

PREFACE

I want this book to be a finger pointing, a voice speaking, a pen writing, and a life reflecting the glory of our great God. But where do I begin? How do I start telling the story?

Back in the late eighties, God gave me many opportunities to preach in rural Tennessee churches. On a few occasions, people came forward to entrust their lives to Christ or renew their commitments to Him. After the church services concluded, I always made an effort to help these people understand their decisions, providing encouragement and a few helpful hints for their Christian journeys. I wanted to give them some material to point them in the right direction, but never took the time to purchase some literature to pass on to them.

When I moved to Dallas in the early nineties, I frequently spoke with strangers on the street about Jesus. During a rare moment, God allowed me to help someone accept Christ. We knelt and prayed right there at the bus stop. Actually, the kneeling was the young man's idea; he didn't fear what people thought. After we finished praying, I asked him a few questions to make sure he understood what following Christ really meant. I then encouraged him to read his Bible, pray, and get involved in a church. We swapped phone numbers and went our separate ways. After several days passed, I called him to discuss his new faith. We arranged a time and place to meet so I could get to know him and informally teach him some basic biblical principles.

I drove to the agreed upon meeting place but couldn't find him. Later, over the phone, we planned another meeting. Yet again, we failed to meet. Eventually, we lost contact. Unfortunately, not only did I fail to build a relationship with him, but I never gave him reading material to help him grow spiritually. I didn't know if he owned a Bible either. Upon realizing this, I determined to buy some biblical material that I could carry with me when sharing my faith. As I browsed Christian bookstores, I found plenty of material but nothing that suited what I wanted to read through with new believers.

Therefore, in the latter part of 1990, I seriously considered writing my own material, and in the summer of 1993, I put my thoughts on paper. I never dreamed that more than a decade would pass before I considered my work complete.

This book seeks to explain and apply spiritual principles to the reader's life so he or she can fellowship with the Lord and live out truths presented in the Bible. In this volume, I attempt to discuss major biblical doctrines in a concise manner, explaining issues in a way that new believers with little or no background in Christianity can understand. In addition, mature Christians can find it a useful reminder of the things they hold dear. Hopefully it will also serve as a valuable reference work for later consultation after the first reading.

This is not a book on *how to teach* believers, but a book *to teach* believers, either in a one-on-one situation or a group setting. This material, however, is not a substitute for a personal mentor and should only serve as a supplement to discipleship (helping people follow Christ). Nevertheless, life offers occasions in which one leads another to Christ and, because of uncontrolled circumstances (i.e., time or distance), cannot disciple him or her. In these cases, this material would be ideal to give to that person.

This book contains purposeful limits. Since a volume this short could never adequately deal with all of the critical aspects surrounding major doctrinal issues, I include a suggested-reading bibliography for further research. Each chapter concludes with a summary, assignments, and a few questions for thought and discussion.

With a work like *Growing Up in Christ*, the reader's head might be filled while his heart remains empty. More than anything, I hope this book stirs passion in the heart of the reader for God's glory, a passion which results in a global vision for spreading the message of God's redeeming love among all the world. May God accomplish this in our generation.

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Although my wife, Denice, did not know me during most of my years of writing and editing this work, I owe her gratitude for helping me bring this book to completion. And of course, my daughter Hope, whose name could just as easily have been Joy, has helped me--by virtue of her neediness as a toddler--learn to put true discipleship into practice.

To God alone be the glory!

KLH

"God is the highest good of the reasonable creature; and the enjoyment of Him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. . . . Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance."

Jonathan Edwards

(1703-1758)

The Christian Pilgrim

"Grant, O Jesus, that I may love You more than I love my relatives and friends. That all my efforts be centered in knowing You, loving You and imitating You. O God of love, grant that I may love You as I should; that is, with a love which surpasses all other love. Amen."

Thomas à Kempis

(1380-1471)

The Imitation of Christ

"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."

Apostle Paul

(First century A.D.)

Ephesians 4:15-16, New International Version

CHAPTER 1 THE HEAVENLY FOOD

I grew up in a family with many Christian-based values. At the age of 11, I asked Jesus to change my life. For the first time in my short existence, I sensed that God had forgiven all of my sin.

As a new Christian, I felt a responsibility to read the Bible on a daily basis. But, as an 11-year-old boy, I hated to read. Nevertheless, I forced myself to crack open the Bible. I did well at first, but soon slacked on my Bible reading. Eventually, I ran out of spiritual energy.

Abstaining from reading the Bible for long periods of time was akin to avoiding food for a long duration. Only eating occasionally would cause my body to become weak and unhealthy. In the same manner, I didn't feed my soul and was spiritually starving. I continued to attend church services and listen to sermons, but this failed to properly nourish me. Trying to live through a week simply by hearing the Bible preached two or three times, with no Bible reading of my own seemed like enduring a week by eating only two or three meals. Spiritual malnutrition!

A few years later, I became increasingly aware of my poor spiritual diet. Eventually, I began to read the Bible more consistently. Before long, an intense love for the Word of God grew in my heart. As an 11-year-old boy, I had failed to realize that the Bible serves as more than a book to read sporadically. The Bible is the Word of God, the Book Christians live by, the Heavenly food.

Living According to the Bible

The Bible is spiritual food.¹ First Peter 2:2-3 says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." You will never find meaning in life without filling your mind with God's truth. David (ca. 1000 B.C.), the second king of Israel, said in Psalm 119:9, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word" (NKJV). Psalm 119:105 says, "[God's] Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Also, John 15:3 states, "You are already clean because of the Word which I [Jesus] have spoken to you" (NASV).

Daily read your Bible in a quiet place where you can study without interruption when your mind works best, whether morning, noon, or night. Attempt to read at least one chapter each day, or buy a one-year Bible so you can read through it annually. If you can not find a one-year Bible, you can read three chapters every day Monday through Saturday and five chapters on Sunday to complete the Bible in one year.

Of course, no biblical rules indicate how much Scripture you should read daily or annually. You have some freedom here but the more Bible you read the better.

The Bible stands as a unique book, and you can never read it too much. Your goal is not to just read it but to live it. An important point to remember is not how much of the Word *you get into*, but how much of the Word *gets into you*.

¹ *Bible* means the book, and *Scripture* refers to the Bible or a specific biblical passage. Throughout *Growing Up in Christ*, I frequently refer to the Bible as "the Word" or "the Word of God."

Pay attention to the biblical context when you read. Context refers to the verses and chapters surrounding a particular passage. If you skip around from book to book, ignoring the context, you may misunderstand a passage's true meaning.

Keep the original audience in mind as you read. Consider the passage in its natural, historical setting. The Bible is relevant and applicable for today, but don't apply it carelessly. Since there is a correct and incorrect way to interpret Scripture, be careful about haphazardly claiming promises. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV). Many books can assist you in studying the Bible and appropriately applying its promises.² Church leaders can also help you interpret Scripture.

You need to know what the Bible says in order to know God and His will. As a friend aptly stated, "If you are not educated by the *Word*, you will be educated by the *world*." Be prepared for Satan's schemes. The only way to prepare yourself is by knowing God's Word. Memorize key verses, perhaps one a week. In addition to your life-long pursuit of understanding the Bible, remember that it is your key source for getting to know God intimately. The Bible serves as the primary channel through which God will communicate with you.

Making Sense of the Bible

The Bible consists of two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament authors wrote the majority of this section in Hebrew. The New Testament authors wrote in Greek.

Scripture reveals God's will to mankind and explains God's plan of salvation for sinful humanity. It describes how God is defeating His enemy--the devil. More precisely, the Bible shows people how to have a personal relationship with the Lord.

In the Old Testament, God promises something special for Abraham (ca. 2000-1900 B.C.) and his offspring, the Jews. God told Abraham, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3, NKJV).³

Furthermore, in Exodus 20:3-17, God gave the Jews the Ten Commandments through Moses (ca. 1445 B.C.):

- 1). You shall have no other gods before Me.
- 2). You shall not make for yourself an idol.
- 3). You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
- 4). Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy [undefiled].
- 5). Honor your father and your mother.
- 6). You shall not murder.
- 7). You shall not commit adultery.

² See suggested reading list at the end of this book.

³ Also see Genesis 17:7 and Galatians 3:16, 29. Concerning the future of Israel, see Matthew 19:28 and Revelation 7:1-8; 21:12-14.

- 8). You shall not steal.
- 9). You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- 10). You shall not covet your neighbor's wife (or house, etc).

These commandments were given to the Israelites so they would know how to relate to God. According to Deuteronomy 4:13, the Ten Commandments, often called the "Mosaic covenant" by scholars, were God's summation of His guidelines for how the Israelites might lead holy lives--lives given to following God wholeheartedly--and best receive the promise of Genesis 12:2-3 (see above) revealed to Abraham. However, because God knew they would not keep these commandments (Deuteronomy 31:16, 20), He eventually made a new covenant, or promise, with Israel. Examine Jeremiah 31:31-34:

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "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. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The new covenant promised the coming forgiveness for Israel's sin and promised transforming power to live holy lives (Ezekiel 1:19-20).⁴ In Ezekiel 36:26-27, God tells Israel, "And I will give you a new heart--I will give you new and right desires--and put a new spirit within you. I will take out your stony hearts of sin and give you new hearts of love. And I will put My Spirit within you so that you will obey My laws and do whatever I command" (Living).

God loves all people, not just the Jews. In fact, God said that He is not only Lord of the Jews but Lord of the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). All of humanity needed a Savior, not only Israel.⁵ Therefore, from the lineage of King David, God eventually sent Jesus (Acts 13:23).

The New Testament, the second part of the Bible, gives a thorough account of the new covenant's fulfillment. In other words, the New Testament expounds upon Israel's (and all who believe) redeemer, Jesus. The New Testament shows that Jesus, the Savior,

⁴ For a better understanding of how people in the Old Testament had a relationship with God, see the **Appendix**. Furthermore, see 2 Corinthians 3-4 and Hebrews 7:11-9:28 for clarification on the old and new covenants.

⁵ See Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:32. Throughout this work any references with three or more biblical books cited will be put in a footnote to reduce clutter in the main text.

came to earth and fulfilled the old covenant. The Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, describe Jesus' earthly ministry, death, and resurrection. Jesus' death provided forgiveness for humanity's sin, at least for those who believe in Him (Matthew 26:28).

In the Book of Acts chapter 2, God gave His Holy Spirit to 3,000 believers, mostly Jews.⁶ As mentioned earlier, however, the good news of the new covenant is that God's provision for sin extends beyond the Jews.⁷ Acts 8 and 10 show that God gave His Spirit to all who believe in Him regardless of their ethnic origin. (Also see Acts 15:7-9.)

The Book of Acts lays out the activity of the Spirit working through the church. Simply put, the remainder of the New Testament instructs believers how to live until Jesus returns. The last book of the Bible, titled Revelation, describes how God will victoriously defeat Satan, bring history to a close, and establish a visible kingdom.

The Lord is the ultimate Author of Scripture; however, He used the personalities and writing styles of men to record what He spoke to them (2 Peter 1:21). The Bible contains *every* word God wanted it to have. Second Timothy 3:16 says that, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness." In other words, Scripture will lead you in the right direction spiritually, and otherwise.⁸ You can never go wrong by obeying Scripture.

The Bible contains 66 books that were written throughout a period of 1,500 years, and approximately 44 human authors contributed to it. One of the amazing aspects of the Bible is that it agrees internally and does not contradict itself.

Scribes worked as professional copiers; many spent their time preserving the Word of God. Thousands of biblical manuscripts have been preserved from ancient times.⁹ Even though no one possesses the originals, the existence of many ancient manuscripts testifies to the accuracy of Scripture. If the Lord created everything, then

⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the person of the Holy Spirit, see chapter 5 in this material.

⁷ Hosea 2:23; Acts 28:28; Romans 9:25-26; Ephesians 2:13; 1 Peter 2:10.

⁸ Consider what the Bible says about itself in Psalm 138:2; Proverbs 30:5-6; Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 5:17-20; Mark 12:36; Luke 16:17; 24:27; John 5:46-47; 10:35; 17:17; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 4:2; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 12, 14; 2 Timothy 3:16-17 [Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18]; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Peter 3:16. Interestingly, the Bible describes itself in several ways: gold (Psalm 19:10), a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29), a sword (Hebrews 4:12), a mirror (James 1:23-24).

⁹ See Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 36.

surely He can accurately deliver His Word to humanity without error.¹⁰ But don't be surprised when you meet those who disagree with you concerning the Bible's accuracy.

Summary

Scripture functions as the main spiritual food for believers. God gave His Word so people would understand His overall purpose in history. The Bible shows people how they can have an intimate relationship with the one true God of the universe. Believers should study God's Word frequently so that they can live in conformity to its truths.

Assignments

1. Memorize Psalm 119:11, "I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You."
2. Start reading the Bible today. Perhaps you will want to start in the Old Testament with the Book of Genesis or in the New Testament with the Book of John. Or you might want to start with a shorter New Testament book like Philippians, Colossians, or James. Strive to read at least one chapter each day. Consider using a notebook to record the passage, the details of its contents, and how you can apply what you read.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the two main divisions of the Bible?
2. How is the new covenant, that God made with Israel in Jeremiah 31:31-34, relevant to the nation of Israel and the followers of Christ, the church?
3. Is the Bible accurate on all issues it discusses?
4. How does daily Bible reading help believers?

¹⁰ See John 14:26; 16:13 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 to better understand the Holy Spirit's role in making sure the human authors recorded Scripture correctly.

Answers to Chapter 1 Discussion Questions

1. What are the two main divisions of the Bible? *The Old Testament and the New Testament. "Covenant" is another word that can be interchanged with "testament."*

2. How is the new covenant, that God made with Israel in Jeremiah 31:31-34, relevant to the nation of Israel and the followers of Christ, the church? *God promised to put His law in the hearts and minds of Israel and Judah. He called this the new covenant that would enable them to obey. Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25, Galatians 6:16 and other passages indicate that Christ's promise to empower Israel to one day obey His Word is also now applicable to the church.*

3. Is the Bible accurate on all issues it discusses? *Yes. There are certainly many difficult passages in Scripture, but, historically, Christians have always affirmed the truthfulness and accuracy of Scripture.*

4. How does daily Bible reading help believers? *It gives them insight into the very heart and mind of God. It shows believers how to joyfully live in obedience to God.*

CHAPTER 2 THE HOTLINE TO GOD

By their hard work, Alexander Graham Bell and his assistant Thomas Watson put all telephone users in their debt. In 1876, little did Bell and Watson know the effect their invention would have on the world. The telephone, and now email, stand as amazing creations; regardless of the miles separating two people, they can communicate with one another. While high-tech devices make contact with friends and family possible, prayer makes talking with the Heavenly Father possible.

The Importance of Prayer

As the previous chapter noted that God's Word serves as a means through which the Lord communicates with you, this chapter discusses prayer as a means through which you communicate with God. Prayer provides you with the opportunity to fellowship with God. You do not need a priest or a pastor to talk with your Heavenly Father (Hebrews 7; 1 Peter 2:4-10). You can speak directly to God (Hebrews 4:16).

Prayer is so important that even Jesus Himself prayed (Mark 1:35). King David prayed at least three times a day (Psalm 55:17). You too should pray daily (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Matthew 6:8 reveals that God knows what you need before you ask Him through prayer. So why pray if God already knows what you will say? Pray because only He holds the power to ultimately help you, and because He *wants* you to pray to Him.

Although some respectable Christians would disagree with me, I believe prayer does not change God's mind. Instead, prayer helps you draw closer to Him. God has designed us to pray so we can then see Him act.

The telephone and email are not ends in themselves. You use them as devices to communicate with others. In a similar way, prayer is not an end in itself but a means through which Christians tap into God's power. Biblical prayer deepens and expresses your faith (Matthew 21:22) by allowing you to see God's goodness in answering your prayers (Matthew 7:7-12; Hebrews 4:16). Prayer also develops perseverance through difficult times (Luke 11:9-13; 18:1-8).

As much as possible, make prayer a natural part of your daily life. Prayer is more than something to do every once in a while but something you can do throughout the day (Luke 21:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). "Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and prayerful always" (Romans 12:12, Living). Philippians 4:6 says ". . .with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." You can pray quietly as you sit at your desk at work, or push your shopping cart down the grocery aisle. Prayer need not be loud in order to be valid. You can utter it in your heart.

If you pray out loud during public worship, remember, your goal is to talk with God, not to impress people. Jesus warned against praying with wrong motives:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-7)

Effective Prayer

To pray effectively, be specific when you talk to God. Do not merely ask God to "bless" you or other people; reverently tell God precisely what you desire so that you will know when He answers your prayers (Philippians 4:7).

You might want to journal your prayer requests so that when God answers them you can record the date. Imagine how encouraging this will be after God begins to answer your prayers. Think what your journal will look like in 20 years.

In what physical position should you pray? The Bible gives no specific position. You do not have to kneel or close your eyes while praying, although it may be appropriate in certain settings. You also do not have to pray verbally, though sometimes doing so may help you concentrate.

How should you pray? What pattern or outline should you follow, if any? In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus offered a prayer for His disciples (followers) in what Christians often call The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, we honor Your holy name. We ask that Your kingdom will come now. May Your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give us our food again today, as usual, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. Don't bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One. Amen. (Living)

Weekly, many Christians pray this prayer together during public worship services. That's fine, but you don't have to pray this model prayer. Jesus prayed it to give believers an idea of how to pray more effectively. Let's look at a few aspects of prayer that could help you pray more effectively.

Aspects of Prayer

Praise is the facet of prayer during which you reflect upon the attributes or characteristics of God (holy, good, all-powerful, etc.) and express adoration to Him. Think of praise as your compliments to God. Try using Psalms 145-150 as your own personal prayers of praise to God. Also, Revelation 4:8, 11 and 5:12-13 can be helpful in directing your praise time. Ponder who God is, and declare your love for Him.

Praise is not merely a segment of prayer; praise should characterize your life (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Like Philippians 4:4 says, "Always be full of joy in the Lord; I say it again, rejoice" (Living).

Giving thanks is another important part of prayer during which you express your gratitude to God for what He has accomplished. Think of His goodness and how it affects you. "No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, Living). Pause for a few moments now to thank God for as many things as you can think of. The next time you prepare to eat, stop and thank God for providing for your needs.¹¹

¹¹ Matthew 15:36; 26:27; Mark 8:6; 1 Timothy 4:3.

Confession functions as a vital component of prayer, too. When you confess your sin to God, you agree with your Creator that your sin is rebellion against Him. "But if we confess our sins to Him, He can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins" (1 John 1:9, Living). Confessing sin goes hand-in-hand with repentance. Repentance pictures the idea of turning from your immoral behavior and following God's ways.

Since you sinned specifically, you should confess your sins specifically. Some people wait until their day concludes before they confess and repent, but you'll live happier if you confess and repent immediately after realizing your sin. Never embrace the attitude, "I'll sin now and confess it later." Such an approach to sin will harm you and others.

Ezra 9:5-15, Nehemiah 1, Psalm 51, Daniel 9, and Isaiah 6 provide a few examples of men confessing their sin to God. Consider Proverb 28:13 which states, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Also, see Psalm 32:3-5 and 139:23-24.

When you confess sin to God, you are *not* persuading Him to forgive you. If you are a Christian, God has already forgiven you (1 John 1:7). Then why confess your sin to God? Confession expresses to God your disappointment for your sin, just as you should confess to your family or friends for offending them. It keeps you humbly submitted to God.¹²

Be aware of the difference between feeling guilty about your sin and confessing your sin with the intention of abandoning such acts (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). Confession consists of more than feeling guilty; confession is about hating your sin and living in obedience, joy, and peace with God.

Confession conveys your desire to abandon your sin. You can confess your sin to the Father while knowing that through Christ you have fellowship with God (1 John 2:1). Your sin does not sever your *relationship* with God, but sin does hinder your *fellowship* with Him. If a son offends his dad, the offense might cause friction between the two, but it will not destroy their father-son relationship. God's relationship with you stands on securer ground than mere earthly relationships (Romans 8:31-39).

¹² Commenting on 1 John 1:3, 8 and 10, two scholars make some noteworthy statements about confession: "John really means that we must confess our sins in an ongoing way to be forgiven by God.... The stubborn refusal to admit such sins is lethal. What are we to make of the objection that our sins are already forgiven? The already-but-not-yet dynamic of New Testament-thinking helps us here. Yes, we are already forgiven. But we have not yet arrived in the Heavenly city.... We are already forgiven, yet we must continue to confess sins in order to be forgiven. The Scriptures teach both truths, and we ignore either of them to our peril." Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 77.

You need to confess your sin because God hates sin.¹³ He doesn't hate you, but He does despise your sin, which will hinder your prayers if left unconfessed.¹⁴ When you harbor unconfessed sin, your prayers lose their power. Even unresolved conflict with someone will hinder your spiritual life (Matthew 5:23-24). In fact, unrepentant sin in your life may be an indicator that you aren't really a child of God. This isn't to say that Christians never sin, but they can't sin and be happy about it because God's presence in believers lets them know they rebelled, and provokes them to confess their sin and change their behavior. (For more details on habitual sin, see section entitled "Freedom and Limits" in chapter 8).

When confessing your sins to God, don't hide your feelings from Him. If you are angry at God or someone else, reverently confess it to Him. Unconfessed sin can cause sickness, but confession and the passionate prayers of maturing believers, can lead to healing (James 5:13-18).

Intercession is prayer on behalf of someone else. The Holy Spirit and Jesus talk to God the Father for you (Romans 8:26, 34; 1 Timothy 2:5). Follow their example and pray for others. Make a list of people to pray for, and perhaps divide this list in order to pray for certain people on specific days. Even Paul the Apostle,¹⁵ ca. A.D. 63, requested prayer (Ephesians 6:18-19) and he made it a point to faithfully pray for others (Romans 1:9; Colossians 1:3).

You can start your list with the following suggestions: the peace of Jerusalem or Israel (Psalm 122:6); more workers for spreading the gospel and making disciples throughout the world (Matthew 9:38); all people and the governments (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Petitioning consists of making requests to God for your own needs and wants. "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 minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). You can talk to God about anything, so don't fear asking Him for big or small requests.

Listening to God is also important. Psalm 4:4 declares, "In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent." Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Listening might be the most difficult part of prayer. Start with small chunks of time (5 minutes) and increase gradually. Although God can speak audibly, it does not appear to be His usual way of communicating with us, so don't expect to hear an audible voice. He has chosen to speak through the Bible.

¹³ Hebrews 12:5-11; 1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 5:16.

¹⁴ Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:2; 1 Peter 3:7.

¹⁵ An apostle is a follower of Jesus. Sometimes the Bible used the term to refer to those in the first century who saw Jesus with their own eyes, and at other times to refer to certain key Christians, such as Paul, who never saw Jesus (in the sense the other 12 disciples did) but nonetheless followed Him.

Nevertheless, during this listening time, ask God to provide thoughts that will help you live a healthy Christian life. Ponder what God wants you to do with the truth you have gleaned from His Word. Consider what should change or remain the same in your life. If need be, confess any previously overlooked sin. Then, attempt to be still and quiet while you reflect on God's Word. Possibly, you will want to write down the thoughts that come to mind.

Unanswered Prayer

Does God always answer prayer? Certainly, but sometimes He answers "No." Why would God say no to His own children? The ultimate answer may be a mystery, but let me offer a few considerations. For instance, you might not need what you want, or what you want might hurt you. In fact, you might be asking for something less than God's best for your life. In some cases, you lack something simply because you have yet to ask God for it (James 4:2-3). But God does sometimes say "No."

At other times, His response may be "Not now" because He wants you to wait until you mature more (Psalms 25:3; 27:4; 37:7). We don't receive everything at the moment we ask for it. And sometimes we don't get it, period.

Some Christians teach that you can have whatever you want--just pray for it with faith and God will give it. God never promises, however, to give us everything we request. The Apostle Paul asked the Lord to remove something very painful, something Paul called a thorn in his flesh, but God did not grant the request (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). God will not give you everything you want, yet He delights in giving you that which serves your good *and* His glory.¹⁶

The Bible says that Christians should pray according to God's will as 1 John 5:14-15 instructs, "And we are sure of this, that He will listen to us whenever we ask Him for anything in line with His will. And if we really know He is listening when we talk to Him and make our requests, then we can be sure that He will answer us" (Living).

But how do you pray according to God's will? Does it mean to end your prayers with the phrase "In Jesus' name"?

Not necessarily. Just ending your prayer by saying "In Jesus' name" or "In the name of Jesus" does not guarantee that you have prayed according to God's will or that you will get what you want. Praying according to God's will, and praying in Jesus' name, means, among other things, that you should pray with Jesus' attitude toward the Heavenly Father, "Not my will but Yours be done" (Matthew 26:42; John 14:13). We must always pray realizing that God has the prerogative to give or withhold.

When God Seems Distant

You will sometimes feel like God has forsaken you. David said in Psalm 22:2, "O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent." In fact, David and other biblical writers frequently felt distance between themselves and God (Psalms 10:1, 22:1, 43:2, 44:23, Isaiah 8:17). You will also travel through this valley,

¹⁶ 2 Samuel 23:5; Psalm 20:4; 21:2; 36:8; 37:4; 145:19; Proverbs 10:24; 13:4; Matthew 7:7; 21:21-22; Luke 11:1-13; John 10:10; Romans 8:28-29; Ephesians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:3; 1 John 5:14-15.

this "dark night of the soul" as some label it. Listen to the words of Richard Foster on this issue: "It is true that those in the first flush of faith often are given unusual graces of the Spirit, just like a new baby is cuddled and pampered. It is also true that some of the deepest experiences of alienation and separation from God have come to those who have traveled far into the interior realms of faith."¹⁷

Most Christians who have walked with the Lord a number of years can attest to such an experience in which no matter how much they prayed and read God's Word, the Lord still felt far away. I walked through this valley when I was 25 years old and studying in seminary. I wasn't hiding any major sin in my life, nor was I ignorant of God's Word. But I remained stuck in this spiritually dark time for more than a year. I spoke about it with friends, prayed concerning it, searched the Bible for that one verse to set me soaring once again in the fresh air of God's joy, but not much happened. Instead, God let me dwell there for a while, following Him just on faith, with little spiritual or emotional feeling to back it up. On numerous occasions I burned with anger against God for not letting me feel what I had once enjoyed when I prayed and read the Bible. Why would God not answer me? Silence!

After numerous months, the gloom lifted and my heart once again began beating with joy. I remember that moment vividly. I was praying with several other Christians, and my awareness of God's presence began to reemerge. I was so glad to sense God's presence again, I wept with delight.

You are likely going to encounter similar times, feeling God has abandoned you. What should you do when facing these dry seasons of life? While no easy answers exist, Pastor Rick Warren lists some good principles to keep in mind: 1). Tell God exactly how you feel; 2). Focus on who God is--His unchanging nature; 3). Trust God to keep His promises; 4). Remember what God has already done for you.¹⁸

Prayer and Fasting

Fasting refers to consciously abstaining from anything, usually food, for a specific span of time for the purpose of focusing special attention on God concerning certain issues. The Bible often links fasting with prayer (Luke 2:37; Acts 14:23). Jonah 3:5 connects fasting with repentance.

The New Testament does not so much command fasting as it assumes that believers will fast (Matthew 6:16-18; Mark 2:18-20). When you fast, try not to let anybody know about it, unless someone asks you directly or you need to tell someone not to cook for you. Otherwise you might be tempted to fast to impress people. The Bible teaches that those who fast and pray to impress others gain only applause from humans; God does not smile at these vain efforts (Matthew 6:16-18). So, if possible, keep your fasting endeavors to yourself.

Determine the duration of your fast before you start. The Bible does not mandate official time limits for fasting. In Matthew 4:2, Jesus fasted 40 days and nights without

¹⁷ *Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 19.

¹⁸ *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002), 110-112.

food. Exodus 34:28-29 says Moses went 40 days and nights without food or water. God supernaturally sustained him, since we can't naturally go many days without water.

Beginners should start reasonably (i.e., 3 to 5 hours). When breaking a fast of 12 or more hours, do not eat too much for your initial meal. Your stomach may not be ready for much food, so don't overdo it. Consult your doctor before fasting, especially if you are elderly, or have health complications.

If the situation that you're fasting about changes, it might affect the duration of your fast. For example, King David fasted so his child might be healed, but then he ceased fasting when his baby died (2 Samuel 12:16-22). You may fast for a few hours, days, or, for those with more experience at fasting, weeks.

The first few times you fast will be difficult, but don't give up. Ask God to give you endurance during this period of fasting. If you fail, move on and try again. You might want to fast with a friend so you can encourage one another.

Let your hunger pangs serve as reminders to pray more about whatever provoked you to fast. When you willfully abstain from things that are necessary for survival (food) or permissible to enjoy (television), such discipline can draw you closer to God. Occasionally resisting necessary or permissible things might even give you a greater ability to resist sinful things. (See chapter 9, the section entitled "The Danger of Legalism.")

Clarify specifically *why* you want to fast (i.e., what do you desire God to do?). Know specifically *what* you will abstain from. You might fast from television, the Internet, food, sodas, sleep or a combination of several. The Bible allows for creativity concerning fasting. Fasting need not become a burdensome duty or a magic formula. By itself, fasting will not make you a stronger Christian. Remember, even Buddhists and Muslims and Jews fast, but that doesn't make them right with God. A relationship with Christ makes us right with God.

For those of us following Christ, we fast not because it makes us right with God, but because it, if conducted with the right attitude, can help us draw closer to God. Fasting is not the goal, but simply a means through which we fellowship with God.

What a privilege to fast and fellowship with the Lord who changed us from the wicked and dirty people that we were to the pure and clean people He is making us into.

Summary

Prayer is the means through which believers talk to God. Prayer is not just something you can do while gathered with other believers, but rather, you have the privilege of praying alone throughout each day. Prayer does not inform God of your needs in the sense that it gives Him information He didn't already have; rather, prayer allows you to trust God with your needs. The Bible often links prayer and fasting--both permit believers to experience the seriousness and intimacy of talking with God.

Assignments

1. Memorize Mark 1:35, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed."
2. Start your daily prayer time today. Try to incorporate it into your Bible reading time. In other words, read your Bible and then pray, or vice versa. Use the above six concepts under "Aspects of Prayer" as a guide. Make a list of concerns to pray for.

3. Sometime throughout the next seven days, set aside three to five hours for fasting. Obviously, this should be done in place of a meal, or something else that you really like to do on a regular basis. Try spending this time praying, singing praises to God, and reading the Bible.

Discussion Questions

1. Will God always answer your prayer with a "Yes"?
2. What are the six aspects of prayer?
3. What things can hinder your prayers?
4. Should you fast?

Answers to Chapter 2 Discussion Questions

1. Will God always answer your prayer with a "Yes"? *No. Scripture teaches that God loves to answer prayer, and He always does answer, but not always in the way we may expect.*
2. What are the six aspects of prayer? *Praise, Thanksgiving (giving thanks), Confession, Intercession, Petitioning, Listening.*
3. What things can hinder your prayers? *There may be several answers, but unconfessed sin, like a grudge against your spouse, will definitely hinder your prayers.*
4. Should you fast? *There are no biblical passages that say all believers should definitely fast, but it is my opinion that Christians do well to fast occasionally.*

CHAPTER 3 THE CLEANSING EFFECT

In the early 1990s, my dad bought a house to fix up and sell. By looking at this house, I had good reason to wonder why he chose one so badly needing repair. A fire had damaged large portions of the floor, walls, and ceiling. For three years after the fire, rain poured through the damaged roof, contributing to the house's demise. The floor bowed, the walls hid behind a black stain, and all the windows bore witness to the rock-throwing skills of mischievous boys. My dad, however, held high hopes for this piece of rubbish.

Shortly after my dad purchased the house, I returned to my hometown for a few weeks and helped him clean. I remember feeling overwhelmed at such a hopeless sight and thinking my dad to be a bit crazy. Sweeping up the debris seemed like an endless task. After seemingly endless hours sweeping debris, with dust irritating my eyes and lungs, I gladly returned to Dallas.

Several months later, I returned to Tennessee and discovered that the house had undergone a remarkable transformation. That renovated dwelling showed that my dad had poured countless dollars, sweat, and hours into rebuilding the once dilapidated house. He replaced the windows, painted and papered the walls, rebuilt the floors, and covered them with new carpet. The smell of newness hovered in that work of art. Only someone with diligence, skill, and immense patience could do such a thing.

This amazing transformation symbolizes what Christ did for me. I was wretched, vile, polluted, and nasty. Surely I was more hopeless than my dad's burnt house. Then God came along and changed me. He gave me new life and cleansed me from the inside out, like my dad did for his house. Of course, God did not do this for me only but for all believers.

God has cleansed countless spiritually dirty humans, allowing them to have a relationship with Him. He demonstrated His desire to offer hope to sinful humanity with the first two humans who lived thousands of years ago in the Garden of Eden.

Humanity

Adam and Eve were the first humans on earth. God formed Adam from the ground (Genesis 2:7; 2 Corinthians 15:47-49). Not wanting Adam to be alone, God created woman (Genesis 2:18, 21-25).

Humans seem to be the only creature that God created in His own image (Genesis 1:26).¹⁹ God created humanity, and everything else, for His purposes (Isaiah 43:7; Revelation 4:11). God exists perfectly complete without us and does not need humanity. Nevertheless, out of the deep reservoirs of the Lord's love, He created people so we could interact with Him. In fact, our ability to fellowship with our Creator is what makes us distinct from the rest of creation.

¹⁹ It is highly debated as to what Scripture means when it says that Adam and Eve were created in God's image. At least part of being created in God's image includes an ability to have a relationship with God through means of salvation from sin. See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990 reprint), 498-517.

Sin

Sin is rebellion against God. It is any thought or act not in compliance with God's will. In short, sin means wrongdoing. Sin became a problem for the human race when Satan tempted Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit, and she succumbed to his temptations and sinned (Genesis 3:1-7). Adam then did likewise. She and Adam sinned after God had explained what could, and should not, be eaten (Genesis 2:16-17).

Genesis 2:17 says that if they partook of the forbidden fruit, they would die.²⁰ Why did they not drop dead immediately when they disobeyed? What God said in Genesis 2:17 meant more than physical death but spiritual destruction.²¹ Spiritual death signals that an individual is separated from God (i.e., no ability to fellowship with God) just as physical death indicates the soul is separated from the body (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:14-15).

Immediate consequences, however, transpired because of Adam and Eve's sin. Genesis 3:16-19 explains some of the physical penalties which resulted from their sin.²² The human race fell into sin because of Adam and Eve's disobedience.

Sin separates mankind from God (Isaiah 59:2). Jeremiah 17:9 states that the heart (the innermost part of a person) is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.²³ Because Adam represented mankind, he passed on his sin to all of humanity.²⁴

Because Adam and Eve sinned, their natures became sinful. Therefore they could only produce sinful offspring. As such, we are born with a sin nature--a proclivity to sin. With the progression of time, our sin nature blossoms. Adam's disobedience brought sin and death, but Christ's obedience brought forgiveness and life (1 Corinthians 15:22).

God's Love for Humanity

"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whomever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."²⁵ God the Father demonstrated His love to you through His Son Jesus (Romans 5:8).

²⁰ Sin brings death (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23; James 1:15).

²¹ By sinning, however, they probably forfeited a never-ending physical life (Genesis 3:22-24).

²² See Numbers 30:8, 11; Ephesians 5:22-25, 28, 33; Titus 2:5; 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

²³ Also see Matthew 15:18-19.

²⁴ Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; 5:12-19; and Galatians 3:22. See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 632-39.

²⁵ Author's translation of John 3:16

He loves you because of who *He* is, merciful and gracious. He does not give you what you deserve, eternal death (see Psalm 145:9). Yet, He gives you what you do not deserve, eternal life (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

God does not love you because of any intrinsic goodness you possess. Rather, if you have believed in His Son Christ, He loves you with an ultimate, unconditional, unchanging love stemming from His intrinsic goodness. As a believer, God will never love you more or less than He does now.

Salvation

Just as my dad made that ruined house look beautiful, so God is making you into a beautiful masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10). As that house couldn't change itself, you too couldn't save yourself because you were dead in your sin (Ephesians 2:1-5).²⁶ But now that Christ saved you, you possess true spiritual life. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."

Christ saves people from their sin and rescues them from God's wrath. "Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him" (Romans 5:9).

Romans 6:23 says "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." If you are a believer, your sins have been covered (Romans 4:7), canceled (Colossians 2:13-14), and forgiven (1 John 2:12).

Jesus is the only way to peace with God. Acts 4:12 teaches, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." As Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus was the gospel (the good news) in the flesh.²⁷

In Romans 1:16, Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." No one can be saved without believing the gospel. People receive salvation only through the forgiving work of Christ. God allows people to believe as Philippians 1:29 stated, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him." Also, see 1 Corinthians 1:30.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God." In other words, if you are a Christian, God saved you not because of anything you did to merit it but because He is good.

²⁶ A person who has trusted Christ is often referred to as "saved," "born again," "a convert," "a Christian," and "a believer." Saved, in short, refers to the process by which God delivers believers from His wrath and the penalty of sin.

²⁷ "Gospel" means good news and refers to the good news of forgiveness that comes to believers through Christ's death and resurrection, Romans 10:14-17. Also, see 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

As Romans 2:4 states, God's goodness allowed you to repent: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" Repentance does not mean that you turn over a new leaf or straighten up your life *so God will accept you*. Rather, repentance is a change of mind which *results* in a change of behavior.²⁸ Your desire then is to turn away from sin and turn to God. This "turning" to Him is faith (Romans 10:9-10, 14-17).

Faith consists of two facets. The first aspect is merely mental assent. The Bible says that even the demons believe in God (James 2:19), but, obviously, demons are not Christians. The kind of faith that demons possess consists of mental assent or the accepting of facts. Many people possess only this type of faith, but they are not believers in the true sense of the word.

The second aspect of faith is total reliance upon Christ. If anyone has faith, he or she must realize that God provided it (Ephesians 2:8; 1 John 5:20). True faith consists of more than just accepting facts; true faith relies completely upon Jesus, that He destroyed sin's debt, and that He has authority over all areas of one's life.

Since you lack the power to save yourself, putting your faith in Christ means trusting what Christ did on the cross to bring you into a right relationship with God. True faith entails more than believing doctrine. Having faith is trusting Christ to change your life; it means you trust God with your life now and after death.

Just believing facts about Jesus will not save a person any more than believing facts about a chair will hold up that person; a person must trust the chair enough to sit down. Likewise, he must trust Christ to forgive his sin. When a person trusts Christ to forgive sin, he receives salvation and surrenders his life to Christ's authority.

"*Faith* is the evidence of things hoped for; the substance of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). To have faith in God does not indicate that Christians have taken a blind leap of faith (i.e., believed something without substantial evidence), but that they cannot see or touch the person they trust (John 20:29). Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God.²⁹ Furthermore, Habakkuk 2:4 states, "The righteous will live by faith." In other words, since humans cannot see or touch God, the only way to relate to Him is by faith.

Assurance and Security

Often, Christians wonder whether trusting Christ to forgive their sin gives them a relationship with Him. They fear and doubt that there might be something left undone about their salvation.

But God wants His children to have assurance that He has saved them from their sin. "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13).

²⁸ God initiates the change of mind and enables you to carry out the change of behavior.

²⁹ See Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

"Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). According to the Bible, if you have trusted Christ, you are saved.³⁰ You can also have assurance of salvation because salvation stands secure. In other words, when a person receives salvation, he or she can never lose it. You did nothing to deserve it, and you can do nothing to forfeit it (John 10:27-29; Ephesians 1:13).³¹

A word of caution must be added here, because often people think that since they are assured of salvation then they can sin as much as they want. Being assured of and secure in salvation indicates that you submitted to Christ's authority. Salvation implies that you now live for Christ and not for your own sinful pleasure (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Be careful not to abuse God's goodness. If you desire to use God just to enter heaven, and you intend to do whatever you want, even if Scripture says it is wrong, then you are probably not a Christian. "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him" (1 John 2:29).

Relationship

Becoming a Christian means that you have entered into a relationship with your Creator. God gave you eternal life (Romans 6:23).³² Your body will die, but you will not be separated from Him. Eternal life begins at the moment of salvation (John 17:3) and will continue forever.

³⁰ Again, Schreiner and Caneday, authors of *The Race Set Before Us*, help us think through our theology of salvation: "We conclude that it is wrong to conceive of salvation exclusively in terms of the past. Believers have been saved, yet the New Testament emphasizes even more that we shall be saved on the last day. We are already saved, yet our salvation has not yet been completed or consummated. We must uphold the tension in the New Testament between the already and not yet when we think of salvation in the New Testament. Believers today are prone to oversimplify the biblical teaching and to think of salvation only in terms of the present. When this happens, a crucial element of biblical teaching is surrendered, and we shall see that abandoning part of the biblical teaching has practical consequences that are of great importance" (52).

³¹ Many Christians disagree on this point. Hebrews 6:4-6, and other passages, are often used to support the view that a person can abandon his faith. But, I think Scripture in its entirety teaches that we cannot lose our salvation. Such warning passages, however, should not be glossed over by those of us who believe in eternal security. These warnings are real. If one does not persevere in his faith, one isn't saved.

³² Eternal life may be simply defined as a believer's unending fellowship and existence with God. Consider what the Old Testament says concerning eternal life (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11; Psalms 49:9; 139:8, 24; Ecclesiastes 12:7). Also see further New Testament verses (John 3:15; 10:28; 1 Timothy 6:12; Titus 3:7; 1 John 5:11; Jude 21).

God the Father forgives all the sin of those who trust Him to do so (Psalm 103:3, 12; Colossians 2:13).³³ If you have trusted Christ, God has pardoned your wrongful deeds and has forgiven your guilt and penalty based on Christ's death on the cross.³⁴

You were a slave to sin--it had power over you. While enslaved to sin, Christ delivered you from its chains. The act of God buying you is called *redemption*.³⁵

God purchased you from sin's penalty--eternal separation from Him (i.e., hell). To put it another way, God owned the bank, and you had accumulated an unpayable debt. Someone had to pay--either you suffering in hell or Christ suffering for your sin, and Christ chose to pay that debt for you. Scripture uses the term *ransom* to indicate the payment Jesus made with His shed blood.³⁶ Christ gave you a new bank account, forever

³³ Even though I approach these issues from a Reformed or Calvinistic perspective, as opposed to an Arminian perspective, if the reader wants to delve into passages on both sides of the debate related to foreknowledge, predestination, election, foreordination, sovereignty, and free will, etc, see: Genesis 6:6; 1 Kings 18:37; Psalms 22:9-10; 76:10; 115:3; Proverbs 8:17; 16:4, 33; Isaiah 14:27; 42:9; 46:9-11; 54:16-17; 63:17; 65:12; Jeremiah 29:13; Lamentations 3:37-38; Ezekiel 18:31-32; 34:11, 16; Daniel 4:32; Habakkuk 1:6, 11; Matthew 18:14; 22:3, 14; 23:37; 25:34; Mark 6:5-6; Luke 7:30; 16:16; 22:22; 24:16, 31; John 3:27; 5:40; 6:37, 39, 44, 65; 10:26; 17:6; Acts 1:7; 2:23; 4:27-28; 7:51; 13:48; 16:14; 17:26; Romans 8:29-30; 9:11, 15, 18, 20-21, 23-24; 10:21; 11:2-5, 7, 22, 32; 1 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11; 2:10; 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:10; Hebrews 11:6; 1 Peter 1:2, 20; Jude 4; Revelation 6:11; 13:8; 17:8, 17.

For a brief summation of these ideologies, under "Arminianism" and "Calvinism," see *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 79-81, 186-88. For further succinct discussions, see J. S. O'Malley, "Arminianism," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. D. G. Reid, R. D. Linder, B. L. Shelley, and H. S. Stout (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 77-79. Also see R. W. A. Letham, "Reformed Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. J. I. Packer, S. B. Ferguson, and D. F. Wright (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 569-72. Also, for various articles in support of Arminianism, see Clark Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989. And, for various Calvinistic articles, see Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, ed., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

³⁴ Acts 13:38; 26:18; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14.

³⁵ Romans 3:24; 8:23; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12, 15; 1 Peter 1:18-19. Notice, also, the future aspect of redemption in Ephesians 1:14; 4:3.

³⁶ Genesis 22:13; Matthew 20:28; Acts 20:28; Psalm 5:10; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:18; 1 Timothy 2:6.

debt-free (i.e., new life). The Bible calls this new spiritual life *regeneration* or *renewal* (Matthew 19:28; Titus 3:5).

Now that you serve Christ, peace reigns between you and God; your sin no longer separates you from Him. The mending of this broken relationship is called *reconciliation* or *restoration*.³⁷ God considers you part of His family, one of His heirs; *adoption* refers to the act of God making you His child.³⁸

You will receive an inheritance from God because you are a joint-heir with Christ.³⁹ Receiving an inheritance means you will receive the benefits and pleasures of living with God forever.

Christ died on the cross and suffered for your unrighteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21); He then credited to your account His undefiled character or *righteousness*.⁴⁰ You needed Christ's purity because you were sinful by means of your and Adam's corruption (Romans 5:12-13). Yet Christ credited His purity to you.⁴¹ Now God views you, and all Christians, as possessing Christ's righteousness.

God's act of declaring you righteous is called *justification*.⁴² He cleansed you and declared you to have a right status with Him. Because of Christ's death on the cross, God sees you as pure.

To better understand justification, consider the situation of a good friend of mine who lived in a slum of Jacksonville, Florida. While growing up, his family lived in poverty. But because of skills he learned in the Navy, a millionaire offered him a position as navigator of his yacht. The yacht owner even made his bank account available to my friend, supplying all the cash he needed. Needless to say, my friend took the position.

Picture yourself having grown up in a ghetto and now traveling around the world, able to buy anything you want. This became my friend's situation.

If you are a believer, something even more spectacular has happened to you. Christ made you a partaker of His own righteousness. Just as the millionaire made his account available to my friend, so Christ credited His purity to you. He did not forgive only some of your sins, and add the stipulation, "Do not ever mess up or you'll have to

³⁷ Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20-21.

³⁸ John 1:12; Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5.

³⁹ Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 1:12; Galatians 4:6-7.

⁴⁰ Romans 3:21-22, 25-26; 4:3, 5, 6, 9, 13; Galatians 3:6.

⁴¹ Psalm 32:2; Romans 4:6, 11, 22-24; 5:13; James 2:23.

⁴² Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:26, 30; 4:25; 5:16, 18; Galatians 2:16; 3:24; Titus 3:7.

get saved again." Instead, Christ forgave all of your sins and declared you eternally pure. He gave you unlimited forgiveness.⁴³

You have been, and are being, *sanctified* (i.e., set apart from sin unto God). Sanctification consists of at least two aspects. First, God spiritually seated you in the heavens when you entrusted your life to Christ (Ephesians 2:6). This means that your ultimate home is in heaven with God. Second, God is daily sanctifying you.⁴⁴ He continually seeks to make you more like Christ in your thoughts and actions.

The last stage of salvation is *glorification*.⁴⁵ This will take place when you pass from this life into God's visible presence. Glorification does not mean that you will become God. You will, however, shed all earthly limitations which impede you from maximum intimacy with God. "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). One day we will see God as He really is.

A Christian can also be termed a *convert*. Conversion indicates a turning or change in one's life. It's not wrong to label the initial salvation experience a conversion, but the whole process of salvation, from initial faith to glorification in heaven, is the conversion of the believer.⁴⁶ New believers, sometimes called new converts, have the privilege of entering into fellowship with God, the One who created everything.

⁴³ What about Jesus' "if" statement in Matthew 6:14-15? (Also see Mark 11:25-26.) Matthew 6:14-15 sounds as though Jesus was saying that forgiveness is conditional (i.e., if you forgive others, He will forgive you). Jesus seemed to be saying, "You want me to do good things for you, and you want others to respond to you in a wholesome fashion, so treat them in a wholesome fashion. You ought to forgive just as you have been forgiven."

In other words, you would not want Christ to hold a grudge against you; therefore, do not hold a grudge against anyone else. Treat them the way you would want God to treat you. If you do not forgive others, you are acting as one who is unforgiven. In fact, the biblical warning means that if you don't forgive others, God won't forgive you. Also see Matthew 5:44-45 and John 1:9. For a detailed discussion on how believers can affirm eternal security, while at the same time take the warning passages and conditional statements seriously, see John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1995), 231-71 and the previously mentioned Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*.

⁴⁴ 2 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:22; James 4:8. Also see Numbers 7:1; Deuteronomy 32:51; John 17:17, 19; Acts 26:18; Romans 8:29; 15:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:26; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 9:13; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2.

⁴⁵ Romans 8:17-18, 30; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 15:52-54; Philippians 3:21; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 John 3:3.

⁴⁶ Psalms 19:7; 51:13; Matthew 13:15; Mark 4:12; John 12:40; Acts 3:19; 15:3; 28:27.

Love Toward God

You should love God because He first loved you (1 John 4:19).⁴⁷ You demonstrate your love for Him by submitting to Him (James 5:8). If you love Him, you will obey Him; and if you love Him, obedience will be a pleasure (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). This is not to say that you'll always want to obey. Sometimes temptation will be strong and disobedience will seem more desirable. But pleasure comes from knowing and obeying God. Despite some failures, your love for Him will grow as you get to know Him through prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other believers in the local church.

A Sinner's Prayer

If while reading this material you have realized that you're not a Christian, and want to follow Christ, then this paragraph is especially written for you. Below, I've written a prayer. The words aren't magic, and simply repeating them will not make you a Christian. You must be sincere with God and surrender your life to Him. If you desire to become a Christian, and don't feel comfortable creating your own prayer, then you can say this prayer:

Dear God, I am a sinner. I deserve to die and suffer in hell, but Jesus your Son made the way so I would not have to perish. He died on the cross and rose again. I know that you are right and I am wrong in my rebellion. I have sinned against you and I am sorry. Please forgive me and save me from my sin. I accept and confess you as Lord of my life. Thank you, Father, for adopting me as your child.

The Bible says that whoever puts faith in the Lord will not be turned away (Romans 10:13). If you have sincerely asked God to forgive you, then you are His child.

Summary

God created Adam and Eve as sinless beings, but they rebelled. And, as a result, all of humanity enters life sinful (with a proclivity to sin). Because God loves people, He provided a sacrifice for humanity's sin by sending His Son Jesus to die. Humanity can fellowship with God, but humans must trust (submit to) Him to take away their sin. They must also receive the gift of forgiveness. Those who trust Christ have assurance and security of salvation and have entered into a relationship with their Creator. Therefore, a believer should love, obey, and enjoy God.

Assignments

1. Memorize Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
2. List how God has changed you. Write how areas of your life are now different. If you have recently become a Christian, write how you want to be different.

⁴⁷ Also, see Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:30.

3. Did you become a Christian while reading this chapter? If so, tell someone what happened to you.

Discussion Questions

1. Why should you love God?
2. What does it mean to be justified?
3. According to me, how many aspects of faith are there?
4. What does it mean to be a sinner? (See Romans 5:12.)
5. Why are all humans born with a proclivity to sin?
6. How would you explain salvation to someone else?

Answers to Chapter 3 Discussion Questions

1. Why should you love God? *You should love God because He first loved you (1 John 4:19). And because He continues to be merciful to you.*

2. What does it mean to be justified? *You have received Christ's payment for sin and God has declared you righteous and forgiven. You have trusted Christ with your life, and have asked Him to save you and forgive your sin, which has led to a transformation in your life.*

3. According to me, how many aspects of faith are there? *There are at least two aspects to faith. There is mental assent (believing God exists) and then there's true life-transforming trust (believing Christ has forgiven your sin and made you His child).*

4. What does it mean to be a sinner? (See Romans 5:12.) *Among other things, it means that your heart is tainted by sin, that you sin because your heart is turned against God and His ways.*

5. Why are all humans born with a proclivity to sin? *We are born with a sin nature because Adam and Eve sinned, and therefore, we share their sin nature. We are innately sinful.*

6. How would you explain salvation to someone else? *Salvation isn't something you can manufacture yourself. You can't work your way to God. You must receive His gift of forgiveness--Christ. He died and rose again to glorify God the Father by forgiving sin, because we as humans are rebellious. When we trust that only Christ's death can make us right with God the Father, then that's called faith. We simply ask God to forgive us and, by His grace, we turn from our sin, trusting that we now have a right relationship with God. Salvation will come to full fruition when we meet God face-to-face at death or during Christ's return.*

CHAPTER 4 THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD

Imagine trying to describe fire to someone who has never seen it or experienced its heat. What does fire look like? What shape does it have? What does it do? These questions will remain unanswered if the person you're teaching has no concept of shape, color, or function. Writing about God entails more difficulty than trying to describe fire to someone with no understanding of it.

What makes God so difficult to write about is that He cannot be seen, touched, or physically analyzed by people on earth. Even the most mature Christians and wisest Bible scholars fall short of adequately describing God. Volumes have been written about God, yet none will ever exhaust such an awesome subject (person). This brief chapter only attempts to introduce a few characteristics of God.

God is unlike any other person or thing, yet He is similar to, though separate from, His creation in certain ways. He has always existed (Exodus 3:14-15). He is unchanging (Malachi 3:6), eternal (Psalm 90:2), personal (Exodus 34:5-7), perfect (Isaiah 55:8), spirit (John 4:24), all-knowing (1 John 3:20), all-wise (Ephesians 3:9-11), faithful (John 17:17), good (Psalm 145:9), holy (Leviticus 11:44-45), righteous (Psalm 145:17), and supreme (1 Chronicles 29:11-12).

Triunity of God

Some religions believe in many gods (pantheism). The Bible teaches, however, that there is only one God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).⁴⁸ He is three persons in one: Father, Son, and Spirit. The three Persons of the triune God equally share the divine nature, but have separate functions. No one can fully explain the Triunity of God, because it is a mystery.⁴⁹

Read a few of the passages below that teach about the triune God:

There is one God

Deuteronomy 6:4, "*Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*"

The Father is God

Ephesians 1:3, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

The Son is God

Colossians 2:9, "*For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*"

⁴⁸ Also see Mark 12:29-30; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; Galatians 3:20; 1 Timothy 1:18; 2:5; James 2:19.

⁴⁹ Often Christians use the words "Trinity" or "Triunity" or "triune nature" to speak of God; these terms are not found in Scripture, but the concept is taught. For Scripture references dealing with the Triunity of God, see Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 14:16; 15:26; Acts 7:55; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20-21.

The Spirit is God

Acts 5:3-4, *"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . . ? You have not lied to men, but to God.'"*

The Father is not the Son

John 3:16, *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. . . ."*

The Son is not the Spirit

John 14:16, *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper."*

The Spirit is not the Father

John 14:26, *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name. . . ."*

The Father is a Person

Luke 22:42, *"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."*

The Son is a Person

Ephesians 5:25, *"Christ also loved the church."*

The Spirit is a Person

Ephesians 4:30, *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. . . ."*⁵⁰

God the Father

The second word of the Lord's prayer indicates that Jesus thought believers should view God as a Father (Matthew 6:9), a concept reiterated in several Bible passages.⁵¹ He rules with both love and firmness like a good father should. God has created everything, maintains control over creation, and can do whatever He wishes, thus He is called a *Father*.⁵²

⁵⁰ Verses from NASV. Concept based on John Pretlove's 1991 unpublished class notes in Systematic Theology 1 at The Criswell College in Dallas, Texas.

⁵¹ Isaiah 9:6; 63:16; Jeremiah 31:9; Malachi 2:10; Matthew 5:16; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:2.

⁵² Psalm 135:6; Proverbs 16:4, 33; Isaiah 45:7.

God the Son

The Son as a Person

Virgin Birth

Jesus Christ, the second person of the Triune God, had the unique task of coming to earth to provide salvation from sin. God the Son existed prior to His earthly birth and wasn't created or procreated (Micah 5:2).⁵³ Since sexual activity had nothing to do with Jesus' virgin birth, it stands as a miracle.⁵⁴ You might think it impossible for someone to be conceived and born of a virgin, but consider the words in Luke 1:37, "For nothing is impossible with God." If God created everything (Genesis 1:1), then causing a virgin to give birth to Jesus seems simple. Within recent centuries, opponents of the Bible have seriously attacked Jesus' virgin birth, saying it could never have happened. Nevertheless, if you trust Scripture, you cannot deny the virgin birth. While you can't prove it, neither can anyone else disprove it. It takes faith to believe.

Incarnation

The incarnation means God the Son, Jesus, became human. At conception, He was a human embryo, and at birth, He was a human baby. Jesus was not half man and half God. He was fully God and fully man.⁵⁵ He did not have two personalities; He was one person. Nevertheless, Jesus had two natures (e.g., human and divine). You may not understand this completely, but be of good cheer. You dwell in good company--neither does anyone else. Jesus' incarnation, too, stands as a mystery. (Every religion and belief system, including Darwinism, has its mysteries and concepts that are hard to explain. Christianity is most compatible to reality.)

Jesus is God.⁵⁶ In Matthew 1:23, the disciple calls Jesus Immanuel ("God with us") by quoting Isaiah 7:14. Although Jesus' purpose on earth was identical with God the Father's reason for sending Him (John 17:21-22), the Son had a different function than the Father (Luke 22:42). However, Jesus always carried out the will of God (1

⁵³ See Proverb 30:4 and Isaiah 9:6.

⁵⁴ See Matthew 1:18, 20, 23, 25; Luke 1:27, 35.

⁵⁵ Concerning His **humanity**, see John 4:6-7; 11:35; Acts 2:23; 7:56; 13:38; 1 Timothy 2:5. Concerning His **divinity**, see Psalm 2:7; Proverb 30:4; Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:23 [Isaiah 7:14]; 22:42-45; Mark 2:5-7; John 1:1-2; 8:58 [Exodus 3:13-14]; 10:30; 20:28; Acts 2:34, 36; Romans 9:5; 10:9-10, 13 [Joel 2:32]; 2 Corinthians 12:8 [Luke 1:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2-3, 1-10]; Philippians 2:5-11 [Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11]; 4:20; Colossians 1:14-19; 2:9; Titus 2:13 [Isaiah 45:21], 3:4; Hebrews 1:1-5, 7; 2:9-10, 22; Revelation 1:8, 17-18 [Isaiah 44:6]; 5:12-14.

⁵⁶ Luke 1:35; John 10:31; Ephesians 2:18.

Corinthians 3:23; 11:3; 14:28). In other words, Jesus' job on earth was to save those who would believe, and while doing so, He perfectly obeyed the Heavenly Father.

The Son's Work

Crucifixion

The crucifixion refers to Jesus' death on the cross.⁵⁷ The Apostle Paul sometimes spoke of it in positive terms. "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2; also see 1 Corinthians 1:17-25). Paul was not rejoicing in Christ's pain, but celebrating Jesus' accomplishments on the cross.

Because of the Bible's teaching about Jesus' crucifixion and death on the cross, some may accuse Christians of loving pain, agony, and blood. Christians reject sadomasochism, but without Jesus having shed His blood, there would be no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

Jesus' crucifixion offends some people (1 Corinthians 2:14). It offends because Christ's death on the cross indicates humanity's rebellion and need for a Savior (see 1 Corinthians 1:23).

Before a person enters into a relationship with God and understands what Jesus accomplished by dying on the cross, the concept of crucifixion serves as nothing more than a religious reminder of torture and death. But for Christians, the cross represents the point in history where Christ defeated sin and Satan.

Atonement

Christ's atoning work refers to what He did through the cross and resurrection. Jesus Christ, being fully God and fully man, shared the same character or nature with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus lived a sinless life and sacrificed His life in place of those he chose to save.

By doing so, He took on sin's full ramifications, namely, He took the penalty that was rightfully due to humanity when He died on the cross. Jesus appeased God's wrath and purchased select people from sin, thereby declaring them righteous before God.

Propitiation is the technical term for Jesus turning away God's wrath toward sin.⁵⁸ In short, propitiation signifies that Jesus defeated sin and gave you a relationship with God.

Jesus' death on the cross proves how seriously God hates sin. Because of God's holy and just nature, He demands a penalty for sin (Romans 6:23a). Amazingly, He carried out this penalty on Himself (Romans 4:25; Romans 6:23). Only the God-man, Jesus, could give you peace with God.

⁵⁷ Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 20.

⁵⁸ Romans 3:24-26; 1 John 2:2; 4:10. For further references on the atonement, see John 1:29; Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; 3:13; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Hebrews 1:3; 9:22, 28; 10:12; 1 Peter 2:24.

Jesus, your substitute on the cross, took your place and your penalty (Isaiah 53:4-6, 8, 11-12). Jesus was the only human who did not deserve death. He was, therefore, the only Person qualified to die for you and me.⁵⁹

Resurrection

After three days Jesus rose again. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). If there had been no resurrection, there would be no Christianity. In Matthew 26:32 and John 2:19, Jesus predicted His resurrection. Had He not risen, He would have been a liar and all He said would be worthless.

The resurrection is more than a spiritual concept; it stands as a historical event. If you had been there with a video camera, you could have filmed Christ's physical, resurrected body.⁶⁰

Ascension and Return

Christ ascended to heaven from the earth (Acts 1:9). In Acts 1:11, the angels said to the onlookers, ". . . why do you stand gazing into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven" (NKJV).

Some people have tried to place a time and date on Jesus' return, even though Scripture teaches that no one knows when He will come back to earth.⁶¹ Even conservative Christian scholars debate certain details concerning the return of Christ.⁶² Despite various disagreements, true Christianity concurs that Christ will physically come back. Scripture teaches that Jesus will return, and until then, believers have the Spirit dwelling in them.

Summary

God is separate from creation and unlike any thing (or anyone) else in existence, yet He interacts with His creation. There is one God consisting of three Persons--the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus Christ has always existed and is the second Person of the Triune nature of God. He became human while retaining His divinity. He died on the cross and atoned (provided forgiveness) for those who would be saved. Jesus physically rose from the dead on the third day and now sits at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. He shall one day physically return for His followers.

⁵⁹ Concerning Jesus' sinlessness, see John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26-27; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5.

⁶⁰ For other passages on the resurrection, see Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-6; John 11:25-26; 20:1-17; Revelation 1:18.

⁶¹ Matthew 24:36, 42; 25:13; Mark 13:32.

⁶² See chapter 10.

Assignments

1. Memorize 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive by the Spirit." In a few sentences, write out the meaning of this verse.
2. Again in your own words, write what 1 Peter 1:1-2 says about the Trinity of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the phrase *Triunity of God* mean?
2. Does the Bible teach that Jesus was born of a virgin? If so, cite passage(s).
3. Was Jesus half God and half man?
4. Why did Jesus die?
5. What does Christ's atonement mean? (i.e., explain it)
6. What event (and doctrine) serves as the foundation of Christianity?
7. Over what, or whom, did Christ win victory in Colossians 2:14-15 and Hebrews 2:14?

Answers to Chapter 4 Discussion Questions

1. What does the phrase *Triunity of God* mean? *Triunity, or Trinity, refers to the three Persons of the Godhead. There is one God, but He is three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.*
2. Does the Bible teach that Jesus was born of a virgin? *Yes. If so, cite passage(s). Matthew 1:18, 23 is a good place to begin.*
3. Was Jesus half God and half man? *No. Christianity believes that Jesus was fully God and fully man, not some quasi-mixture of the two.*
4. Why did Jesus die? *Jesus died on the cross to deal with humanity's sin debt. He died to atone for His elect, to bring them into a right relationship with God the Father, so God would receive all the glory due His name.*
5. What does Christ's atonement mean? (i.e., explain it). *Atonement indicates Christ paying for a sin debt. He cleansed believing sinners and brought them into unity with God the Father.*
6. What event (and doctrine) serves as the foundation of Christianity? *According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection of Christ is the groundwork on which all of Christianity stands. Without it, believers would be miserable for trying to follow Christ.*
7. Over what, or whom, did Christ win victory in Colossians 2:14-15 and Hebrews 2:14? *Jesus won victory over sin and Satan.*

CHAPTER 5 THE WONDERFUL HOLY SPIRIT

God the Spirit

The Spirit as a Person

Driving to college one particular winter morning, my car broke down. My car died at a busy section of Dallas during morning rush-hour traffic. Embarrassed, frustrated, and alone, I sat there for several minutes trying to start my car.

Then, to my surprise, I spotted a classmate approaching my car. He had recognized me and stopped to help push my car out of traffic. Before we could get my car into a nearby parking lot, another classmate also came by to help us. How incredible!

Likewise, the Holy Spirit assists and encourages believers through life, and especially through times of crises. When Jesus ascended to Heaven, He sent the Spirit to glorify God the Father and to help believers in this life (John 14:17). Maybe we could say the Spirit came to glorify God *by* helping believers.

Jesus said to His disciples, ". . . I will send [the Spirit] to you" (John 16:7). The Spirit comes to live in believers, not to take them out of difficult times, but to help them through difficult times. Because of the Spirit, believers have intimacy with God and the ability to live out the truths found in God's Word.

The Holy Spirit is God.⁶³ He is identical, or equal in character, with the Father and the Son. He has, however, a separate function from the Father and the Son. Some people refer to Him as "the third Person of the Trinity."⁶⁴ Although He has no physical body, the Holy Spirit is a Person like Jesus (John 14:16). He can comfort, and be resisted, grieved, lied to, and quenched.⁶⁵

The Spirit's Work

The Indwelling of the Spirit

The indwelling of the Spirit refers to Him residing within all believers.⁶⁶ He resides in you in order to testify of Christ (John 15:26; 16:13-14). He also functions as the ultimate source of comfort for believers (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

⁶³ Notice what the Old Testament says about the Holy Spirit: Genesis 1:2; 1 Samuel 11:6; Psalms 51:11; 139:7; Isaiah 48:16; Joel 2:28-29.

⁶⁴ Though Scripture does not use this phrase, see Matthew 3:16-17; John 14:16; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:18.

⁶⁵ John 14:16-17, 26; 16:8, 13-14; Acts 5:3-4; 13:2-4; Romans 8:16; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

⁶⁶ The indwelling of the Spirit is often called the "baptism of" or "baptism by" the Spirit. This transpires when the Spirit comes to live within believers when they ask Christ to save them.

How comforting to know you have a friend, God Himself, dwelling in you. The Spirit will help you talk with God the Father when you do not know what, or how, to pray (Romans 8:26). The Spirit also makes you aware of right and wrong, and lets you know you are God's child.⁶⁷

During the Old Testament period before Christ, the Spirit did not necessarily dwell permanently within believers. He would often manifest Himself in people's lives only at special times.⁶⁸ However, in Joel 2:28-29, God promised to one day "pour out the Spirit" upon His followers, meaning that eventually the Spirit would dwell permanently within believers. In Acts 2:33, 38-39, God fulfilled this promise:

Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. . . . Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.'

The Filling With the Spirit

The believers' *filling with* and *indwelling of* the Spirit are not necessarily fuzzy, ooey-goey, ecstatic, tingly feelings. Some Christian groups pressure new believers to have an emotional experience at conversion. Granted, crying or shouting might accompany salvation, but they may not. One might experience high emotions (e.g., feeling good, crying) and still not be saved. And one might be saved without feeling much emotion. Nonetheless, joy, peace, and happiness should accompany salvation.

The believer's *filling* with the Spirit is linked to the *indwelling* of the Spirit.⁶⁹ However, do not confuse the two.

	<u>Indwelling</u>	<u>Filling</u>
When?	Once at conversion	During conversion and many other times

⁶⁷ See Romans 8:16 John 16:11; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30. The sealing of believers by the Spirit seems to be imagery for His work of securing believers in the family of God and authenticating them as God's property (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5).

⁶⁸ Judges 16:20; 1 Samuel 11:6; Psalm 51:11.

⁶⁹ The indwelling of the Spirit is also closely connected to the *baptism by the Spirit*. The baptism by the Spirit is the act whereby the Spirit brings believers into the family of God by indwelling them (see the following section in main text).

How?	Repentance unto salvation	Submission unto closer fellowship with God
What?	Spirit resides in believer	Spirit's power resides in believers
Why?	To bring believers into God's family	To enable believers to obey God's Word and bear spiritual fruit
Results?	Gifts imparted	Fruit manifested
Hindrances?	None	Sin ⁷⁰

How do you get this filling of the Spirit? Even though Scripture does not specifically state how, it might be inferred that the Spirit will fill you with Himself when you submit to God's Word (see Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:18-19). As a Christian, you need to confess to God any unconfessed sin in your life and turn from specific sin. Ask God to fill you, trust that He did, and then obey His Word.

Receiving the Spirit After Conversion

Some Christians believe that a person can be saved without immediately receiving the indwelling of the Spirit. At least partial reason for this belief is that a group of Gentiles in Acts 8:15-17 seemingly received salvation but did not receive the Spirit immediately. "When [Peter and John] arrived, they prayed for [the group of Gentiles] that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." This group of Gentiles received the Spirit only after the Apostles Peter and John had prayed and placed their hands on them.

The occasion in Acts 8 seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. Some teach that this passage provides a norm for thinking that new believers do not necessarily receive the Spirit at conversion. Yet, a careful reading of verse 16 might indicate that the Spirit's delay would not be typical--"because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." In other words, this was a rare occasion after the "pouring out of the Spirit," as Acts 2 records, in which the Spirit did not immediately indwell believers.⁷¹

⁷⁰ The original source of this chart is unknown to me. For further study on the Spirit, see Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 16-41, 52; Galatians 5:16, 25; Ephesians 5:18; Colossians 3:17.

⁷¹ To be fair to those who contend that the Spirit does not always immediately indwell believers at conversion, there is at least one other possible passage to support their view, found in Acts 9.

Acts 9 records the conversion of Saul, who would later be named Paul the Apostle. On his way to persecute Christians, he was struck blind as he encountered a special vision of Jesus. Even though many who believe that the Spirit *does not* immediately indwell Christians at the moment of salvation use Acts 9 as their proof text, one of several possible options is that while Paul was converted on the Damascus road,

Scripture shows in Romans 6:3, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Galatians 3:27 (and possibly Colossians 2:12) that the Spirit is the one initiating the believer into the family of Christ.⁷² The Spirit baptizes believers by indwelling them. The above verses make it clear that all saved people receive the Spirit. Scripture gives no evidence that someone could be saved and not receive the Spirit (Romans 8:9). In addition, Ephesians 1:3 and 2 Peter 1:3 stated that all believers receive everything needed for the Christian life. This would seem to include the Spirit. Romans 5:5 says, "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."⁷³

his conversion was an exceptional case in which the Spirit did not immediately indwell him at the moment of conversion.

The word "filled" in Acts 9:17 seems to be a unique case in which it is used synonymously with "indwelt" (also see Acts 2:4). Not every thing that transpired at Paul's conversion will necessarily take place at the conversions of believers today. Therefore, since Paul's conversion experience differed vastly from usual conversions, it must be said that just because he did not immediately receive the Spirit does not mean that it is a norm for Christians today.

Furthermore, at first glance, Acts 10:44-45, seems to support those who say that believers do not immediately receive the Spirit when saved. But, look closely. In verses 39-40, the gospel is proclaimed (because these people were not yet saved). Thus, the "pouring out of the Spirit" in verses 44-45 was immediate with salvation. (Chapter 11:15-16 refers to the same event.)

Some may argue that Acts 19:2-6 supports their view that believers do not always receive the Spirit immediately at conversion. However, Acts 19:2-3 and verse 6 record, most likely, a situation in which these Gentiles had not yet been saved. For a clear and balanced presentation of these and other Spirit-related issues from a more charismatic perspective, see Craig Keener, *Three Crucial Questions about the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

⁷² Compare with Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16 where it appears that Jesus is baptizing (i.e., initiating into the family of God) the believer *with* the Spirit. In other words, the substance, or person, into which they are baptized is the Spirit.

⁷³ Although Ephesians 1:3, 2 Peter 1:3, and Romans 5:5 say nothing about when believers receive all that is needed for the Christian life, these passages can be better understood when linked with Romans 8:9. In other words, Romans 8:9 indicates that those without the Spirit are not Christians. Therefore, the inference is that Christians receive the Spirit at conversion.

Gifts From the Spirit

With the indwelling Spirit comes spiritual gifts.⁷⁴ God fully enables you to utilize your spiritual gifts by filling you with the Spirit. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others . . ." (1 Peter 4:10).

The Bible doesn't teach that any one person receives every gift. Rather, it says the opposite in Romans 12:4, 6-8:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

You need other believers and they need you. Beware of Christian groups who minimize the importance of gifts or those that say everyone should have the same gift(s) (e.g., speaking in tongues).

God has given you a spiritual gift or gifts that someone else does not have and vice versa. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 that:

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.

God gave you gifts to equip you to serve others. He has equipped you for a specific ministry in your local church. He has equipped you to serve with other believers so the church functions in unity like a healthy physical body.

Fruit Produced by the Spirit

You possess a God-given responsibility to *bear* fruit. John 15:8 says you do not have to *produce* fruit; the Spirit will do that. But you do have to *bear* fruit. Bearing the fruit of the Spirit means your life will demonstrate that God controls you (Ephesians 5:9).

The Apostle Paul lists the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Note the fruit:

<u>love</u>	<u>joy</u>	<u>peace</u>
<u>patience</u>	<u>kindness</u>	<u>goodness</u>
<u>faithfulness</u>	<u>gentleness</u>	<u>self-control</u>

⁷⁴ For references dealing with spiritual gifts and functions, see Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:11-12.

I suspect that the fruit of the Spirit makes up for any spiritual gift you may lack. Your life might not show all of the above nine characteristics right now, but your life will bear more of each fruit as you obey God's Word.

Summary

Because of the ministry of the Spirit, believers can have constant fellowship with God. The Spirit is God and indwells all believers at conversion. He imparts spiritual gifts to every believer. The Spirit fills believers with His power when they submit to Him. Because of the Spirit's filling, believers should utilize their gifts and bear fruit.

Assignments

1. Memorize Romans 8:9, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."
2. Write about the connection between God sending the Spirit and John 14:27.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between the Spirit indwelling and filling believers?
2. What does John 14:16 call the Spirit?
3. Is it possible for believers *not* to have the Spirit dwelling inside them? (See Romans 8:9.)
4. What does Ephesians 5:18 command?

Answers to Chapter 5 Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between the Spirit indwelling and filling believers? *The Spirit's indwelling is when He comes to live in each believer at conversion. His filling is when believers live in the light of His indwelling.*
2. What does John 14:16 call the Spirit? *He is called the "Helper" or "Comforter."*
3. Is it possible for believers *not* to have the Spirit dwelling inside them? (See Romans 8:9.) *According to this passage, it is not possible to be a Christian and be without the Spirit.*
4. What does Ephesians 5:18 command? *Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.*

CHAPTER 6 THE COMMUNITY OF CHRISTIANS

The Church

I remember many occasions as a child when our little church assisted members in need of food or finances. The adults gave a special offering or brought canned goods. As an adult, when my mom died, her church inundated our family with food and other kinds of support. Truly, the church is a group of people whom Christ has forgiven and unified to serve one another so God might be glorified.

The Bible often refers to the church as the body and bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33). The church is a community of Christians not a building. Christians do not *go to church*--they *are* the church. Nevertheless, they need to participate in weekly worship at a local meeting place with their particular assembly, whether it be in a traditional church building or someone's home, or out in a field, etc.

Acts 2 records the beginning of the church.⁷⁵ The word "church" refers to those believers assembled together to worship God through Christ.

The church has at least two dimensions. First, the word *church* can refer to the universal church, which refers to all people in the world who follow Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Christ spoke of the universal church before its inception.

Second, *church* can refer to the local church. Of all the times the Bible mentions the word "church," the majority of passages refer to the local church. The local church is a group of baptized believers who meet to worship God, fellowship with one another, see themselves as a church, and often partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:44-47). This group also submits to their leadership and serves each other. Furthermore, these believers seek to tell others about Christ so unbelievers can know Jesus, become a faithful part of the local church, and grow in their faith.

Elders and Deacons

When believers assemble together they need biblical leadership. Various churches and denominations use different titles for their leaders.⁷⁶ "Elder" is the more appropriate biblical term, although many churches don't use this exact word.⁷⁷ Elders

⁷⁵ Some scholars contend that the church began in the Old Testament, and others believe that it began when Jesus called and appointed His 12 disciples as recorded in Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16.

⁷⁶ The New Testament often uses various words which describe different titles and facets of the same ministry: "pastor" or "shepherd," and "bishop" or "overseer," and "elder" or "presbyter" (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Peter 5:1-9).

⁷⁷ Some people use "elder" synonymously with "pastor." Even though a pastor is a type of elder, every elder is not necessarily a pastor (Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:11).

serve as the basic leaders in the local church.⁷⁸ They hold the responsibility of ruling, teaching and preaching.⁷⁹ Even though a pastor is a type of elder, not every elder is necessarily a pastor (Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:11). Pray for your pastors and elders, because they will give an account to God for what they do in their leadership positions.⁸⁰ You must also submit to their leadership, for Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Servants fulfill a vital role in each congregation. Deacons are the servants each church designates (Acts 6).⁸¹ Every person in the church is a servant, but churches select deacons as specific servants to assist the congregation. By example, they lead the rest of the congregation into service. First Timothy 3:8-13 describes their qualifications and responsibilities.

Water Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Part of the local church's distinction from other organizations is that it often publicly fulfills two main functions called "ordinances": water baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁸² Water baptism is the first obedient step for all new believers.⁸³ The New

⁷⁸ Notice that Scripture often cites a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14).

⁷⁹ See 1 Timothy 3:4-5; 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 5:3; and 1 Thessalonians 5:12. While major decisions in a church may call for some congregational input (Matthew 18:17; Acts 6:3-5; 15:22; and possibly 1 Corinthians 16:3), God has still given elders the decision-making power.

⁸⁰ See 1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Timothy 5:1; Hebrews 13:7.

⁸¹ Unfortunately, some Christians confuse deacons with elders, ascribing to deacons ruling authority in the church. But this is typically not the case in Scripture. Some have used the case of the deacon Philip in Acts 8:26-40 to say that he preached and therefore also functioned in a "pastoral" capacity. But, all this shows is that Philip also ministered to nonbelievers by sharing Christ. Evangelism is something we should all do, whether a pastor or not. But the usual scriptural example of a deacon is that he was a servant, and an example for others to follow in servanthood, not an authoritative figure making leadership-type decisions.

⁸² These are called "ordinances" because Christ *ordained*, or instructed, the local church to perform them. These ordinances symbolize and remind believers of their relationship with Christ.

⁸³ Do not confuse *water baptism* with the *baptism by the Spirit*. Concerning water baptism, see Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:36, 38; 10:48; 22:16.

Testament knows nothing of an un-baptized believer. Although believers frequently participate in the Lord's Supper, they receive baptism only once.⁸⁴

What purpose does water baptism serve? First, consider what baptism is *not*. Water baptism has no ability to forgive sin, as some groups have wrongly taught.⁸⁵ If water baptism had the power to forgive sin, it seems odd that Jesus, the Savior, never baptized anyone (John 4:1-2). Furthermore, His death was unnecessary if water baptism possesses the capacity to take away sin or to contribute to His atoning work. In addition, the Apostle Paul did not think water baptism had saving power (1 Corinthians 1:15-17). But since Christ commanded it (Matthew 28:19), water baptism isn't something to take lightly or delay.

The Bible speaks of the importance of making a public commitment to Christ. Romans 10:9-10 says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Baptism is the primary way to publicly acknowledge that you are now a follower of Christ.

Only those who follow Christ should undergo baptism. Scripture never suggests that infants or any other unbelievers be baptized. Water baptism publicly identifies Christians with Christ and the church (Acts 2:38). It portrays Christ's death and resurrection. Water baptism symbolizes the spiritual death of the person before salvation and represents the spiritual resurrection of the person after salvation.⁸⁶ It also pictures the

⁸⁴ The Lord's Supper represents fellowship with Christ and the local church. Whereas water baptism represents initiation into a relationship with Christ and the local church. See chart later on in this same section.

⁸⁵ Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 3:21; 1 John 1:7. Some believe Mark 16:16 asserts that water baptism is necessary for one's salvation, but the latter part of this verse shows that the emphasis is on belief. Acts 2:38 and 22:16 also seem to indicate that water baptism is necessary for salvation. Suffice it to say that water baptism is an expression of faith, thus linked closely with repentance and salvation. Although they are linked together conceptually, water baptism is not a part of one's salvation in that it has power to save. I would say, however, that anyone calling himself a believer who has purposefully not been baptized has no reason to call himself a Christian. But if one has professed faith in Christ and hasn't had an opportunity to be baptized, but intends on it, will go to heaven if he dies before being baptized. For further study on Acts 2:38, see I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988 reprint), 80-81, and concerning Acts 22:16, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976 reprint), 102-103.

⁸⁶ Consult Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12. I'm not contending that these two passages refer to water baptism, but that they refer to spiritual baptism (i.e., baptism by the Spirit) which is pictured by water baptism.

believer's physical resurrection in the future. All of this symbolism seems pointless if the person being baptized doesn't know about it, like in the case of infants.

The Bible teaches immersion--submerging under water--as the only method of baptism. Since it symbolizes death and resurrection, it seems consistent with the imagery that the person(s) baptized be submerged, as being buried.⁸⁷

Not only should you be baptized, but you get to (and should) participate in the Lord's Supper.⁸⁸ The Lord's Supper refers to the last meal, which consisted of bread and wine, Jesus ate with his 12 disciples. The bread and wine represent Christ's blood and body.⁸⁹ How often should a church participate in the Lord's Supper? The Bible lists no details as to how often believers should receive the Lord's Supper, but when they do receive it, they should take time to reflect on Christ's death.⁹⁰

	<u>Baptism</u>	<u>Lord's Supper</u>
1. Related to:	Water (in the Jordan River)	Blood (on Mount Calvary)
2. Chiefly:	Individual	Corporate
3. As a rite is:	Non-repeatable	Repeated
4. Part of:	Initiation into the faith	Continuance in faith
5. Means of:	Entry into a church	Renewal in devotion ⁹¹

⁸⁷ For further evidence for this method, read Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:9-10; Luke 3:16; John 3:23; Acts 8:39.

⁸⁸ Refer to Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:19-20. For further details about the Lord's Supper, see 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 and chapter 11. It is not to be done haphazardly or abusively (1 Corinthians 11:28-30). Furthermore, Jesus calls this Supper the "new covenant" or promise (Matthew 26:28). According to Matthew 26:28, Jesus appears to say that His approaching death involves at least partial fulfillment of the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

⁸⁹ Many churches use grape juice in the place of wine simply because of the way people abuse alcohol in modern times. Also, there are some who believe that the bread and wine actually become the blood and body of Christ when the Lord's Supper is administered (1 Corinthians 10:16). Most likely, the first disciples understood Christ to be saying that the bread and wine only represented His blood and body; it commemorated His death (1 Corinthians 11:26).

⁹⁰ But I would challenge all churches that only offer the Lord's Supper once a quarter to consider the joy and blessing they're missing by not providing it more frequently. Without being too judgmental, I'm tempted to say that many churches don't understand the importance, beauty, horror, fellowship, tragedy, and joy of the Lord's Supper when they partake of it only once a quarter.

⁹¹ Taken from Murray J. Harris' 1994 unpublished class notes in Pauline Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (now TIU) in Deerfield, Illinois.

Besides the Lord's Supper and water baptism, the church has numerous responsibilities. The church should primarily seek to spread the fame of Jesus Christ and teach people how to follow Him (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). The church also serves as a safe haven and a point of accountability for believers. It also has many other obligations--too many to name here.

Accountability to the Local Church

Many years ago I asked a Bible-college student where she worshipped. She replied that she attended chapel at school and did not feel obligated to worship otherwise. Unfortunately, many professing Christians exhibit a poor attitude toward the church. And who can deny the horrible things done in the name of Jesus?

But we should remember that the church is the bride of Christ: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27). Christ is making His bride, the church, spotless because He loves her passionately and wants the best for her. To speak ill of the church is to speak ill of Christ's bride.

Do not forsake the assembling together (the church) of yourselves (Hebrews 10:25). Some say they can worship at home better than they can with other believers. Some people further declare, "I do not have to go to church to be a Christian."

This statement might be true technically but one cannot *grow* as a Christian while willfully disobeying Scripture.⁹² A man does not have to live in the same house with his wife to be married, but his marriage will suffer if he lives elsewhere. Similarly, believers should regularly interact with each other in the context of a church.⁹³ As a wise preacher once said, "Eternal security is a community project." Christianity isn't an adventure we take by ourselves. The late priest Henri Nouwen wrote, "We cannot bring good news on our own. We are called to proclaim the gospel together, in community."⁹⁴

⁹² If willful, persistent sin continues, Scripture says that such a person isn't taking the steps needed to rid himself of that sin or else isn't a believer (1 John 3:6, 10). In other words, the habitual sin demonstrates the lack of true faith in that person's life. Refer to section entitled "Freedom and Limits" in chapter 8.

⁹³ God understands special cases, such as sickness, which hinder people from being a part of corporate worship. And when I say *church*, I don't mean a building, but rather a group of baptized believers united for the purpose of worshipping Christ, holding each other accountable, and partaking of the Lord's Supper.

⁹⁴ *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1996 [1989]), 40.

Be faithful to your local congregation.⁹⁵ Worship consistently with your local group of believers and avoid skipping it because you do not feel like going. You might never worship with other believers if this is your criterion. While few would blame you for taking an occasional break, don't make it a habit. You need to fellowship with people who love Jesus. Not only does the local church provide love and support during good times, but it gives assistance through difficult times.

Also, your local fellowship should hold you accountable to obey God's Word. Even though Jesus loves sinners, Scripture commands the local church to exercise discipline upon its rebellious members (Matthew 18:15-20). The church cannot overlook blatant sin in its members because the local church is a gathering of holy people who follow Christ. While church offers many opportunities to fellowship, it's not a social club. I'm surprised at the blatant sins of adultery, abandonment, gossip, and other sins that Christians ignore in local congregations.

Christ hates sin and loves righteousness. Therefore, believers must also hate sin and love righteousness. The local church must love its members enough to help them grow spiritually, even if it means confronting them about sin (1 Corinthians 15:30).

Jesus gives the procedure for carrying out church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20. The first step is one-on-one confrontation to encourage the offender to repent. If that doesn't work, one or two other people should approach the sinning person. Finally, if that isn't effective, the confronter should notify the church of the person's rebellion. If the offender doesn't repent, the church must consider him a nonbeliever.

The local church disciplines rebellious members for the purpose of restoring them to proper fellowship with God and the church, not for spite or shame (2 Corinthians 2:6-11; Galatians 6:1-5).⁹⁶ Many Christians oppose this procedure, saying it lacks kindness and can result in a lawsuit, but Scripture still teaches discipline. Practicing compassionate church discipline helps the church body and the sinning member. A church can't be healthy and ignore this scriptural teaching.

⁹⁵ Faithfulness to your church is a bit subjective because what you might call faithful, might not seem faithful in other's eyes. Most church members and leaders have their own concept of faithfulness. For many churches in the southern part of the U.S., there is a high expectation for members to show up at a church building three or more times a week. Any less, and one might be perceived as unfaithful to Christ and the church. Without getting too deep into a long debate, Scripture doesn't obligate us to worship with believers any certain number of times a week.

At the least, believers in the first century met once a week (1 Corinthians 16:2), at the most the same group congregated every day (Acts 2:46). So, when I say be faithful to your church, I mean, be as faithful as you can be. Don't be a slacker, never showing up. But don't get trapped in a legalistic obligation ("If I don't attend this service, then I won't be a good Christian," or "If I attend this service, then that proves I am a good Christian").

⁹⁶ Some reasons for discipline, as well as how to respond to those under discipline, are given in Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 1 Timothy 1:20; Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15.

What kind of local fellowship should you join? Though no perfect churches exist, some churches follow the biblical pattern more than others. Join a church that respects, preaches, and practices *all* of the Bible.

A local church should love God and help believers grow spiritually. Join a church that practices prayer, Bible study, church discipline, grace, evangelism, missions, and joy-filled worship. The church you unite with should be spreading the gospel to the community and world, and should be helping the hurting and hungry.

Get involved with God's people and participate in as many things as you can realistically manage. However, be cautious not to overload yourself.

Accountability to Individuals of the Church

Even though you are responsible to the church and supremely to God for your thoughts and actions (Psalm 51:4), you are also responsible to fellow believers for certain things. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 tells of the important role others play in your life. Take some time to study that passage. Then find a strong, growing Christian of the same sex and keep each other accountable.⁹⁷

Meet frequently with your accountability partner to share personal struggles and victories. Be honest and confidential with one another, encouraging each other along life's way (Proverbs 17:17). "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

During your accountability time, avoid condemnation, but don't fear lovingly correcting weaker areas of the other's life (Proverbs 28:23). "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses" (Proverbs 27:5-6). But a word of caution is in order when it comes to confronting others about their sin. Approach people with humility and keep in mind what Matthew 7:3-4 says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"

The Church and Finances

The Old Testament often spoke of a *tithe*.⁹⁸ God required all Israelites to regularly give a tithe (10 percent of their income) to help fund the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 14:22; 2 Chronicles 31:5-7).

⁹⁷ I'm encouraging believers to only have accountability relationships with members of the same sex because of the temptation opposite-sex relationships hold. A married couple should undoubtedly make their spouse their closest relationship, but many times married people need other close friends of the same sex to confide in. Two married people should avoid, at all times, sharing their struggles, and other such intimacies, with members of the opposite sex other than their own spouse. Furthermore, those who are single should avoid close intimate interaction with a married person of the opposite sex.

⁹⁸ Genesis 14:20; Leviticus 27:30, 32; Numbers 18:26; Deuteronomy 12:17; 2 Chronicles 31:5; Nehemiah 10:38.

The New Testament talks about money in several passages. The Apostle Paul speaks of giving funds to further the ministry of the local church in 2 Corinthians 8-9 and Philippians 4:12-19.

No New Testament rule says you have to give *10 percent* of your gross income to the local church. Giving at least 10 percent, however, seems to work well as a reminder that God owns all of your finances, not just 10 percent.⁹⁹

Give to the local church, with a cheerful heart, as the Lord has given to you. And remember, you're free to give well above 10 percent (1 Corinthians 16:2). "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Church and Cults

In short, a *cult* is a religious sect or group that teaches something contrary to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. A few popular cults are the Mormons (Latter Day Saints), Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moonies, and Christian Scientists. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are world religions and are not considered cults, but they also teach doctrines contrary to the New Testament.

The best way to recognize a counterfeit is to be familiar with the original. If you study the Word, pray, and worship with other Christians assembled as the local church, you will recognize false teachings.

In 1 John 4:1, the Bible tells believers to "test the spirits." This means believers should scrutinize all teachings to discern whether such teachings align with the Bible. Don't accept everything you hear. In fact, don't accept what I say without measuring it against God's Word. Read the Bible for yourself to discover its teachings (Acts 17:11).

Don't buy, accept, or read material from cults or other false teachers. In 2 John 10-11, the Apostle warns believers not to even let such people into their houses. At the very least, this meant that they should not encourage or enable false teachers to spread unbiblical teaching.

One day you might be able to converse with cult members. However, you must be a strong, mature believer who thoroughly knows God's Word. Without an in-depth knowledge of God's Word, you will find Satan's forces overpowering.

Summary

The church is the bride of Christ, a group of believers who worship together, fellowship with one another, give their finances to extend the family of God and to promote the fame of Christ by proclaiming the gospel. Local churches administer water baptism and the Lord's Supper. These churches function with appointed leaders and servants. Local churches help believers grow in their faith; sometimes discipline is the only way to achieve spiritual growth. The local church provides accountability for the community of believers. A person must be careful to get involved with a doctrinally sound church, not a cult.

⁹⁹ See Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:41-42; Acts 24:17; 2 Corinthians 16:1-4; 1 Timothy 6:6-19.

Assignments

1. Memorize Hebrews 10:25, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
2. If you have not yet found a church home (i.e., the assembly of believers with whom you faithfully worship), do so as soon as possible. Worship with a local church sometime within the next seven days. Take notes on the sermon. After returning home, record what you liked and disliked about the church.
3. During the following two weeks, find a spiritually maturing Christian of the same sex and start meeting to hold each other accountable. It could actually take longer than two weeks to find someone you trust enough to share your soul with, but at least start trying to pinpoint a prospective accountability partner in the next couple of weeks.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the biblical title(s) of a designated church leader?
2. What is the biblical title of a designated church servant?
3. What two ordinances do the local church administer?
4. Which passage in Matthew discusses church discipline?
5. Is a church still a church if it doesn't meet in an official church building?

Answers to Chapter 6 Discussion Questions

1. What is the biblical title(s) of a designated church leader? *An elder, bishop, shepherd, pastor, overseer, or presbyter.*
2. What is the biblical title of a designated church servant? *A deacon.*
3. What two ordinances do the local church administer? *Water baptism and the Lord's Supper.*
4. Which passage in Matthew discusses church discipline? *Matthew 18:15-20.*
5. Is a church still a church if it doesn't meet in an official church building? *Yes. Some Christians think that unless believers meet in a traditional church building then that group isn't a church body. But a church is made up of believers and has nothing to do with a building.*

CHAPTER 7 THE TROUBLESOME ENEMY

Only his eyes and nose poke out of the surface of the placid water. His nostrils breathe the hot air of death. Despite his size, he remains unnoticed by his prey. His beady eyes focus on the wild pig mulling around the edge of the swampy banks. He submerges into the murky unknown of the brown water, while the pig roots around on the bank looking for evening delights. The small snorting beast takes a step backward, when suddenly the waters churn, and the leathery reptile leaps from the edge of the water. With the deadly clasp of the predator's jaws, the pig jerks and releases a brief squeal as dozens of pointed teeth pierce his tough skin. Then, as quickly as it happened, the pig disappears with his enemy into the liquid grave of the Everglades. Only the choppy blood-filled water testifies to the pig's past existence.

The alligator, a fierce reptile, stalks with the precision of a lion and the silence of the sunrise. His very appearance strikes fear into the hearts of the wise, and his stealth and power command respect from those who dare come near his spooky realm. To walk along his shores unprotected and ignorant guarantees him his next meal. He survives by catching his prey off guard.

So it is with Satan. He thrives on destroying those who think they can outsmart him or those who stroll along his domain unaware of his ability to mangle and kill.

Satan

Understanding the enemy and his tactics will help Christians prepare for Satan's attacks and life's difficulties. Not being prepared for the enemy's attacks can be costly.

Satan does not stand as God's equal and has never been capable of defeating God. Satan is a created being and God has power over him. Unlike God, Satan and his demons don't know all things, nor do they have power to do everything they want (Zechariah 3; Job 1:13; 2:6). Though God didn't create Satan evil, the devil is now the father of all wickedness and wrong.¹⁰⁰

Some scholars believe that Isaiah 14:12-27 and Ezekiel 28:11-18 refer to Satan and these passages explain why God cast him out of heaven. According to this interpretation, Satan, sometimes called Lucifer or Day Star, lost his position of honor in heaven because he wanted to be like God. Although Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 might refer to Satan, the context is not clear. Luke 10:18, however, clearly speaks of Satan's fall (being cast out) from heaven. Also, see Revelation 12:1-9.

¹⁰⁰ Notice Satan's description in the Bible. Satan is the tempter (Matthew 4:3). He is the wicked one (Matthew 13:19). He is a murderer (John 8:44). He is the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He can be transformed into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). He is the adversary and a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). He is the great dragon, the old serpent, the devil, and the accuser (Revelation 12:9-10). Furthermore, he goes to and fro in the earth (Job 1:7). His place of rule is the atmosphere of the earth (Revelation 2:13).

One day God will temporarily bind Satan from committing evil (Revelation 20:2-3). God will then release him "for a season" and he will deceive people for one last time. Revelation 20:10 tells of Satan's final destination--hell, where he will suffer forever.

In the mean time, Satan and his forces will do all they can to destroy you. He often bombards believers with lies. Note a few of them, many of which overlap:

- God will never answer your prayers
- You're too sinful to pray right now
- You've asked God for too much lately
- God won't mind if you sin a little
- This little sin won't hurt you
- God owes you this
- God hates you now that you sinned
- God doesn't care about you
- God doesn't want you to enjoy life
- God is not good or fair
- God won't let you do that because he knows you want to
- You'll always struggle with this particular sin
- You should sin now because you're going to give in eventually anyway
- No Christian would ever think or do what you did
- Don't read the Bible because you won't understand it
- Don't tell anyone about your secret sin, you can handle it
- Sin now and repent later
- This sin will bring you lasting pleasure
- Go ahead and sin so you can get it out of your system
- God will never forgive you again for that same sin
- You've got to earn God's approval
- You're too good to commit a sin like the other guy did
- Just one quick look then you can change the channel

Satan lies to provoke you to take your eyes off of God. The devil schemes to leave you feeling condemned and hopeless. Until God casts Satan and his demons into hell, they might tempt you, but they can't make you sin. Despite Satan's lies, you can obey God's Word and resist sin (Romans 13:14).

Note the teaching of Ephesians 4:26: "If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge. Don't let the sun go down with you still angry--get over it quickly; for when you are angry, you give a mighty foothold to the devil" (Living). Satan searches for a weakness in your life--physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological--so he can get a foothold. He might even try to use Scripture against you, as he tried to do with Jesus (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11). Beware of such sins as jealousy, pride, lust, and uncontrolled anger.

You alone cannot defeat these sins, but you can rely on the protection Christ provides. James 4:6-8 says:

But [God] gives us more and more strength to stand against all such evil longings. As the Scripture says, God gives strength to the humble but sets Himself

against the proud and haughty. So give yourselves humbly to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. And when you draw close to God, God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and let your hearts be filled with God alone to make them pure and true to Him. (Living)

The next time you feel overwhelmed by temptations, sing a praise song to God. If you don't know any, make up one. By focusing on the greatness of God, many times the lure of a particular temptation will fade. Although this might sound trite, and I'm aware of the pressure temptation brings, focusing our minds on good things is better than trying not to think about bad things. Consider the words of John Piper, a Minneapolis pastor, "I know of no other way to triumph over sin long-term, than to gain a distaste for it, because of a superior satisfaction in God."¹⁰¹

Spiritual Warfare

As a 13-year-old boy, I took karate lessons--Tae Kwon Do to be exact. We frequently sparred each other at the end of class. I recall the humiliation and pain that sometimes stemmed from my lack of preparation and skill. On occasions, I'd spar my instructor and these served as humbling experiences. I'd hold my hands up in front of my face, and despite my best efforts, he'd smack me in the eye with the fastest backhand I've ever seen. He'd hit me over and over, popping me in the eye. At one point, my eyelid folded over, and I had to stop to flip it back down. Eventually, I learned to keep my hands up and be ready for an attack at any moment (not that I ever learned to block sensei's relentless eye shots). In the same way, you should prepare for Satan's attacks. However, the forces you fight as a Christian are not physical but spiritual (See 2 Chronicles 32:8; Zechariah 4:6).

The Apostle Paul describes the serious nature of this battle in Ephesians 6:10-18:

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 saints.

¹⁰¹ *Desiring God* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1996 revised ed [1986]), 11.

Satan wants you to believe that your enemies are politicians, the folks in Hollywood, scientists, Muslims, professors, atheists, or fellow believers. Yet Paul, in Ephesians 6, reminds believers that Satan and his forces rank as their ultimate enemies. Also see 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

Temptation and Spiritual Warfare

When sparring other students in Tae Kwon Do class, I tried to seize the moment when my opponent was most vulnerable. If he held his arms too far apart or left his elbows out, a swift kick to the ribs usually did the trick. Similarly, Satan's ongoing desire in spiritual warfare is to tempt you during your weakest moments so you will surrender to his enticements. You will certainly face temptation, but you can face it successfully.

Romans 5:12 says that you were born a sinner (i.e., you had, and still have, an inclination toward sin). As stated earlier, all people have sinned (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23). If you follow Christ, however, God has planted in you a desire to please Him.¹⁰² By imparting His Spirit, God equipped you with the ability to obey His Word and resist sin. Yet, you still remain capable of sinning. While on this earth, you will not experience total freedom from sin, but you can live victoriously, nonetheless.

As a Christian, your sinful nature no longer dominates you, but it still influences you.¹⁰³ Galatians 5:17 says, "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." In other words, sin need not enslave you as it did before salvation, but sin still exists, and you must obey the Spirit to resist it (2 Timothy 2:22).

Again, James 4:7-8 commands, "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."

Also, consider what 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "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." How reassuring to know that you can trust God! He will never leave or forsake you (Hebrews 2:18). All believers struggle; even the Apostle Paul struggled with temptation (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

The Bible explains that God does not tempt people (James 1:13). Temptation comes from Satan, who distorts good human desires (e.g., to eat, to have sex, or to rest). Being tempted is not sinful. Nevertheless, you face temptation when you are drawn away from God by your own desires.

Because you have the tendency and ability to sin, you will often give in to temptation. However, you don't *have to yield* because Christ has defeated sin. The Apostle John (ca. A.D. 85) said, "...for every child of God can obey Him, defeating sin and evil pleasure by trusting Christ to help him. But who could possibly fight and win this battle except by believing that Jesus is truly the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5, Living).

¹⁰² See Romans 6:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; 5:24.

¹⁰³ See Romans 13:14; Ephesians 4:22-25; Colossians 3:5-16.

Satan often seeks to provoke your sinful desires. He will attack you in at least three areas: *the lust of the flesh*, *the lust of the eyes*, and *the pride of life* (1 John 2:16). Satan tempted Eve, and later Jesus, in these three areas.¹⁰⁴ Notice that Eve and her husband Adam succumbed to temptation, but Jesus resisted. Interestingly, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. Knowing Scripture will help you discern between right and wrong.

Satan succeeded in arousing and distorting Adam and Eve's natural desires, but he failed to provoke Jesus to sin, because Jesus, though human, obeyed the Father and resisted sin. In Matthew 4 and Luke 4, Jesus' victory over temptation clearly showed His power over Satan.

Yielding to temptation eventually leads to destruction (James 1:15). If you are going to defeat evil thoughts, you must replace them with good and wholesome ones (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."

At some point in life, we all fail at something. Even Thomas Edison who invented the phonograph, electric light bulb, and more than 1,000 other patented inventions, faced extreme failure when, as a young boy, he was kicked out of one school because they labeled him "retarded."¹⁰⁵ As history shows, he overcame his failure.

Failure is a part of life. You too will fail, sin, and make many mistakes.¹⁰⁶ But you should never be comfortable with your sin anymore than you would with a pebble in your shoe. When you sin, immediately repent and continue following God. Consider these chiding words of wisdom in Proverbs 24:10, "You are a poor specimen if you can't stand the pressure of adversity" (Living).

When you sin, ask God to forgive you, and accept that He has forgiven you. He knew of your blunders long before you committed them. So confess your sin to God, thank Him for His unchanging love, ask Him for help, and determine not to commit the same sin again. Get up and go on, "...for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity" (Proverbs 24:16).

The Enemy and Difficulty

Because of sin and Satan, difficulty promises to track us to the grave. Consider the circumstances of one of my dearest friends, Mrs. Calfee, an elderly lady in the church where I grew up in Tennessee, who's now in heaven. During the last few years of her life, I visited her in the nursing home and hospital. Although I went to encourage her, she usually encouraged me. Her passion for Jesus bubbled continuously. Frequently, tears ran down her face as she spoke about the beauty of heaven.

¹⁰⁴ Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:3-10; Luke 4:1-13.

¹⁰⁵ See s.v. "Edison, Thomas," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1986, 15th ed.

¹⁰⁶ See Proverbs 28:13; James 4:4; 1 John 3:8; 5:18.

Nevertheless, she lived a hard life. Her dad had abandoned her family prior to her birth. She buried five of her siblings, her husband, and four of her children. On top of that, she spent the last few years of her life in misery. She experienced blood clots, multiple strokes, arthritis, diabetes, kidney problems, Parkinson's disease, Bell's palsy, cancer on the face and eye, cataracts, hernias, and underwent 13 surgeries.

Mrs. Calfee entered the Intensive Care Unit five times, and lived in one rest home and three nursing homes before she went to heaven. Yet, her sweet attitude and love for Jesus dazzled more than a few people. Although she experienced enormous trouble, she relished God's faithfulness.

Your problems might differ from Mrs. Calfee's, but you will also face hard times (James 1:2-8). Despite trouble, the Spirit comforts believers during hard times (John 16:7). Persevering through difficulty can result in your own benefit because of the lessons God can teach you by enduring trials (Deuteronomy 8:16; Job 23:10). "For many, the deepest growth in humble, joyful reliance on God will be in the context of the most bloody battles, which appear to be tragic losses and not glorious victories."¹⁰⁷

The experience and maturity gained through suffering gives one the ability to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1; 1 Peter 1:7). Paul encourages the believers in Rome by saying:

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us--they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. (Romans 5:3-5, Living)

Suffering might be more bearable if you keep in mind your destiny--heaven. For example, Jesus faced agony on the cross but endured it because of the joy that awaited Him in the presence of His Father (Hebrews 12:2). Suffering taught Paul to rely more upon Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:24-28; 12:7-10).

Loved ones will die, your car will malfunction, and things you cherish will break. When these difficult times arise, ponder what lesson you can learn from these events. Hardships should always cause Christians to examine their lives to see if their difficulties are corrections from God.¹⁰⁸ This is not to say that God sets out to punish people, but He does correct His children when they step out of line. Certainly not every difficulty is personal retribution for your sin, but you will want to ponder this as a possibility when encountering hardship.

¹⁰⁷ Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 55.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 5:11; Hebrews 12:5-13; 1 Peter 2:20.

Persecution

Furthermore, at times you will be disliked and ridiculed because of your Christian beliefs (Matthew 5:11; Acts 5:41). In John 15:18-25, Jesus tells His disciples to expect persecution. If Jesus and His disciples suffered, should you expect anything differently? If you are living for Jesus, persecution will come (Philippians 1:29).

Listen to Paul's sobering words in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yes, and those who decide to please Christ Jesus by living godly lives will suffer at the hands of those who hate Him" (Living). However, despite the difficulty involved with faithfully following Jesus, you can still live a responsible, effective, joy-filled Christian life.

Revelation 12:10-11 says,

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

I'm afraid that too many American Christians have lost sight of what it means to really follow Christ. Many think bearing their cross means enduring another boring day at work or having to drive a Corolla instead of a Lexus. They've forgotten that Jesus told His disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Taking up our cross means facing death for the cause of Christ. Some reports show that 200,000 Christians faced death in 2003 because they claimed Christ as their Savior. Who knows how many went unrecorded? What does our faith cost us? If the answer is "nothing," then it's time to walk closer to the dangerous edge of God-honoring ministry.

The fact that Jesus holds all authority and that He will never leave His followers enables us to fulfill His command to go and teach all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). The truth of God's power in our lives sets us free to take chances and risks for the sake of God's glory that would otherwise be foolish.

The simple truth is this: if we are going to reach some of the unreached peoples of the world with the gospel, many of us must die as martyrs. I don't want to be a martyr, but I do want to be faithful. And if being faithful means dying for my faith, then I pray that the Lord will give me the grace to die upholding His great majestic name. That's not foolish thinking, that's biblical thinking.

Summary

Satan knows He cannot destroy God, so he attacks God's creation. Specifically, Satan seeks to destroy humans. The devil constantly engages believers in spiritual warfare. He cannot lead believers to hell, so he attempts to damage their influence for Christ. Thus, he and his demonic forces tempt believers. Even though believers can, and do, surrender to temptation, they need not be enslaved to sin. Hard times often accompany temptations. The world is not perfect and difficulty abounds. Christians often suffer persecution because of their faith. Nevertheless, God uses hard times to make believers more responsible and effective vessels for Him.

Assignments

1. Memorize John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full," and 1 Peter 5:8, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
2. Read Romans 8:28-29.
3. List several things that currently cause you stress, frustration, or pain. How might God use these problems to help you? Have you done anything that has contributed to your difficulties?
4. What are some of the lies Satan frequently tells you?

Discussion Questions

1. Is it sinful to be tempted?
2. How can you most effectively deal with evil thoughts? (Hint: Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:8.)
3. What are the items of spiritual armor that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:14-18?
4. Does facing difficult times necessarily indicate that a person is rebelling against God?

Answers to Chapter 7 Discussion Questions

1. Is it sinful to be tempted? *No. Even Jesus faced temptation. But, James 1 teaches that we are tempted when we are drawn away by sin in our hearts. Jesus wasn't tempted for that reason, but you and I are.*

2. How can you most effectively deal with evil thoughts? (Hint: Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:8.) *You can think upon wholesome and godly things. I would also recommend that you enlist another mature believer of the same sex to talk to about these things.*

3. What are the items of spiritual armor that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:14-18? *The belt of Truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit (the Word of God), and prayer.*

4. Does facing difficult times necessarily indicate that a person is rebelling against God? *No. Hard times come to all people whether Christian or not. That's life! But you should closely examine your life during hard times, because it could be correction from the Lord.*

CHAPTER 8 THE RESPONSIBLE CHRISTIAN

Freedom and Limits

Few things excite me more than visiting a foreign country. Traveling offers the willing person a chance to grow and learn. Preparation serves as a key element in visiting another nation. Learning as much as possible about the country before visiting is vital.

Pondering all the issues can be exhausting. What offends the citizens? What types of foods do they regularly serve? What kinds of clothes do they wear? What's illegal and what's not? What parts of the country are safe?

Visitors should seek to be responsible and grateful guests. It would be shameful for someone visiting a foreign country to insult the local people. For example, it's rude to show the bottom of your feet in Thailand or to give something to someone with your left hand in Indonesia. In Vietnam, you should motion for someone to come to you with your hand and palm turned downward, instead of upward like we do in the U.S. In South Korea, in some circles, Koreans commonly turn down an invitation or offer three times before accepting it. In certain countries, people initially laugh when something tragic or embarrassing occurs, not because they think it's funny, but because it's the way they deal with certain difficult situations.

A tourist should be careful not to offend while at the same time not becoming easy prey for those who take advantage of foreigners' ignorance. People living outside their home country often struggle with what they can, or can't, do because they want to be responsible guests in their host country.

Likewise, Christians who live in intimacy with God and have an awareness of Satan's ploys often struggle with what they can or can't do because they desire to be effective and responsible Christians. Aware of such struggles, the Apostle Paul talked about believers' freedoms and responsibilities in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

Paul avoided activities that would spiritually hinder or offend Christians. Paul lived free from bondage to "dos" and "do nots," but he realized that not all things worked for his good (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). He wanted everything he did to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

What about the morality of certain television shows, secular music, movies, drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, etc.? Although I don't have the perfect answer to all of these scenarios, keep in mind that wherever you go and whatever you do, Christ goes with you (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:15).

Ask yourself, "What does Scripture teach me to do?" Although the answer will not always be obvious, sometimes it will.

Don't go where Christ would not want you to go (for instance, into a strip club), and, likewise, do what Christ would want you to do (like share your faith). Certain movies and music can damage your Christian life and should be avoided. But I'm not going to name specific titles, bands or genres, rather I want to encourage you to fill your mind with things that will make you more like Christ.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

Before you sigh with despair, realize that Christianity consists of having a relationship with Christ, not just obeying commandments and following rules. Relationships do require responsibility, but they also provide fulfillment and fun. Have a good time and enjoy life, but don't harm yourself or others in the process. Furthermore, for those wrestling with whether certain issues and habits are acceptable, ask yourself these questions:¹¹⁰

- 1). Does it violate any clear teaching of Scripture?
- 2). Does it destroy any part of you?
- 3). Does it hinder a nonbeliever or a weaker believer from coming closer to Christ?
- 4). Does it violate the express will of one's authority (i.e., not permitted by your employer)?
- 5). Does it glorify God? Can you, with a clear conscience, ask God to bless it?
- 6). What motivates you to do this activity?
- 7). Is this the wisest choice to make?

Answering these questions will not clarify every query you have, but it may point you in the right direction.

Even though 2 Corinthians 5:17 says Christ made you *new* at salvation, your struggles remain. Bad habits might continue to tempt you as a new Christian. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul states that believers should not be addicted to anything. If you can't seem to break a habit, get help from someone in the church, or from another mature believer outside of your congregation. Christ has not come to put you in bondage, but to give you freedom and victory (John 10:10).

Family

Healthy societies can't exist without healthy families.¹¹¹ In Genesis 2, God made the first family--one *man* to live with one *woman* for life.¹¹² This model reflects God's ideal family.

Because of divorce and unforgiveness, many broken families fill the American landscape. Nonetheless, God still wants these broken families to glorify Him. The family was God's idea, not society's, therefore, society has no right to redefine the family. Satan attacks the family through sexual perversions, like affairs, incest, pornography, and homosexuality.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Some of these questions derive from Byang Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos, Nigeria: Challenge, 1976), 55.

¹¹¹ By "health," I have the traditional nuclear family in mind, in which the members of the family remain a unit and love each other.

¹¹² Notice what the Bible says about the family in Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1.

¹¹³ All of these are clearly sins: Genesis 19:4-11; Leviticus 18:22; 20:10-17; Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

Satan would also like to destroy your family through fighting and divorce.¹¹⁴ Even if you are married to a non-Christian, God wants your marriage to succeed (1 Corinthians 7; 1 Peter 3:1-7). Among other sins, God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). God doesn't hate divorced people, but He does hate divorce. Divorce serves as the world's answer for marital conflict, but forgiveness is God's answer (Colossians 3:12-17).

Even though God cherishes the family, He wants our devotion focused ultimately on Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not *hate* his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26, NKJV, emphasis added). Here *hate* does not mean you should despise your family with bitterness; it stresses a point by using an extreme. Thomas à Kempis, 1380-1471, said it beautifully: "Grant, O Jesus, that I may love You more than I love my relatives and friends. That all my efforts be centered in knowing You, loving You and imitating You. O God of love, grant that I may love You as I should; that is, with a love which surpasses all other love. Amen."¹¹⁵ The old saint's point seems clear. Love God so much that your love for family seems like hatred (Matthew 10:37). I've known Christian men to take this verse to the extreme and leave their families to study the Bible at seminary. Somehow, I don't think that's what Jesus had in mind. Loving one another remains a part of the way Christians show their love for God (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14).

Although God ultimately leads the family, the husband is responsible for spiritually leading his family and physically providing for them (Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:23, 29). Scripture commands the husband to love his wife as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29, 33). The husband should strive to understand and honor his wife. He lives with her as a partner, not her dictator (1 Peter 3:7).

Furthermore, the wife should submit to her husband even if she thinks he doesn't deserve it (Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1). Although she should never do anything against God's Word merely because her husband wants her to, she should still submit according to the biblical model. Titus 2:3-5 outlines her responsibilities.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Deuteronomy 24:1,3; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:7-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 27-28, 39

¹¹⁵ *The Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, Chapter 8, Jamaica Plain, Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1962, 36.

¹¹⁶ The husband should love, protect, and provide for his wife as Christ loved the church. He's not a tyrant, but he is her leader, a servant-leader. Most husbands could probably do more to assist their wives around the house. Christ led and served by washing feet and dying. So the husband leads and makes important decisions with his wife, putting her needs above his own. The wife nurtures her husband and children. She also submits to her husband. This doesn't mean that she's his doormat, but that she allows him to lead the family in a godly way. Submission doesn't mean the husband always gets what he wants, either. After all, how could he if he loves his wife as Christ loves the church. Any marriage must have compromise and understanding. But submission means

Not only should wives submit to their husbands, but children should obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20). The result of following the biblical pattern should result in the harmonious family God desires for believers.

Government

Believers are responsible to God, their families, the church, and the government. Though God does not necessarily agree with all that governmental officials do, He has granted the government power and authority (Proverb 21:1; Romans 13:1-7). You should pray for, and give honor to, government leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17). Titus 3:1 requires you to obey the government and the law of the land (e.g., speed limits, taxes, etc.).

In Matthew 22:21, Peter inquires of Jesus whether or not he should pay his taxes, and Jesus tells Peter to give the government the things that belong to the government. (Also see Romans 13:7.)

What about civil disobedience? Whether or not you like the government leaders is irrelevant. Obey them unless they require you to do something that violates Scripture. Peter and John faced such an incident in Acts 4 when the governing officials told them to stop spreading the gospel. They disobeyed the government, and obeyed God rather than man, because the government blatantly violated Jesus' command to share the good news. However, this text does not sanction all forms of civil disobedience. Regardless of the restrictions placed on Christians, God's followers can still demonstrate effective lives that testify to the integrity of the church and to the goodness of God.

Summary

Since believers live under the authority of Christ, they should want to live responsibly. Often, believers struggle with what they are and aren't allowed to do. Perhaps believers struggle so much because the Bible doesn't specifically address every possible situation that a believer may encounter. Yet, believers can obey Scripture and enjoy life at the same time. Believers, however, should be sensitive that their actions don't cause less spiritually mature believers to stumble. Believers also have a responsibility to take care of their families and respect the government.

that the wife is willing to respect her husband and support him as he leads the family. In essence, the wife submits to her husband in a way similar to the way a congregation should submit to their pastor(s). The pastor(s) makes decisions based on Scripture and occasional congregational input while leading them gently. So, it is with a husband. He's not a boss *per se*, making decisions that the wife has to comply with, but he's able to lead as he loves his wife and as she submits to him out of respect. A simple book illustrating this concept is William Hendricks and Robert Lewis, *Marriage Roles* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991). A well-written evangelical book with an opposing view is Gilbert Bilezikian's, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 12th printing, January 2001, 2nd ed [1985]).

Assignments

1. Memorize Romans 14:21, "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."
2. List some things that you do that could be causing other Christians to stumble.

Discussion Questions

1. When did the family begin?
2. As a Christian, do you have the freedom to do anything you wish?
3. When is the only time that governmental laws should be ethically violated?

Answers to Chapter 8 Discussion Questions

1. When did the family begin? *God created the first family in Genesis 2 with Adam and Eve. He meant the family to be one man with one woman for life.*
2. As a Christian, do you have the freedom to do anything you wish? *No. When Paul said "all things were lawful" for him in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, he didn't mean that he could do anything he wanted. Otherwise, he would have contradicted himself in 6:13 where he said that "the body isn't for sexual immorality ." Rather, when he said "all things are lawful," he might have been speaking of issues such as suing someone or eating food offered to idols, etc. He could do those things, but they weren't necessarily the best things to do in every situation. Or he was quoting a statement from the Corinthians that he didn't agree with.*
3. When is the only time that governmental laws should be ethically violated? *Only in cases where the law is asking you to violate the teachings of Scripture.*

CHAPTER 9 THE EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN

One day during my rebellious teenage years, I sat in class talking to a friend and said something profane. Even though he was not a Christian, he pointed out my hypocrisy. According to him, I lived one life in church, and another in school. The truth cut deep, but I could not deny what he said. God used this person to show me that I needed to repent so my life could evidence my relationship with the Lord. I was living irresponsibly and, as a result, was not being an effective Christian.¹¹⁷ Since effective Christianity covers a broad spectrum, this chapter will discuss only a few specific areas of this wide subject.

Lust and Sexual Purity

With sensual commercials, explicit movies, passionate television shows, racy satellite programs, porn magazines, strip clubs, prostitutes, unwholesome Internet sites, and scantily clad women in the work place and church, it does at times seem impossible to survive this sexual bombardment, especially as a man. Satan tells us that we will never rise above these things, that we will always be trapped by lust and masturbation. But we must not believe these lies. Satan wants us to believe that God isn't good, that He's keeping something from us.

Men, we really must get into the habit of bouncing our eyes away from sensual things and starving them of lustful images.¹¹⁸ Notice the example of Job as he promised to refrain from looking lustfully at what he should not (31:1).

Psalm 119: 9 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word." And verse 37 stated, "Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to Your Word."

Ephesians 5:3 declared, "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." Did you get that? Not even a hint. Second Peter 1:3 stated of Christ, "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." Also see 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18-20; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:6; Titus 2:11-14.

In this highly sexual culture, both Christian ladies and gentlemen should be modest especially in the things they wear and do, so as not to provoke each other to lust (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-6). Many Christian youth group girls need to seriously

¹¹⁷ In chapters 8 and 9, I'm not trying to draw a fine distinction between the words "responsible" and "effective." I'm merely using them to loosely organize this material into two shorter chapters, rather than one long one.

¹¹⁸ For a great book that gets right to the point on this subject, see Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker, *Every Man's Battle: Winning the War on Sexual Temptation One Victory at a Time*, Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2000. This is also a wonderful resource for women if they really want to understand men and are mature enough to grapple with the sexual darkness and temptation that lurks in the hearts of most Christian men.

rethink what they're wearing (or not wearing!), because their Christian brothers might stumble at these temptations. But youth aren't the only ones dressing seductively. Many women need to carefully think through this, too, for their own purity and for the sake of others. Ultimately, immodest clothing indicates an immodest heart (attitude). A pure heart will demonstrate itself in appropriate dress and behavior, like the way you walk, bend over, and carry yourself. Of all people, Christians should take modesty seriously.

Dating and Sex

Sex is a good thing, but outside the sanctity of marriage it is wrong (1 Corinthians 6:15-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). Although there's tremendous social pressure, and often hormonal pressure, you should save sex for marriage. Even if long ago you gave away your virginity, you can still live celibate until marriage. Despite what it seems, everybody is not "doing it." Even if they were, it would still be wrong. You will not regret waiting until marriage.

How far is going too far sexually? Christians often wonder how physically involved they can get without sinning and this is dangerous. You should never seek to find sin's "borderline." Stay as far away from sin as you can.

When certain actions seem questionable, abstain until you've had time to talk it over with a mature Christian. Anything that will subtract from the meaningfulness of your wedding night is too far. Apart from marriage, certain types of kissing and touching will only provoke sexual desires. Anything you wouldn't want someone to do with your sister or future spouse is also too far. Stay away from anything that might directly lead you to sin (Romans 13:13-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Carefully plan your dates. Try to limit your isolated time together since it will likely only elicit temptation. Unmarried couples who sleep together often try to justify their actions by saying that they're in love. If you think this way, turn to 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, and read how it defines love.

Others would never try to justify their sin, but neither do they guard themselves from the subtleties of sexual sin. I recall a dating Christian couple I knew in college. Although their intentions were good, they were alone in an apartment one day with too much free time. They started to kiss, then their passions ignited and soon they were sexually involved. Because he got her pregnant, they married and dropped out of school to work full time. What happened to them is typical. Though they were good people, they isolated themselves, inviting temptation. So live wisely. Stronger people than you have fallen into sexual sin.

Dating and Marriage

Amy worshipped with us regularly, typically attending Bible studies and other church activities. She remained fairly faithful to the church until she started dating Bill. She and Bill worshipped with us a few times but quickly stopped coming altogether. Though Bill claimed to be a follower of Christ, his life showed no signs of hunger for God. Certainly, this relationship failed to honor God because it led Amy and Bill away from God's people, the church.

If you want to avoid unbelievable pain, only date and marry a maturing Christian. Fools think they can convert non-Christians. If you are dating an unbeliever (or even a person who claims Christ but does not live the Christian life), you are forfeiting God's

best. First Corinthians 7:39 indicates that the Apostle Paul did not want a believer to marry an unbeliever--"A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord."

Also, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 may give the reader further insight into the foolishness of marrying an unbeliever:

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

Though 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 may not be specifically addressing the issue of dating or marrying unbelievers, the text offers a few principles that most likely apply to Christians in those situations. But the most fundamental principle would be, don't date or marry a nonbeliever. If you hold your relationship with God to be the most important thing in life, how can you expect to live in harmony with someone who doesn't share that same value? I could take you to countless women in local churches who thought they could eventually sway their men to believe in Christ, but after decades still see no results.

Friends and Acquaintances

Friends significantly influence you whether you know it or not. "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Proverb 12:26, NKJV). "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Ephesians 5:11). Surround yourself with people who love Jesus (2 Timothy 2:22). Furthermore, if you want to be wise, spend time with wise people (Proverbs 13:20; 15:22).

But what about your non-Christian friends? Do you abandon them? If your friends influence you in a negative way, they will only hinder your spiritual growth. As a Christian, you can make a difference in this world. Listen to what Matthew 5:13-16 says:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

You cannot be salt and light if you embrace the same values as the world (i.e., non-Christian community). Neither can you be effective if you withdraw altogether.

You might, however, need to disassociate from friends because of their negative influence.¹¹⁹ If so, be courteous. Don't condemn, but explain why you want to disassociate from them, even though they might not understand. Regardless of their responses, continue to demonstrate the compassion of Christ toward them.

Language and Conduct

Undiluted evil continues to ooze from the pores of today's culture. Vulgar or racist words flow prevalently in society. If you use profane words or tell suggestive jokes, you damage your effectiveness in communicating Christ's love. Even laughing at unwholesome jokes gives the impression that you approve of them.

In addition, participating in sarcasm or gossip damages you and others (Proverbs 18:21; 20:19). Sometimes professing Christians revel in gossip, spreading negativity with no shame. Christians should view gossip, especially their own, as an offense against God.¹²⁰

Throwing verbal sticks and stones breaks emotional, spiritual, and mental bones. As Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Let Scripture set your guidelines for language and conduct.¹²¹

Unfortunately, many people who claim to follow Christ also frequently take the Lord's name in vain. People don't have to use God's name along with "damn" in order to use it in vain. Believers should avoid using words like, "God-almighty," "Jesus," "Oh my God," "Lord," or "God" as exclamations. In Exodus 20:7, God commanded the Israelites not to use His name in vain. Any usage of God's name without reverence for who He is constitutes taking His name in vain. Of all people, Christians should not profane the name of their Savior.

Some Christians manage to keep their language pure, but smolder with a bad attitude, and non-Christians notice this. They will not be attracted to Christ if you consistently demonstrate a poor attitude. Everything about you conveys some type of message. Therefore, be considerate of the people around you lest you trip them up.

School and Work

Ever since the beginning of creation, even before Adam sinned, God gave humans responsibility (Genesis 1:28-30; 2:15, 19-20). If you are healthy and old enough to work, you should work diligently at your job (1 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:8). Followers of God should not be lazy (Proverbs 6:6; 13:23).

Several passages provide principles that can apply to the class room or the work place: "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh" (1 Peter 2:18; also see

¹¹⁹ Proverb 22:24; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

¹²⁰ See Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

¹²¹ Proverbs 4:24; 12:18; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17.

Ephesians 6:6-9; Colossians 3:22-24). These verses discuss the relationship between first-century slaves and owners, which we are not. But these verses still apply to us.¹²²

Even though you are not a slave, these principles still apply to you as a student or an employee. Both relationships consist of a functional element (e.g., authority and subordination). Nevertheless, since you do not live as a slave, the demands of these verses should make your responsibility a little easier to fulfill.

Be on time for work or school, and work as industriously as possible. If you cannot fulfill your obligations, ask for help, but don't do a poor job. Do your assignments as if Jesus were your employer or teacher. Remember, you represent Christ. Romans 12:11 encourages believers to, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." Cheating on tests, being dishonest on your time cards, or taking materials from the office are wrong and paint a poor picture of Christ.

Forgiving Others

You will not travel through life without being spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically wounded. Refraining from bitterness is difficult, but you must forgive those who mistreat you regardless of how harsh they have been. If you harbor bitterness toward someone, it comes from an unforgiving disposition that will certainly hurt you.

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:14-15).

To deal with these harsh attitudes, you may want to write your bitter feelings down or even mention them when you privately pray to God. You can honestly vent your frustrations to God. Be reassured that He will avenge all injustice (see Psalms 12, 35, 37). However, don't carry hatred around; determine to forgive those who hurt you. Ask God to do good things to your enemies, even if you have asked Him to avenge you. Go out of your way to do something nice for your enemies (Romans 12:20).

How many times should you forgive them? Grant them forgiveness as many times as they offend you (Matthew 18:21-35). Even if they refuse to repent, don't hold a grudge.

What was Jesus' attitude toward His enemies in Luke 23:34? He forgave them. You should forgive others because Christ has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32). You might even have to take the first step in attempting reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-25).

Take for example a Christian couple, Brian and Karen, who loved each other deeply and talked about marriage. Out of nowhere, Brian broke up with Karen. She died inside because she loved Brian more than she could put into words. Admittedly, she struggled with bitterness toward him, she even shared some of her anger with him. He listened, but never apologized for his own sins. Eventually, more tension built between them. Finally, Karen felt she needed to offer forgiveness, although she considered it more Brian's place, since he had initiated the breakup. She spoke with him and asked for forgiveness over any bitterness she'd sown. Although Brian received her apology, he never apologized to her. Even if he wasn't sorry about breaking up, he could have helped Karen by asking for her forgiveness for the damage he'd caused. But that never

¹²² See s.v. "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

happened. He only said he wasn't mad at her. Karen had a choice, to forgive Brian or become bitter again. She forgave him, and that's what you must do for your offenders.

The great pastor and scholar from New England, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-58, spoke directly about the need to forgive and endure offenses from others:

*A humble spirit disinclines us to indulge resentment of injuries; for he that is little and unworthy in his own eyes, will not think so much of an injury offered to him as he that has high thoughts of himself. . . . It is pride or self-conceit that is very much the foundation of a high and bitter resentment, and of an unforgiving and revengeful spirit. . . . Let us endeavour, under all injuries, to preserve the calmness and quiet of our spirits, and be ready rather to suffer considerably in our just rights, than do anything that may occasion our stirring up, and living in, strife and contention.*¹²³

When you wrongfully offend others, be humble enough to apologize to them and ask them to forgive you.¹²⁴ If they do not grant you forgiveness, continue to treat them respectfully. You cannot make them forgive you. If you have sincerely sought to reconcile the relationship, then you have done your part. Furthermore, do not continually carry guilt for your mistakes. God has forgiven you as 1 John 1:7 says, "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." Accept God's forgiveness.

Are there people whom you have not forgiven, or people you should ask forgiveness from? If so, write their names down and make things right before another day passes. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 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." As Schreiner and Caneday boldly say, ". . . people who ignore these verses and do not forgive others will find themselves in hell."¹²⁵

A Non-Argumentative Attitude

Avoid arguments when you can. They typically only waste time and stir up anger.¹²⁶ As much as possible, live in peace with all people (Romans 12:18).

¹²³ *Charity and its Fruits*, ed. Tryon Edwards (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998 reprint [1852]), 79, 82-83.

¹²⁴ Confess your sin to people according to the extent of your sin's effect. In other words, if you have offended someone, go to *that person* and seek reconciliation. It would not necessarily be wise to confess this to other people if they have not been affected by the conflict in some other way.

¹²⁵ *The Race Set Before Us*, 77.

¹²⁶ Proverbs 17:14, 19; 2 Timothy 2:23-26; Titus 3:9.

Unfortunately, I haven't always done my part to live peacefully with all people. Shortly after the Lord started changing my life in the late 80s, I spent a great deal of time reading the Bible. As a result of learning biblical concepts, I had an increasing desire to share these truths. Regrettably, I went about things the wrong way. I thought that being an effective Christian translated to rebuking every unbeliever and arguing with every Christian who didn't agree with me on trivial issues. I argued with people until my pastor encouraged me to be less contentious, and his words encouraged me to seek peace rather than arguments.

Sometimes you need to discuss important issues, but don't confuse foolish arguing with necessary discussion.¹²⁷ Don't argue for the sake of arguing or to prove yourself right; you might win the argument but unnecessarily offend the other person. When possible, avoid being harsh or rude. Don't speak in a way that exalts yourself and degrades others. Kindness goes a long way in being persuasive. Seek to attack issues (important ones), not people.

Living Wisely

One day you must give an account for how you lived on earth, so be wise with what God has given you (Ecclesiastes 12:14). If you give children money and time, they will probably spend both on candy and toys. Children, as well as many adults, have a poor understanding of how to properly manage time, spend money, and live wisely. Be a good manager of your time and money (Luke 16:1-13; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Recreation has its place, but don't give it too much attention. Beware of television, the Internet, and computer games; they'll eat your time and sap your soul.

Luke 16:10-11 teaches believers the importance of properly using what they have: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"

Neither waste your money on luxury (i.e., things not needed for survival), nor wear yourself out to get rich (Proverb 23:4; 1 Timothy 6:7, 10). This principle goes against the average American mindset, but Scripture teaches it. Instead, lay up your treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). After all, Psalm 90:12 says, "[God] Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

The Sabbath

The word "Sabbath" means rest. God modeled the importance of a Sabbath rest in Genesis 2:1-3 before sin ever entered into the world. Later on, God commanded the Israelites to take a Sabbath day once a week (Exodus 20:6-11). Although scholars debate the issue, I believe Christians do well to honor the Sabbath.

Consider a few points about the Sabbath:

- 1). The Sabbath reflects our peace with God (Hebrews 4:1-11).
- 2). The Sabbath reminds us of a greater reality (Colossians 2:16-17).
- 3). The Sabbath combats our idolatry by calling us back to God.

¹²⁷ Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3.

- 4). The Sabbath helps us relinquish control (a faith offering).
- 5). The Sabbath restores our energy.¹²⁸

God has given the Sabbath as a gift more than as a rule. God knows we need rest and time to reflect upon the more important things of life. Six days of work done in God's strength will be more productive than seven days done in your own energy.

Although God commanded the Jews to rest on what would now be our Saturday, I think the most important thing is *keeping the Sabbath weekly*, rather than insisting it be on Saturday or Sunday. It seems that it would be better if Christians in the same local church could all take their Sabbaths on the same day, then they could fellowship with each other more. Since work and family schedules will not always allow this, we need to extend grace to each other here.

But we should not overlook the importance of the rhythm (regularity or cycle) of the Sabbath. Regularity ensures that we remember to keep it. Whatever day we set as our Sabbath, it ought to stay our Sabbath, with only an occasional emergency interrupting it.

Lest we become too dogmatic, however, we need to keep in mind what Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, NKJV). While we need to keep the Sabbath consistently, we need to mingle our commitment with grace.

Concerning the issue of what a person can and can't do on the Sabbath I will leave to your own study. As to how long a Sabbath needs to be (sun up to sun down or 24 hours), I'll also leave for each believer to determine.

The Danger of Legalism

Since I've talked so much in these past two chapters about dos and don'ts, I want to discuss legalism. Legalism is the idea that we can do something, or not do something, to gain spiritual credit in God's eyes.

Professing Christians become legalists when they go beyond what Scripture teaches and set rules for what other believers must do. Jesus often battled with the Pharisees over their legalistic tendencies.¹²⁹

Again, the Christian life consists of more than what we wear, eat, drink, or do. We should be careful making rules for other believers ("don't play cards...you must go to church three times a week...you must like this kind of music..."). God cares about how we live outwardly, but He wants our actions to radiate from a pure heart for Him (Hosea 6:6; Colossians 2:16-23). As the Apostle Paul did, we must lean on the side of grace and

¹²⁸ For further study on the Sabbath, see Exodus 31:13-17; Leviticus 25:2-22; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Isaiah 1:13-17; 56:2, 6; 58:13-14; Jeremiah 17:19-27; Ezekiel 20:12-13; Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; John 9:1-16.

¹²⁹ Matthew 9:13; 15:1-14; 23:1-15, John 12:43; concerning the yoke of legalism, see Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 11:46; Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:1.

resist forcing others into our mold, while at the same time guarding against unnecessarily offending others (1 Corinthians 8-9).

Summary

Being an effective Christian affects all areas of a believer's life. Believers should pursue God's best and honor Christ in all aspects of their lives. Specifically, believers can honor Christ through dating and marrying only maturing believers. Believers should choose spiritually mature Christian friends. Other such things as language and conduct affect believers' abilities to fellowship with God and to influence others for Christ. Believers should also do their best at school and work. Furthermore, not forgiving others and arguing over trivial issues can damage believers and their witness--their influence for Christ. God wants Christians to be wise managers of what He has entrusted to them, which likely includes taking a Sabbath each week. But, believers need to be careful of legalism, not falling into the trap of thinking that something they do, or don't do, will make them right with God.

Assignments

1. Memorize Matthew 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."
2. Think of some ways in which you might be able to enhance your effectiveness for Christ. Write them down and post them where you will see them daily.
3. If you need to reconcile with someone, do that as soon as possible.
4. Are there any sexual temptations, like skin magazines or web links, that you need to get rid of or block? What about immodest clothing that shows off your body? If so, take action to rid your life of them now.

Discussion Questions

1. How should believers respond to friends who frequently use inappropriate language?
2. What should be your response toward someone who is angry with you?
3. How might an argumentative attitude affect your effectiveness for Christ?
4. What are some controversial behaviors that may still be OK for a Christian to do?
5. According to the author of *Growing Up in Christ*, why should Christians still keep the Sabbath weekly?

Answers to Chapter 9 Discussion Questions

1. How should believers respond to friends who frequently use inappropriate language? *If the person using inappropriate language is a Christian, you can tell him that you're offended by it and lovingly point them to Ephesians 4:29-32. If that person isn't a believer, you can either ignore his language, or let him know such language offends you. (Be careful not to give the impression that if he changes his language, he'll then be a Christian.)*
2. What should be your response toward someone who is angry with you? *If possible, go to him and ask him what's wrong. Apologize and ask for his forgiveness if you're truly at fault. If you think that approaching him right now will only make matters worse, pray for him. But don't use this as an excuse to avoid him just because you fear confrontation. Continue to look for opportunities to right the situation.*
3. How might an argumentative attitude affect your effectiveness for Christ? *People will begin to perceive you as a troublemaker, a fighter, rather than someone who's life has been touched by Christ.*
4. What are some controversial behaviors that may still be OK for a Christian to do? *Just a couple of examples to get you going...playing cards, dancing, etc.*
5. According to the author of *Growing Up in Christ*, why should Christians still keep the Sabbath weekly? *Believers do well to keep the Sabbath because God modeled it in Genesis 2:1-3 before sin entered the world or before the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath is a gift from God and a chance to trust that God can do more with our six days than we can with our seven.*

CHAPTER 10 THE END OF THE AGE

I will never forget the morning dad dropped off my brother and me, four or five years old, at the baby sitter's house. Before he left, he warned us not to play outside without wearing our coats. As only good children would do, we agreed to heed his words. Several hours passed, and the sun climbed to its pedestal. Although the sun warmed things up, the wind blew with a slight chill. Soon the time came for us to play outside.

And guess what we did? We left our coats inside...so unlike us to disobey! We were running, jumping, yelling, laughing--having the best time of our lives.

The picture hangs vividly in my head; my brother and I ran around the corner of the house, when suddenly, our grins turned downward and our eyes widened. Our worst fears sprang up faster than those weeds dad complained about in our yard. Dad's car was pulling into the driveway while we stood there in full view, coatless and doomed for punishment. The possibility of concocting a clever lie looked slim at that point. Lies work only as much as people believe them, and dad's facial expression didn't show that he would buy our reasoning. We could have ran and hid, but eventually we were going to need food. Dad had caught us with our coatless bodies on display for the world to see. Justice would soon roll down like water.

Dad's sudden presence that day served as quick and unexpected accountability. Dad didn't smile much on that occasion, and he made sure we didn't either. My brother and I learned a valuable lesson about accountability. Playing outside without our coats on had its pleasures, but it also carried *painful* consequences. Furthermore, we learned that we had to answer to others for our actions.

Accountability to God

Likewise, all people will give an account to God, as my brother and I did with our dad after blatantly disobeying him. Although you are responsible to others, you are *ultimately* responsible to God. This should provoke you to live an effective, godly life.

Joseph (ca. 1890 B.C.) realized his accountability to God in Genesis 39:9 when he resisted a woman's seduction. Also, King David recognized his ultimate accountability to God in Psalms 51:4 by the words he used when he confessed adultery and murder. Whatever you do that's not for God's glory will be worthless and to your shame when you stand before Christ (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

The Return of Christ

Although Christians debate the details of the Lord's return, they have always affirmed that the Lord will come back to earth. Whenever God the Father deems it time, Jesus will return to defeat His enemies and to reign upon the earth.

Ponder the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18:

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord's own Word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the

*Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep [died]. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*¹³⁰

We need to keep in mind the hope that lies ahead. This world falls short of giving us all we truly need. This earth fails to satisfy our true longings because earth isn't our real home. We do well to frequently reflect on Christ's coming return. "If we do not anticipate His return, then we will either be lulled into thinking that what we currently enjoy in this life is enough or lapse into fury for this life not being enough."¹³¹

Judgment

God will evaluate you and me some day.¹³² All people will be judged after death, both Christian and non-Christian (Hebrews 9:27; 1 Peter 4:5). This inevitable judgment consists of at least two aspects.

One aspect of the final judgment concerns nonbelievers. Sometimes believers call this facet of judgment *The Great White Throne Judgment*. God reserves the other judgment for believers, sometimes referred to as *The Judgment Seat of Christ*.

Those who have rejected Christ will not receive a second opportunity for salvation. When unbelievers face judgment, Christ will show them their evil deeds, declare them guilty of rejecting Him, and cast them into hell, where they will suffer forever (Matthew 7:22-23; 25:46; Revelation 20:11-15).

The judgment for believers will be more like an evaluation, and not one last attempt, on God's part, to decide whether or not they get into heaven. Instead, believers will account for how they lived. During this judgment, Christ will reward believers (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Second John verse 8 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 indicate that believers can also lose rewards.

¹³⁰ Also see Luke 21:25-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-12; 2:1-17; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7-18; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 19-22. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1091-1108. Also see R. G. Clouse, s.v. "Rapture of the Church," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 908-910.

¹³¹ *Bold Love*, 142.

¹³² Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Heaven

It's natural to want to go to heaven when you die. After all, Jesus dwells there (Hebrews 4:14). When believers die, they too will dwell in heaven with God (Matthew 6:9; 2 Corinthians 5:8).

God's presence makes heaven wonderful. Although God dwells in heaven, He is not confined to it (1 Kings 8:27, 30). One might suppose that since everything lies within God's presence, then people on earth should be able to see Him. But God manifests Himself in heaven uniquely from how He manifests Himself on earth.¹³³ One day, all Christians will see God face-to-face. (Also see above discussion of glorification under section entitled "Relationship" in chapter 3, "The Cleansing Effect.")

Hell

The Bible teaches that those who reject Christ go to a place of torment. The rich man of Luke 16:23-26 went to a place where he experienced inescapable suffering.

The Bible makes a distinction between the temporary place of suffering, where the rich man found himself, and the permanent place of suffering where all the wicked finally go.¹³⁴ The rich man went to the present place of torment (*Hades*: the abode of the dead or the holding place for the Day of Judgment). This temporary hell is a place designed for all who refuse to trust Christ. Revelation 20:14-15 discusses the future place of torment, namely *hell* or the *lake of fire*.¹³⁵ God will cast all the wicked into this never-ending place of suffering (Matthew 25:46).

Why does hell exist? God originally created hell for Satan and his demons (Matthew 25:41). Hell now functions as God's means to mete out justice by punishing wickedness. Furthermore, Romans 6:23a and James 1:15 say that the payment for sin is death (i.e., separation from God). All who reject Christ's atonement for their sin will be cast into hell, where they will be tormented and separated from God forever (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).¹³⁶

Why would God send or allow anyone to go to hell? He is holy and must judge sin. Those who reject God's provision for sin must receive the penalty for their sin

¹³³ For further reading on the future place of heaven, see Revelation 21:1-22:5.

¹³⁴ The distinction between a temporary and permanent place of torment is my interpretation and not necessarily the consensus of scholarship. There are many scholars who do not make a clear distinction between a temporary and a permanent place of torment. Whether the Bible makes a distinction between the two places or not, its message is clear: all who don't entrust their lives to Jesus will suffer the torment of hell the moment they die. Note that the Bible doesn't teach about purgatory--either someone goes to dwell with God or faces eternal suffering in hell.

¹³⁵ See Matthew 5:22, 29; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6; Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 21:8.

¹³⁶ This is the second death: Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8.

(Proverb 16:4). Since humanity stands guilty of sinning, hell is fair. Thank God that He graciously saves anybody!¹³⁷

Summary

Either through death or Christ's return, all people will stand before God to give an account for how they lived and how they responded to Christ. Unbelievers will stand before Jesus to receive the pronouncement of condemnation. Christ will find unbelievers guilty of rejecting Him and cast them into hell, where they will suffer forever. Believers will stand before Jesus to give an account of how they used their time and energy. God will reward believers accordingly and allow them into heaven.

Assignments

1. Memorize Ecclesiastes 12:14, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."
2. As a believer, picture yourself standing before Jesus during the Judgment. What do you want Him to say about your life? In light of that day, write down how you should live now in order to be unashamed then.

Discussion Questions

1. What, or who, makes heaven a place where believers should desire to go?
2. Does the Bible indicate that hell will be a place of conscious, never-ending punishment? If so, what passage(s)?
3. Knowing that many will be cast into hell, how should this affect the way believers live?

¹³⁷ Admittedly, there's an aspect of hell and God's judgment that I don't understand. It's a mystery and something difficult to think about. But Scripture teaches the existence of hell, that man is sinful, that unrepentant man goes to hell, and that God is just. I believe all of these points, even though I can't fully explain them.

Answers to Chapter 10 Discussion Questions

1. What, or who, makes heaven a place where believers should desire to go? *Although it will be great to see other believers who have gone on before, God will be the highlight of heaven.*

2. Does the Bible indicate that hell will be a place of conscious, never-ending punishment? *Yes.* If so, what passage(s)? See *Matthew 25:46, Luke 16:23-26, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, and Revelation 2:11, 20:14-15, 21:8.*

3. Knowing that many will be cast into hell, how should this affect the way believers live? *Although this may not be your primary motivator, it may provoke you to be more diligent about spreading the gospel.*

CHAPTER 11 THE AWAITING HARVEST

It came every year as faithful as the Spring rains. Like it or not, I had to take my place in the garden along with the other members of my family. The strong scent of tomatoes and cucumbers filled the air. The frustration of family members working in close proximity to one another, along with the pain of our cramping backs and aching knees, in conjunction with the scratches on our hands from gathering vegetables, only meant that tension hovered close by.

The bugs and insects carried out their typical ritual, torturing our exposed flesh. The sun cooked our backs, and our skin dripped with sweat. A narrow dirt ring served as an artificial collar around our necks. Occasionally I relieved the dislikes of garden work with the momentary pleasure of hitting my brother with a dirt clod, always being careful not to let our ever-suspicious parents see.

Memories of those times are fuzzy and fond now, however, I didn't enjoy them so much as a kid. For a youngster as myself, garden work, or work of any type, meant the cessation of pleasure and the infliction of discomfort. But for the more mature mind, the success of the garden came through a successful planting season, a reward for much labor and more money saved at the grocery store.

In Matthew 9:37-38 and John 4:35-38, Christ compared the work of the Christian life to a harvest field. Granted, he didn't have a small garden in mind. Rather, he compared the lost souls of men and women to a wheat field, ripe unto harvest.

There are as many attitudes about the work of harvesting souls as there are Christians in any given church. Some people look at it more positively and others consider it drudgery. Nonetheless, the work still remains. God wants all Christians to assist with the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). A key element in harvesting souls for the kingdom comes through loving other people.

Loving Others

Since God will hold all people accountable for the way they live, believers should love others. First Corinthians 13:1-8a says:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails

Jesus said people would recognize His disciples as followers of Him by their love for one another.¹³⁸ Love will express itself through humility (1 Peter 5:6). Philippians 2:3 explains that loving one another means putting the needs of others first (also see Matthew 25:35-40; James 2:14-16). Love goes beyond mere nice words; it provokes you to assist people whenever possible (1 John 3:18).

In Mark 12, someone asked Jesus which commandment stood as most important. In verses 29-31, Jesus told His listeners to love God and to love their neighbors as themselves: "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these."

By giving the Ten Commandments, God was calling His people to love Him supremely (see section above entitled "Making Sense of the Bible" in chapter 1, "The Heavenly Food"). And as a result of loving Him, they would love those around them (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18). Jesus echoed this in Mark 12:29-31.

Spreading the Gospel

People who love God will go out of their way to meet the needs of others (1 John 3:16; James 2:14-17). Although the physical needs of others should not be overlooked, neither should the spiritual. God cares about both the physical and spiritual needs humans have (Matthew 10:42; 25:35-46). Feeding the homeless man on the corner and not sharing the gospel with him isn't ideal, but it's better than not feeding him at all. At least he has a chance of living another day where he might hear the gospel at a later time. Sharing the gospel with him and not feeding him isn't ideal either, but again, it's better than doing nothing for him. Given the wealth of many Christians in America, most believers can find a balance between the two extremes.¹³⁹

Without turning a blind eye to the physical needs of those around us, let's look more closely at communicating the gospel--good news--to others. In Acts 1:8, Jesus commands His followers to spread the gospel. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus wanted His disciples to have a global perspective as well as a local and regional concern for the lost. Too many churches think they can't focus on the unreached peoples of the world until they first reach their city or county. But Jesus wants the church to do both local and international ministry.

He talked about *both* Jerusalem *and* the uttermost parts of the earth rather than *either* Jerusalem *or* the uttermost parts of the earth. I contend that typically churches will not do a good job of evangelizing locally until they have a biblical perspective for reaching all the peoples of the world.

¹³⁸ John 13:35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:15; 4:20-21.

¹³⁹ For a thought-provoking book that challenges American Christians to do more in this area, consult Ronald Sider's work, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, Nashville: Word, 1997, 4th ed.

The Bible stresses the urgency of spreading the good news.¹⁴⁰ Paul desired that people pray for him so the gospel would be spread abroad.¹⁴¹

Those ready for salvation, but not yet children of God, are comparable to wheat waiting to be harvested (Luke 10:2) and the harvest time is now (John 4:34-38). Don't make excuses for why you can't tell somebody what Jesus accomplished on the cross and in your life. Share with others what Christ did for you.

Tell them about your life before salvation, how you met Christ, and how He changed you. Remember, you can't save them, you can only present the gospel--Christ's death and resurrection (Acts 10:39-40). It alone has the power to change lives (Romans 1:16). You only need to help them get one step closer to Jesus.

Most Christians feel apprehensive when they share their faith, but don't let fear stop you. Some people like to carry gospel tracts to give strangers. If you prefer this style, be friendly, courteous, and tactful regardless of how people respond. Smile, try not to embarrass them, and share what Christ has done for you.

If you don't use tracts, your surroundings may give you an opportunity to engage them in casual conversation for a few moments before sharing your faith. You could ask about their past weekend. This might give you a chance to tell them of your past weekend (i.e., tell them about your church and then ask them if they worship anywhere). At this point, tell them about the reason you worship with other believers--to praise and adore Christ.¹⁴² Others like to build friendships, and then share their story with them. With either method you choose, evangelism is usually a process. Typically, people need to hear about Christ several times before believing in Him. Most often, our lives serve as the best gospel tracts, when we love non-Christians for who they are.

If you still feel ill-equipped to present the gospel, don't give up. Your skill develops the more you communicate your faith. Not only is dependence on God's help important in evangelism, but genuine care for the person you're talking to can't be overemphasized. Keep loving them.

If you need further assistance, ask your church leaders for training. But keep in mind, there are many ways to tell others about Christ. Secret-weapon methods do not exist. Sincere love and honesty usually work more effectively than mere methods.

If you can, go on a mission trip with folks from your church. Start exploring missions by trying to visit another country for 10 to 14 days. It's probably unreasonable to expect you to sign up as a career missionary if you've never left the U.S. This is usually a process, but get it started by leaving your comfortable surroundings for a couple of weeks.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 10:1-24; John 4:35; and Ephesians 5:16.

¹⁴¹ Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

¹⁴² Here are some other questions which may be valuable in shifting the conversation toward spiritual things: "What do you think will happen to you when you die?," "Do you ever think about spiritual things?," "What is the most important thing in your life?," "What are your spiritual beliefs?," and "Are you happy?".

Much of the world doesn't have the Bible available in their native language. And those who do have Scripture already, need other kinds of Christian help.

Romans 10:13-17 says:

...For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.

You do not have to be a full-time preacher to be a missionary. You may be a mechanic, doctor, field-worker, student, housewife, lawyer, truck driver, janitor, unemployed, or retired. God can use whatever skills you possess. The work of ministry is for all believers, not just a few with seminary degrees. Why not see if your church, or another neighboring church, has an overseas trip planned?

Making Disciples

Loving others enough to help them mature in Christ is critical (Acts 18:26). I know the importance of discipleship, because no one discipled me immediately after my conversion. Even though my dad encouraged me along the way, I didn't grow much.

I can't blame my lack of spiritual growth on anyone except myself, but I might have grown faster had someone, in addition to my dad, offered me some one-on-one guidance.

Eventually, God graciously led two men, Allen and Maston, to build a relationship with me to help me grow spiritually. They never told me that they wanted to disciple me. We simply spent time together doing different things (e.g., visiting someone in the hospital, running an errand, or simply hanging out for the fun of it). I will always be indebted to those two men.

Jesus wants Christians to multiply. Matthew 28:18-20 says, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

As you mature in your faith, help other people grow too. You may never preach or teach behind a pulpit or in a Bible class, but you can find new Christians, and spend time helping them understand the basic truths of the Christian life (i.e., what you're learning in *Growing Up in Christ*, for instance). Teach them to lead others through the same process. Imagine the difference it would make if every mature believer consistently helped immature believers grow. This could lead to church planting (starting new churches), which could result in a church planting movement.

Starting a church doesn't require money, a piano, a pastor, or an official church building. A couple of believers and a Bible will do. When each believer realizes his role as a minister, then he will realize his responsibility to reach someone else.

What would happen to our communities if church leaders enabled the people on their pews to start home Bible study groups with their lost neighbors? Before long, those groups would be churches because many of those lost people would become believers. And they could become a church that sends out others to start churches, that sends out others to start churches, and so on.

Hebrews 10:24 says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." One does not become a disciple by reading a book on discipleship, but by receiving encouragement from other believers and by obeying Jesus--the Master. And the Master said go and make disciples, so that's what we must busy ourselves with as we worship His greatness!

Delighting in God

A great scholar and pastor of the 1700s wrote, "God is the highest good of the reasonable creature; and the enjoyment of Him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. . . . Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance."¹⁴³

Another pastor and scholar, John Piper, loves to preach on the glory of God. According to him, believers can only know real satisfaction when they delight themselves wholeheartedly in God, as a thirsty jogger might lap up the cool waters of a bubbling mountain spring. Piper fondly says that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.¹⁴⁴ The famous pastor popularized the idea of Christian hedonism in his book *Desiring God*. Rightfully, he points out that believers can only discover why God created them when they enjoy Him, because God created humans to enjoy Him.

Several years ago, Piper wrote a few lines that remain noteworthy for us to ponder here:

*Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.*¹⁴⁵

These words explode with brilliance when you realize John Piper's deep commitment to missions. Christ is our focus, not missions, evangelism, church-planting, or disciple-making. While these are important issues, worship is more basic. We do

¹⁴³ Edwards, Jonathan, "The Christian Pilgrim," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sereno Dwight (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 reprint [1834]), 2:244.

¹⁴⁴ See *Future Grace*, 7, 386-87 for a few places to start.

¹⁴⁵ *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.

missions, evangelism, and discipleship for the fame and glory of Christ. If we delight in God, then our hearts will overflow in obedience for these three things.

So now, I encourage you, delight yourself in God, and let that joy overflow into a life of obedience. ". . . God is supreme not where He is simply served with duty, but where He is savored with delight."¹⁴⁶

Summary

Since all people will be held accountable for the way they live, believers should love others. One way believers can express their love to other people is through proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers and discipling believers. Scripture instructs all believers to share their faith and make disciples. We share best with others when our hearts delight in God.

Assignments

1. Memorize Matthew 9:37-38, "Then He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.'"
2. Look up Acts 1:8 to see what Jesus told His followers about multiplying.
3. List the names of at least three people with whom you will share Christ with before next week: _____, _____, _____.
4. As I am maturing in my Christian faith and gaining a better grasp of biblical doctrine, I promise that I, _____, will seek out someone of the same sex and will help him or her grow spiritually.

Discussion Questions

1. How will people know that you follow Christ? (Hint: a word beginning with the letter "L".)
2. What is the biblical criterion for being disciples of Christ?
3. How can you best demonstrate your love to someone else?
4. Should all believers help other believers grow spiritually?

¹⁴⁶ *Future Grace*, 399.

Answers to Chapter 11 Discussion Questions

1. How will people know that you follow Christ? *There may be several facets to this answer, but love for other believers is certainly a key part of the answer.*

2. What is the biblical criterion for being disciples of Christ? *Again, there may be more than one short answer to this question, but at the heart of it, something must be said about salvation and obedience. Being a disciple means you have actually trusted Christ to save you, and you are obeying Him now. You have committed to take up your cross, to deny yourself, and to follow Him (Luke 9:1-62).*

3. How can you best demonstrate your love to someone else? *Once again, there are several components to this answer. But, you can serve others when they are in need. And, you can share with non-Christians what Christ has done in your life.*

4. Should all believers help other believers grow spiritually? *Yes. All believers need to be making other disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).*

BLESSINGS AND PRAYERS
From the New Testament

1 Corinthians 16:23-24

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

2 Corinthians 13:11, 14

Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Ephesians 1:18-20

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the Heavenly realms

Ephesians 2:16-19

. . . and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

Ephesians 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.

Philippians 1:9-11

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure 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.

Colossians 1:9-12

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, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and

built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 24-25

To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy--to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

BOOK SUMMARY

As Christians apply spiritual truths to the lives of new believers, through God's help, these new believers can live these truths and walk in fellowship with God. Scripture serves as nourishment for all believers and is God's key source for communicating with His people.

Prayer functions as the main vein through which believers communicate with God. Humanity can communicate and fellowship with God if they have trusted Christ to forgive their sins.

Fellowshipping with God (the Father, Son, and Spirit) is amazing, considering that He created and sustains all things. He is unlike any other person or thing. Since God the Son returned to Heaven, God the Spirit manifests Himself to all believers through His presence in believers.

Because the Spirit dwells in believers, Christians can be unified through the local church, and, furthermore, carry out God's wishes. However, despite the Spirit's comforting and unifying ministry, Satan still assaults believers with temptation and difficulty.

Regardless of Satan's attacks, believers can live responsibly and convey Christ's love. All areas of a believer's life can effectively demonstrate submission to the Lord. Believers must live responsible and effective lives because they will stand before Christ to account for the way they lived.

Since God will hold believers accountable, they should communicate the gospel (good news) to unbelievers and instruct less mature believers with God's Word. Hopefully, believers will share their faith and teach out of a heart delighting in Christ.

APPENDIX THE OLD TESTAMENT AND SALVATION

The Law and Salvation

How were people saved in the Old Testament? People of the Old Testament entered into a relationship with God the same way you did (i.e., by grace through faith).¹⁴⁷ Historically speaking, the crucifixion had not yet occurred during Old Testament times. They lived in a "pre-cross" time, and you live in a "post-cross" time.

While they did not yet know Jesus would come, they did trust God to forgive their sin (Romans 4:1-8). "The Old Testament presents the law as a means of regulating the covenant relationship that had already been established through God's grace."¹⁴⁸ But, the people of Israel often wrongly thought that obeying the law without faith would save them (Romans 9:32).

The New Testament offers insight concerning the Old Testament concept of the law. Much debate exists over what New Testament writers meant when they used the word "law."¹⁴⁹ "Law" can refer to the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy). "Law" sometimes refers to the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 (also see Romans 2:14 and 7:47). At other times, "law" and "prophets" refer to the entire Old Testament (Matthew 5:17).

In general, the word "law" refers to specific rules God gave His people. The law consisted of principles for how people should worship God. The law gave knowledge of sin and eventually pointed people to their need for the Savior (Romans 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; Galatians 3:24). The law's righteousness demonstrated humanity's inability to obey God (Galatians 2:19).

Besides Jesus, no one ever completely obeyed the law (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 7:19). If a person breaks one law, he is guilty of breaking them all (James 2:10). Furthermore, no one can ever be righteous by obeying the law (Acts 13:39; Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:11).

The law should not be viewed as a bad device since God gave it as a positive entity (Romans 7:12). However, since Christ fulfilled the law, God does not require Christians to keep it (Matthew 5:17; Romans 6:14; 7:47; 10:4).

Does this mean that believers can live completely lawless and unrestrained lives? No! The New Testament contains commandments Christians need to obey. The law of

¹⁴⁷ See Romans 4:1-29. Obeying the laws of the Old Testament and offering sacrifices were only temporary expressions of how people were supposed to relate to God. The permanent way to relate to God would be revealed through the new covenant (i.e., Jesus).

¹⁴⁸ Douglas Moo, *Romans 1-8*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Clarke, 1983), 175.

¹⁴⁹ See F.F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: IVP, 1987 reprint), 50-56.

grace doesn't rule out God's law. In Mark 12:29-31, Jesus summed up the law by saying that if believers love God and others, they will not violate God's principles (also see Romans 3:31; 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). In other words, you now live under a new law--the law of grace in which the Spirit will not leave you, and will continually direct you (Galatians 5:18). Put another way, the ultimate consequence of the law required you to eternally suffer the penalty for your sin (Romans 8:2-4). However, Christ suffered the penalty for your sin. Through His death and resurrection, Christ, with love and obedience, fulfilled the law and destroyed the curse of the law--separation from God for all who disobeyed the law (Galatians 3:10-13).

Animal Sacrifices and Salvation

The Bible explains in Hebrews 10:1-18, especially verses 4 and 11, that animal sacrifices could not take away sin. Priests offered sacrifices, for themselves and others, as a way of expressing faith and obedience. Even though the Israelites unfortunately came to view the law and sacrifices as their way of obtaining God's favor, it never forgave sin.

The sacrifices, as explained in Leviticus, demonstrated what Christ would one day accomplish on the cross (Isaiah 53:10; Hebrews 9:22). Christ died as the final sacrifice for sin.¹⁵⁰ Believers, therefore, no longer need to sacrifice animals to the Lord.

God wants true obedience (1 Samuel 15:22). True sacrifice is a broken and repentant attitude (Psalm 51:17).

Circumcision and Salvation

Circumcision outwardly expressed God's covenant with Israel (Genesis 17:2, 10), allowing the men to physically demonstrate their submission to God. It possessed no saving ability (Romans 2:25-29; 4; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:2, 3). Also, notice the figurative use of circumcision in Deuteronomy 10:6; 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4, and Colossians 2:11-13.

¹⁵⁰ John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 10:10, 12; 1 John 1:7.

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