques; all that remains is an attitude of interest—a seeker's mentality—for us to move forward. 1

Pet. 5:6-10 provides the full picture of growing to beat sin:

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

Notice right off the place of humility. Then notice the layers of commitment...casting anxiety and being alert, with clear minds. Resisting Satan, sticking with the Word, enduring, staying in fellowship, living by His strength, walking by faith. These are all reflected in this passage, and these have been achieved through His power. When we have learned His Word and internalized His truth through training, and held temptation at bay by His might, it is because He has brought growth to us, and is enabling us to become occupants of His highest platform. We are surrendering. We have arrived, and Satan must hide. At last, we know how big and incomparably great God is. Look at the passage above (1 Pet. 5:6-10), and consider this incremental analysis of it:

1. **Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand.** Why? So that HE (not I) can lift you up. What does lift you up mean? Causing you to grow! We will not grow without knowing who causes the growth (1 Cor. 3:7).
2. **Be alert and of sober mind.** Anyone who is not preoccupied with Christ and serious about God will not grow. One can settle on this or that as the key to living, but real truth will never find a lodging place in a soul who does not sincerely seek ONLY God and His truth.
3. **Satan is prowling, but he can roar, and he is always ready to pounce.** His objective? To destroy you. This means create doubts about God's reality and God's fairness. This means using sin and self-righteousness to wipe out your faith. This means distracting you with fun, fortune, and fame, or trials, tribulations, and tests—as much as he's permitted—to keep you from accessing God's strength, against which he has no defense. This enemy must be stopped, and God (alone) can do it.
4. **Resist him.** How? By standing firm in the "faith", which includes the doctrines of truth from God's Word, which we believe, and by which we live. Resist through knowledge and faith. By learning God's truths for living, we grow by the Word.
5. **Restoration and Growth through Suffering.** After we suffer for some time, through the pressures of sin and the rigors of training, we will grow to the point that we will not only be "restored" to fellowship, we will become strong, firm, and steady. How? Through Him who has the power for ever and ever. Amen.

We cannot be discouraged! The intense phase of our training, which is the "intermediate" stage of

growth, is difficult and sometimes seemingly unbearable. It can always be characterized by pain and loss, but it will lead to God's strength, so we must remain firm and steady...and we must resist Satan...by God's power. When we do this, we can see Satan routed. This will be the time of supermaturity...surrender. This is open to all, but accessed by few. This is what we will come to.

We are not there yet, are we? Wouldn't it be nice if we did not have this sin monster in our lives? Yes. And we can, but this will require massive growth. When we have gone through the growth process, and have arrived at the time of surrender, a tremendous change will occur. As we indicated above when we examined James 4, we can reach a level of maturity that will enable us to resist Satan. At that time, he will leave us alone and we will have a taste of heaven on earth. We will live without the badgering and battering of Satan. That is the time of complete surrender...the time when we give it all to Him...the moment when we realize that all the wanting and praying we have done, and all the agonizing that has gone into our growth, have now come to fruition. Satan has fled. We are now free to live the life of Christ, as we were intended. Gone forever? You know better than that. We can make choices that reinstate his presence, but as long as we are in a surrendered condition, we will be free from Satan's attacks.

Call to Arms. This section should probably be titled "call to armor", since it is more about ensconcing ourselves within the enclosure of God's protection than actually preparing to do battle. We arm ourselves by allowing God to take up His armament against all foes. Meanwhile, we are hidden inside His grace and power, where we cannot be harmed. But how often do we lodge ourselves in the place of such care? Not often enough. Usually, we are out waging our own battles and chasing our own dreams, and spend little time taking refuge beneath God's wings.

Jesus said to "abide" in Him, which we have equated before with fellowship, but recently we have extended this to surrender. This is very important. There will be no beating of sin without surrender. Of course, surrender, like fellowship, can be stopped and started, but it is more likely to be sustained, simply because we have a weakened enemy and a stronger relationship with our Protector. Satan has been hamstrung through our growth and spiritual walk. Through refined use of grace assets and techniques, we can be kept perpetually in a good place. Of this, Murray said, "No one who learns to rest upon the living Christ can become slothful, for the closer your contact with Christ the more of the Spirit of His zeal and love will be borne in upon you." (Endnote 13)

Murray also said, "The vine [Jesus Christ] is calling us to absolute surrender." He added, as a message from Christ, "I, the living One who have so completely given myself to you, am the Vine. You cannot trust me *too much*. I am the Almighty Worker, full of divine life and power." (Endnote 14) Murray then gave this:

I do not understand that word *surrender* fully; it gets new meaning every now and then; it enlarges immensely from time to time. But I advise you to speak it out: "Absolute surrender to Thee, O Christ, is what I have chosen." And Christ will show you what is not according to His mind, and lead you on to deeper and higher blessedness. (Endnote 15)

There is a higher place here on earth...in time. This is what God lifts us up to, as we trust Him and build our super-structure of faith step by step. “Growing” becomes “grown” at this point. I believe this closeness is possible. I firmly believe this: There is a point in our advancement spiritually, when we reach some higher level of understanding and function, wherein we will be walking in perpetual closeness and constant communion with the Holy Spirit. It is here that we will be living by His strength and witnessing the substantial diminution of sin.

The term “surrender” works for me; you may use a different term, just as long as you understand that God does it all. It is somehow relaxing just to know that we don’t have to do it. “Thou art my Vine, and I am thy branch. It is enough, my soul is satisfied.” (Murray, Endnote 16)

Give me the Strength. God’s strength is constant. It is never reduced or altered. We have the Holy Spirit within us, and never have any less of Him at any point. But when we are in a carnal state, due to unconfessed sin in our lives, His strength is withheld, simply because the connection between our hearts and divine power is disrupted by the rise to power of our sinful nature. We maintain God’s strength by confessing, and we stay in touch with that strength by trusting Him and growing. This sounds so easy, but—by now—you recognize that the process is anything but easy. The intense suffering of real growth is not an easy cross to bear, but growth is greatly facilitated by it, if we persevere in our use of techniques while it is going on. Only through greatest grace will we get through this. And what is the prize? The very strength of the Almighty Creator.

Take what the Bible says about God’s strength very seriously. This is the key to success in the war against sin, even after we have surrendered (reached super-maturity and received the fullness of God). God’s strength is offered to us, to make us the same in spiritual effectiveness as Jesus Christ, since it is the Spirit of the Savior who lives out the character of Christ through us. This is the strength of God within us, which encompasses His plan, His purpose, His love, and His will. When we have His strength, we have all of Him...and all we need to be like Him.

To further acquaint ourselves with the presence and value of God’s strength, we offer some verses for your perusal. These will bless you and (prayerfully) strengthen you.

- Heb. 13:6—“So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid’.”
- Is. 12:2—“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”
- 2 Cor. 12:9—“But he said to me, ‘My grace is made perfect in weakness.’”
- Phil. 4:13—“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”
- 2 Thess. 3:3—“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”
- 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.”

- 2 Thess. 2:16-17—“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”

The word “strength” used in most of these verses comes from the Greek word *dunamis*, which means power, might, or strength. In these verses, strength denotes *spiritual* strength. You do not feel this strength in your muscles (nervous system), or your frontal lobe (cerebrum), or your emotions (limbic system, etc.). This strength will probably not be *felt* at all! This strength takes place in your “inner being”, which is that part of your inner function which cannot be sensed or scientifically observed. Eph. 3:16 describes it this way: “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being..” The power with which we are strengthened through God’s power is directed toward our inner being: our minds, souls, spirits, and hearts. This is where spiritual operations (or that of their evil counterparts) take place. This is the “spiritual” realm, where we will succeed or fail, depending on whether we access God’s strength...or not.

We receive strength for such things as service, endurance, growth, surrender, glorifying God, and beating sin. In this study we are looking at beating sin, which is perhaps the greatest challenge faced by mankind. All we are doing is designed by God to enable us to get to His strength. But we get God’s strength...God’s way. If we depend on ourselves or the world for this strength, we will fail without remedy. God’s strength does not come the “works” way, but through the way of “grace”. Grace provisions, grace assets, grace techniques...these are the paths to strength. We live the same way we were saved: by grace, through faith. Simple, but—as we have seen—not so easy. God, strengthen us for this arduous journey.

Escaping Corruption. The verse that tells us how to escape corruption must be quoted in its entirety. Don’t miss this...2 Pet. 1:3-10:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life 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, having escaped 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, 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 near-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters,^a make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble...

What is needed to escape corruption? *Divine power*, which gives us all we need to beat sin. Divine power can take us to a place where sin cannot find us. This is accomplished through our understanding

of His Word, which tells us about His grace operations. This includes all we are supposed to do in order to grow into reliance on His strength, knowing that without Him we can do nothing good. Here is how this passage breaks down: The first part tells us that divine power can beat sin. The middle part tells us how to grow into that power... “through our knowledge of Him”. And the last part challenges us to stay on a path of growth, telling us what will happen if we don’t. If, however, we stay on a growth-directed trajectory, this passage tells us that we will reach the point when we will “escape the corruption that is in the world”, and will not “stumble”.

This is the time when sin will have been quenched, and we will walk in Christ’s victory over it. The “corruption that is in the world” will no longer have us as its slave, and we will draw on the power of the Holy Spirit every moment of every day.

The conclusion is profound, but well-known to us...and exceedingly simple. The way to ESCAPE sin is through cleansing. The way to STAY AWAY from sin is through growth. There is only one way to beat sin, whatever else may be incorporated with this solution: Keep growing! This commitment will call up the hounds of hell, so we must never look back or let up. The bounties of grace will sustain us, if we keep moving. The truth is, if we truly want God, we will make our search for Him—through knowledge of Him—the most important quest of our lives. And each new day, while we are growing in Him, we will wait for Him, for He is our faithful and merciful God.

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.”

Lamentations 3:22-24

So when we have grown and waited, we come at last to surrender. We have endured what He brought, and are now ready to receive what He gives. As we take from you, O Lord, we know that our receiving comes back to you in the form of your pleasure and your glory. Still, by your grace, we have won. We have surrendered our trash, and you have paid us back in your treasure. Our knees are bent. You have knighted us. Assign us now to rescue others who face the same enemy you have defeated for us.

Summary/Conclusion

Sin is very powerful. It is bigger than we are. But we must find a way to stop it. Sin is violation of God's standards. It is "wrongdoing". It is also anything we do when we are controlled by our sinful natures. It is measured by God's standards, which are impossible for us to meet without divine help.

There are many types of sin, and God hates them all. Sin starts small and then progresses upward. Like quicksand, it pulls us under and covers us up, blinding us to the evil within us and around us. Many analogies apply, such as entanglement, a slippery slope, and enslavement. It is very powerful and has many allies, particularly Satan and the world. Our liaison with the world and Satan is our inner nature, which has as its purpose to create conditions that alienate, frustrate, and isolate God...to distance us from anything that might jeopardize sin.

Satan is the organizer of sin, and his role must be understood. He opposes grace, because behind grace is the power of God...the only force he knows can stop him. This is why he goes after believers who are using God's grace to cope with sin. Satan uses deception, cunning, and lies to lead us away from grace. Satan also opposes gifted service, because it edifies believers, causing them to grow. Satan's problem with growth is that it increases grace operations and threatens him.

The world is Satan's "body", in the sense that it belongs to him and he controls it and energizes it. We know that God ultimately controls everything, even rulers, but Satan has wide latitude to move around and effect (i.e., "cause") events in the world. He has great freedom to tempt and test believers, which becomes part of God's demonstration of grace by His offering solutions to the problems evil creates. Given his freedom, Satan is working frantically to undermine grace, including any faith directed toward grace. He knows his victory depends on his discrediting God's character.

Our sinful nature is the place where impulses toward evil translate into thoughts and actions that oppose God. Like Satan and the world, the sinful nature is deceitful. In fact, it is even more deceitful than Satan and the world. The sinful nature promotes both "good" and "evil", but when these come from the sinful nature, the outcome is *always* evil!

Self effort does not help us in the fight against sin, or in our effort to do good or produce fruit for the Lord. God is the only one who can produce divine good and meaningful work. Our participation in God's good is done through grace accessed by faith. Attempts at keeping the law and following rules will not save us or make us better, and such legalism is actually a sin. After we are saved, law-keeping is not the key to spiritual living. Moral living is not the same as spirituality, because even unbelievers can be moral. We depend on God for righteousness, not our own morality.

There is a "law of sin", which is not only an internal code for evil, but is also the enforcer of the code. The law of sin adds great power to the sinful nature, and is the source for depravity within it. Spiritual growth and divine good work as emergency summons for this law, causing it to rise up to counter increased growth and spirituality. The better we are spiritually, the more the presence of sin will awaken within us and the more intense the attacks of Satan and the world will become.

The only way to overcome such powerful forces and maintain our spiritual posture is through continuous growth of our faith. To do this we must apply all the techniques God has designed for accessing His grace. This comes especially through “core” techniques: restoring fellowship through confession, seeking divine assistance through prayer, increasing our faith through study and training (enduring suffering), and experiencing the benefits of gifted operations from growing believers. When we use the techniques, we will be able to deal with sin. The key to using all the techniques is cleanliness. This is done through confession of our sins, following which we can grow.

We would surely love to find some magic step we can take, or thought we can think...some formula...for defeating sin. I will be honest that I was hoping to find some hidden secret for beating sin, but I have come to a simple conclusion: THE ONLY WAY TO DEFEAT SIN IS TO OUTGROW IT...and this cannot and will not be easy. I wanted it to be easy and painless, but finally surrendered to the truth that growth requires suffering. The final defeat of sin is the outcome of extended and dedicated growth. Without maturity, there will be no victory. But even this oversimplifies. Maturity is not a single decision, but a protracted commitment to growth, leading finally to a place of super-maturity.

When we become super-mature, we can receive the fullness of God and enter a surrendered state where Satan flees, promises are fulfilled, empowerment is complete, and divine righteousness is generated. This is the time of victory over sin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Once again, too simple...sounds easy. But it is not. If you sign up for God’s course leading to maturity, you have committed to the most trying and challenging training in the universe. You will be attacked through your health, your finances, family, friends, careers, and much more; and you will experience temptations you never imagined. God’s training is not for faint hearts or weak wills. It is for those who truly want God.

But when we reach the point of surrender, we will experience relief, and the riches of God’s storehouse will be opened. Sin will subside. Good will come. And we will walk in the garden with God, unimpressed by the crazy and evil world swirling all around us. Sin, for all practical purposes, will be dead, and we will still be alive.

The following is from *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, p. 168:

A Believer’s Prayer of Surrender

Father, I have failed many times, and in so many ways that I can’t name them. I come once again, with markings of my failure trailing behind, to surrender to you. I have searched for you in your Truth, but have equally chased my own self-satisfaction, comfort, and pleasure. I acknowledge now my helplessness to be righteous...to be filled with love for you and to sustain trust in you, and I ask that you take me by my hand and pull me up from the sewer of myself. Cleanse me, for I am offering each member of my body, and all the parts of my heart...to you. I give all that I am and all that I have to your service, and pray that you will receive me and fill me with the complete measure of your fullness. Place me on your highway of holiness. And if I fail again because I am not prepared to consummate this submission, be patient with me. I want only you. Lead me to surrender.

Endnotes

1. *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. VI, by John Owen, ed. By William H. Gold. Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1967. As analyzed and summarized by Greg Herrick in articles published and made available at www.bible.org, under the title, “The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers”, 2009.
2. “Conceptual Outline of John Owen’s Mortification of Sin”, compiled by John Thune, lead pastor of Coram Deo Church Community, Omaha, NE, 2009. This outline is available at www.cdomaha.com.
3. “The Efficacy of Prayer”, by C. S. Lewis, as found in *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*, p. 101, edited by Walter Hooper. Collins, Glasgow, 1975.
4. Andrew Murray was born in 1828 and died in 1917. He pastored a number of churches in South Africa and founded organizations supporting evangelism. He wrote 240 books and numerous articles, almost all of which are in the public domain. Any references to Andrew Murray in this study were taken from his books and articles, which are available (for example) at the following websites:

Books—Books can be found at Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org.

Articles—Articles are available at www.biblestudytools.com.

5. See Endnote 4.
6. See Endnote 4.
7. *A Literal Translation of the Bible*, edited and translated by Jay P. Green, p. 945. Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody, MA, 1987.
8. See Endnote 4.
9. See Endnote 4.
10. See Endnote 4.
11. From *ABC’s for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 136. Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2002. This book is available at www.bible.org. This is a citation of notes from William Lawrence, based on a transcript from a lecture by Lewis Sperry Chafer at Dallas Theological Seminary.
12. See Endnote 4.
13. See Endnote 4.
14. See Endnote 4.
15. See Endnote 4.

16. See Endnote 4.

17. *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, by Cyrus I. Scofield, Chapter 8: “The Believer’s Standing and State”. First published in 1896, Resurrected Books, U.S.A. Scofield references are from the *King James Version*.

18. *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Chapter 8: “The Believer’s Standing and State”.

Appendices

Appendix A Verses on the Eternal Position of a Believer

Appendix B Verses on the Temporal Condition of a Believer

Appendix C Law vs Grace Chart

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Appendix A

Verses on the Eternal Position of Believers (From Cyrus I Scofield: *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*)

What that title or standing is, may be briefly seen from the following Scriptures: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (I John 5:1).

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:4-5).

"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance" (Eph. 1:11).

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (I John 3:2).

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation" (I Pet. 2:9).

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Rev. 1:5-6).

"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10).

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (I John 5:13).

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all- spiritual blessings" (Eph. 1:3).

"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together,

and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

"But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

"In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13).

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (I Cor. 12:13).

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30).

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" (I Cor. 6:19).

"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus . . . I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:2-9).

"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:11).

"Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" (I Cor. 6:15).

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who

is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:12-13).

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Rom. 6:6).

"Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14).

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9).

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8).

"Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (I Thess. 5:5).

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (I Thess. 5:9-10).

"By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us . . . sanctification" (I Cor. 1:30).

"For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

"Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" (Phil. 3:15).

"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (I John 4:17). (Endnote 17)

Appendix B

Verses on the Temporal Condition of Believers

(From Cyrus I Scofield: *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*)

"For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you" (I Cor. 1:11).

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal . . . For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (I Cor. 3:1-3).

"Now some are puffed up" (I Cor. 4:18). "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you" (I Cor. 5:2).

"Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another" (I Cor. 6:7).

"Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?" (I Cor. 6:15).

"But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23).

"But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:8-9).

The student cannot fail to notice that the divine order, under grace, is first to give the highest possible standing and then to exhort the believer to maintain a state in accordance therewith. The beggar is lifted up from the dung-hill and set among princes (I Sam. 2:8), and then exhorted to be princely. As examples, see the following verses.

"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" (Col. 2:20).

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). (Let it be observed, in reading this much-abused text, that the salvation spoken of here is not that of the soul, but salvation out of the snares which would hinder the Christian from doing the will of God.)

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Col. 3:5).

"Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (I Thess. 5:6).

"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (I Thess. 5:11).

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (I Thess. 5:23).

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. 3:12).

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6: 1).

"He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (I John 2:6)

The student will be able to add largely to this list of comparative passages showing that the Scripture makes a clear distinction between the standing and state of the believer. It will be seen that he is not under probation to see if he is worthy of an inconceivably exalted position, but, beginning with the confession of his utter unworthiness, receives the position wholly as the result of Christ's work. Positionally he is "perfected forever" (Heb. 10: 14), but looking within, at his state, he must say, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. 3:12).

It may be said that all the afterwork of God in his behalf, the application of the Word to his walk and conscience (John 17:17; Eph. 5:26), the chastisements of the Father's hand (Heb. 12:10; 1 Cor. 11:32), the ministry of the Spirit (Eph. 4:11-12), all the difficulties and trials of the wilderness way (I Pet. 4:12-14), and the final transformation when He shall appear (I John 3:2), all are intended simply to bring the believer's character into perfect conformity to the position which is his in the instant of his conversion. He grows in grace, indeed, but not into grace.

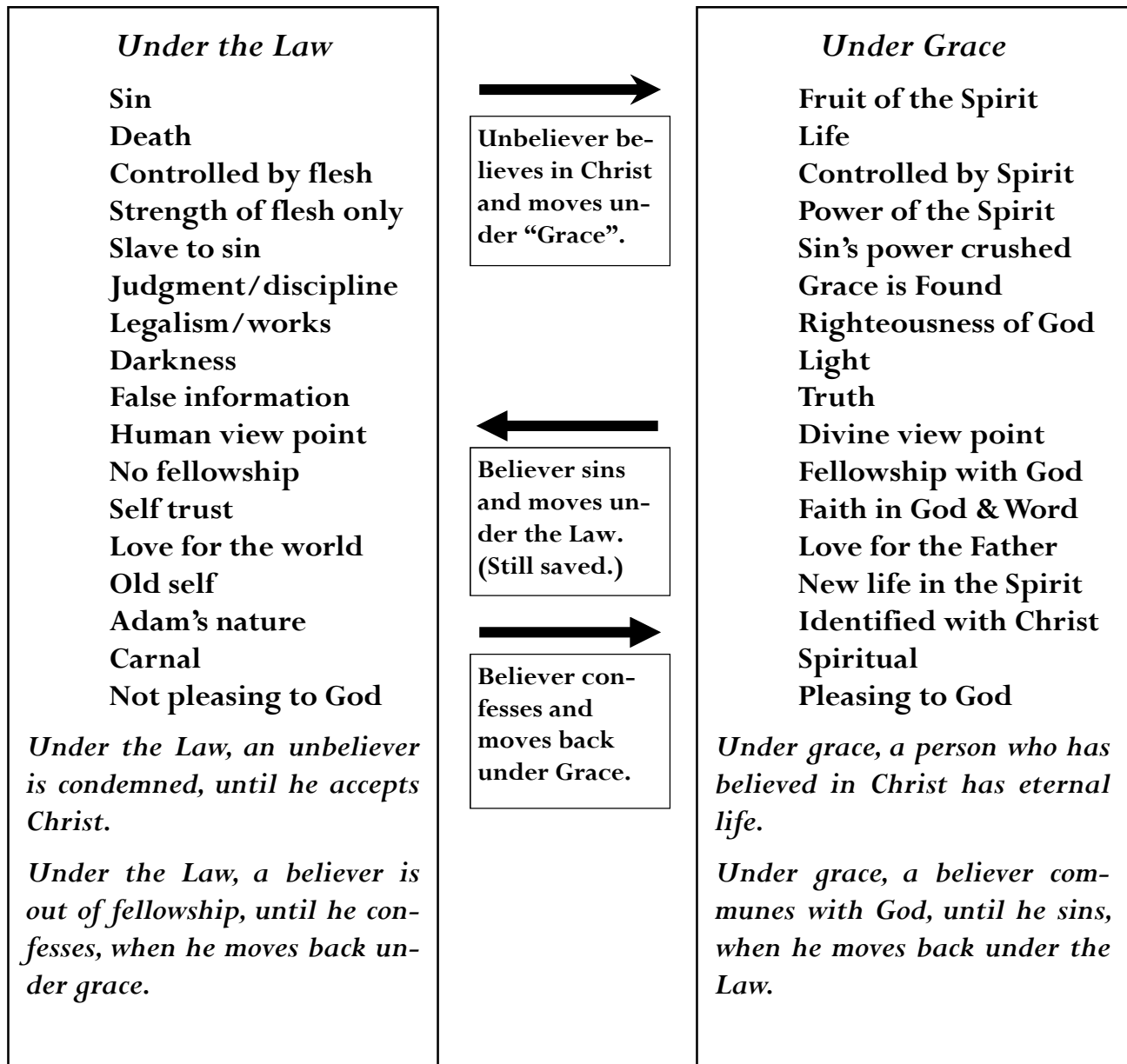
A prince, while he is a little child, is presumably as willful and as ignorant as other little children. Sometimes he may be very obedient and teachable and affectionate, and then he is happy and approved; at other times he may be unruly, self-willed, and disobedient, and then he is unhappy and perhaps is chastised. But he is just as much a prince on the one day as on the other. It may be hoped that, as time goes on, he will learn to bring himself into willing and affectionate subjection to every right way, and then he will be more princely, but not more really a prince. He was born a prince.

In the case of every true son of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, this growth into kingliness is assured. In the end, standing and state, character and position, will be equal. But the position is not the reward of the perfected character-the character is developed from the position. (Endnote 18)

Appendix C

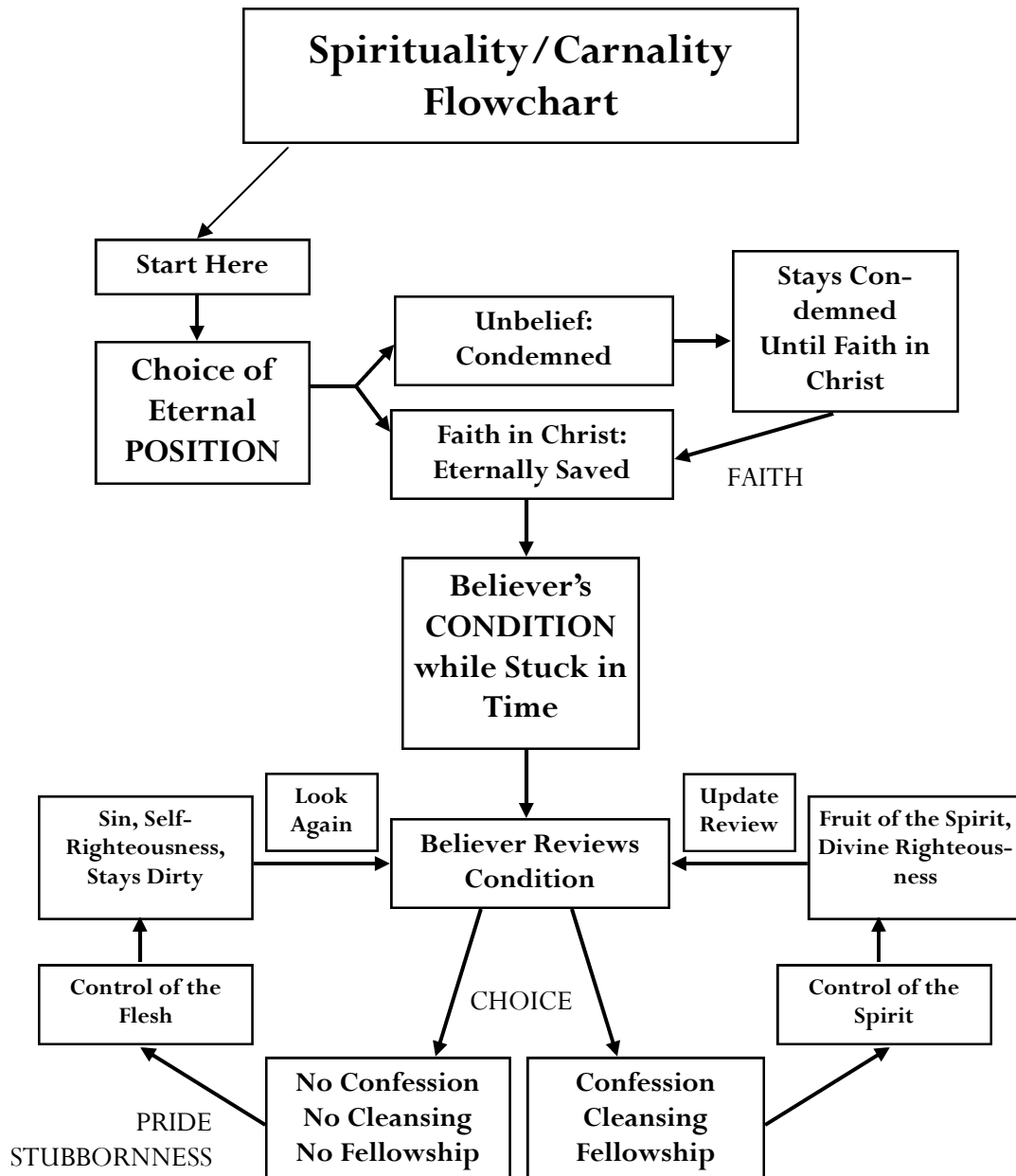
“Law” vs “Grace” Chart

The following chart shows the flow of a believer from the Law to grace...and back to the Law, if sin or legalism occurs...then once again back to grace at the time of confession. A believer “under the Law” is still saved, but He will be “out of fellowship” and will be ineffective, and likely destructive, in his demeanor. Our objective is to live under “grace”, by walking in the Spirit, rather than under the “Law” by living in the power of our sinful natures. **Compare the columns item by item.**



Appendix D

Spirituality/Carnality Flowchart



Appendix E

Sample Promises

- Matt. 10:30-31^a—And even the hairs on your head are all numbered, so don't be afraid.
- 1 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.
- Eph. 4:13-14—until we 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 men in their deceitful scheming.
- 2 Thess. 3:3—But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.
- Rom. 8:28—And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (NET BIBLE)
- 1 Pet. 3:12^a—For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.
- James 5:16^b—The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
- 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.
- Rom. 8:26—In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we

ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

- 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.”
 - 2 Tim. 1:7—For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.
 - Heb. 13:6—So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”
 - Phil. 4:19—And my God shall supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
 - 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.

These are the provisions of grace. When we believe these promises, and all the other promises given throughout God's Word, we will have the kind of faith that enables us 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.

Appendix F

My Personal Confession List

This is the list I use to begin my morning prayers. I prepared this list to help me think of my sins, so I can confess them. I thought the list might be as many as seven or eight. As I was going through my various sins, the list kept getting longer, until it became what you see here. From each item on this list, I can identify any occurrences in recent memory. This list helps me begin my structured prayer time and my day. Perhaps you will find this list helpful; hopefully, your list will be shorter. Here is what is on my “confession” page:

My Prayer of Confession

Father, since I last confessed, I can identify one or more of the following sins:

Pride	Lack of compassion
Greed	Not studying
Self-pity	Not praying
Fear	Not giving
Envy	Lying
Coveting	Stealing
Jealousy	Idolatry
Hatred	Unwholesome language
Gossip	Criticism
Anger (sinful type)	Legalism
Pouting	Complaining
Bitterness	Not forgiving
Sexual lust	Worry
Lack of faith/self trust	Seeking man’s approval
Laziness	Abusing grace

Study Notes

[illegible]

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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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