

Overcoming Evil in Prison

How to Be a Light in a Dark Place

Dr. Steven R. Cook

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Overcoming Evil in Prison

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Second Edition

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to those Christians in jail or prison who are serving the Lord Jesus Christ in their environment and proving to be a light in a dark place.

Preface

I trusted Christ for salvation when I was a young boy, but after years away from the church, I began to live like the world around me, and seven years of heavy drug use eventuated in my living on the streets of Las Vegas, Nevada. I was homeless for a short time and then stayed at a Salvation Army homeless shelter for a few weeks. The summer of 1988 was a rough period in my life. After running from my probation officer for several months, I decided to turn myself in and face my drug charges. As a Christian, I decided to take responsibility for my life and accept whatever punishment I deserved, and I certainly deserved more than I got.

I'd been in the County Jail several times before; however, rather than try to manipulate my release by calling family and friends like I'd done in the past, I decided to put my trust in God alone and live by faith in Him. I wanted God and His will for my life more than I wanted my freedom. I made phone calls and wrote letters, but was very careful not to slip into my old practice of trying to manipulate others to gain my liberty. Old habits die hard, but I knew if I was going to make it as a Christian, I had to start living like one, which meant living by faith in God's Word. Obedience to Scripture was necessary, though it was not always easy. My resolve to live as a Christian was soon tested.

While in jail, I knew the possibility of going to prison was real, and I prayed to the Lord to spare me that trip. But unlike the times before, I decided that if I did go to

prison that I would accept it as the Lord's will for my life and I would thank Him for His love and would strive to serve Him in whatever environment I found myself. On February 9, 1989, my probation was revoked and I was sentenced to two years in prison. I went back to my cell and got on my knees and thanked God for His will in my life. Thanking God that morning was difficult, but it was the biblical thing to do (1 Th 5:18). I served my prison term as an active Christian. I read my Bible daily, shared the gospel many times, prayed often, and encouraged other Christians in their spiritual walk whenever I had an opportunity to do so. Other Christians in prison faced longer and harder sentences than I, but we all knew and served the same Lord. Like other Christians, I faced pressure to conform to the evil that surrounded me, but the Lord's grace sustained me and I was able to advance spiritually and be a light in a dark place.

Four months after my release from prison I started serving in jail ministry and continued for over twelve years. I loved teaching Bible classes several times a week and sharing the gospel with inmates who would listen. I also started college and was able to complete a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services and then went to graduate school where I earned a Master of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. In 2017, I completed a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Tyndale Theological Seminary. On February 10, 2005, I was awarded a full pardon by the Governor of Nevada for the crime that sent me to prison and one year later had my records sealed. This too was the grace of God in my life.

Now I find myself in a place of simple ministry, teaching God's Word in home Bible studies on a weekly

basis. I even find time to write. I still face the pressures of evil around me, and God who sustained me in prison continues to sustain me as I live by faith in Him. God's grace has become central to my life; for it was by grace that I was saved, and it is by grace that I live every moment in this world.

Introduction

For the average inmate, prison is a place where his volition is restrained mainly because he failed to adjust and live by the judicial laws that govern American society. There's even a special place in prison known as solitary confinement for those inmates who refuse to adjust and live by the rules that govern the prison. Groups of inmates create their own laws and expect other inmates to live by them and failure to understand those laws can cause serious problems for someone trying to fit in. Everyone lives by laws, but not all laws are equal, and not all laws are good. The laws created by inmates are also policed and judged by them; but such laws are usually self-serving and spring from sinful motives which demean others and never glorify God.

A lot of evil things happen in prison, but prison is not an evil place. Prison is no better or worse than the people who make up its population. Evil refers to the attitudes and actions of people who conform to Satan's value system. Prisons are usually full of people given over to unrestrained evil motives. Though a government cannot change a person's attitude, it can restrain his behavior by imprisoning him. A prison, properly used by a government, prevents a criminal from 1) causing harm to law abiding citizens and, 2) disrupting the basic harmony necessary to a well-functioning society. Bad choices in society can result in the loss freedom. Bad choices in prison (to conform to evil) only perpetuate the loss of freedom and make the environment a difficult place to live.

A prison, like any social environment, is no better or worse than those people who live in it. People create society, and prison is a micro-society made up of persons

who contribute either to its beauty or ugliness. A prison could reflect the highest and best in human behavior, if the people living in the prison are Christians committed to serving God and each other with an attitude of humility and love. Sadly, the majority of those living in prison reflect the lowest and worst in humanity because they are governed by their sin nature and their thinking is rooted in worldliness and selfishness. The Christian who lives in prison feels the pressure of evil all around him by those who want him to conform to their values. The Christian is not alone, as God and the light of His Word penetrate even the darkest places of this world. There is no place the Christian can go to escape His presence and power (Psa 139). This book is written to the Christian who is living in prison. It is written to the Christian who wants to walk with God and not conform to the pressures of his environment. The challenges of the Christian living in prison can be daunting, but God always equips His child with the necessary resources to know and walk in the light of His truth. God's truth has the greatest impact when we realize the Lord desires holiness more than happiness, and that He is working to develop our Christian character more than satisfying our creaturely comforts. What is amazing is that the divine principles that make for spiritual success in prison also make for success in the free world. God's truth is applicable in all situations. In fact, much of what I learned from God's Word in prison continues to guide and sustain me in everything. This book is designed to educate and encourage Christians to be a light in a dark place.

Getting Right with God

The Bible teaches that God is holy, which means He is absolutely righteous in essence¹ and action. The word *holy* (Hebrew *qadosh* and Greek *hagios*) means *sacred* from all that is sinful or *set apart* from all that is common (Lev 11:44-45; Josh 24:19; Psa 99:9; Isa 6:3; John 17:11; 1 Pet 1:14-16; Rev 15:4). Scripture declares “that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), and “*Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness *with favor*” (Hab. 1:13). Sin is that which does not conform to the holy character of God. However, being holy is not merely the absence of sin or defilement, but also the presence of that which is righteous and good. God is positively righteous in essence and action and this completely sets Him apart from all that is sinful. “Holiness is one of the most important, if not the most important, attributes of God, and certainly nothing that God does can be done apart from being in complete harmony with His holy nature.”²

God’s holiness means His complete “apartness” from anything that is sinful. He is *different* from that which is common; He is *separate* from that which is defiling. But God’s holiness isn’t a static

¹ The essence of God refers to the sum of all His qualities, the complete makeup of His character. God is holy in every aspect of His being, and all that God does is consistent with His holiness.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 19.

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thing, like a block of pure ice. His holiness is active and alive, a “sea of glass mingled with fire” (Rev 15:2). Everything about God is holy: His wisdom, His power, His judgments, and even His love. If His love were not a holy love, He would never have sent His only Son to die for the sins of the world and meet the just demands of His own nature and His own holy law.³

Too often people come to God as though He were a big fluffy teddy bear waiting to be squeezed, or a kindly old man who poses no threat to anyone. God never portrays Himself this way in Scripture, as though He were soft and easy. Men who see God’s holiness stand in awe of Him and have respect for His greatness. More so, because God is holy He must stay separate from sinners, and those who encounter God’s holiness are afraid for their lives. Moses was not allowed to approach the Lord when he met Him at the burning bush; rather, the Lord said “do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5). Later, when God revealed Himself to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, “the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking” (Ex 20:18a). Rather than run to God as One to be embraced as a cuddly friend, “they trembled and stood at a distance” (Ex 20:18b). The prophet Isaiah once encountered God in His holiness and the event disturbed Him greatly.

³ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Books, 2001), 306.

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In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. (Isa 6:1-4)

After seeing the holiness of God, Isaiah declared "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:5). Isaiah thought he was about to die, because He knew he was a sinner standing in the presence of the absolute holy and righteous God. When the Apostle John saw the risen Jesus Christ in His glory and majesty he "fell at His feet like a dead man" (Rev 1:17). To know God properly is to know that He is holy. To know the holiness of God is to have respect and reverence for Him, for "who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy" (Rev 15:4).

It is only in the light of God's holiness that men realize they are not in right relationship with Him. "As it is written 'there is none righteous, not even one' ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:10, 23). By God's estimation all men are fallen in sin. Being fallen in sin does not mean that men are as sinful as they can be, or that they engage in every form of sinful behavior, but

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that sin permeates and contaminates every aspect of their being. Men are sinners at the very core of their being, and this leads them to be sinners in their thoughts and actions. Men are sinners in three ways:

1. By imputation of Adam's sin (Rom 5:12-14).
2. By nature (Psa 51:5; Rom 7:19-21; Eph 2:3).
3. By choice (1 Kings 8:46; Rom 3:9-18).

Biblically, there is both a moral and immoral side to sin. When most people hear the word *sin*, they think of immoral acts (murder, rape, lying, stealing, etc.). However, there is a moral side to sin that often takes a religious form in which men seek to establish a self-righteous code of ethics, thinking God will accept them and other people will hold them in high regard (Matt 23:1-8). Jesus dealt with such people in His day (Pharisees and Sadducees), and it was this group of sinners that crucified Him because He jeopardized their place of importance in society by exposing their hypocrisy and threatening their place of religious power (Matt 23:13-36; John 11:47-48).

Moral sinners often create religions in an effort to adjust themselves to God. They think that if they follow the right set of rules or live by a certain set of ethics that God will smile on them and accept them into heaven. However, our best efforts are sinful when they bypass or seek to modify God's solution of the cross.

For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities,
like the wind, take us away. (Isa 64:6)

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For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God; for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Rom 10:3-4)

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor 1:18)

Arrogant men bring their good works to God and expect Him to fling open the gates of heaven and welcome them. Hell will be full of religious people. There is no system of law or good works men can follow to save themselves; for "if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law" (Gal 3:21). Jesus' death on the cross is the only act that satisfies God's righteous demands toward our sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). There is no salvation without the cross of Christ. May we all say with the Apostle Paul, "may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14).

As stated previously, we are sinners *by imputation of Adam's sin* (Rom 5:12-14), *by nature* (Psa 51:5; Rom 7:19-21; Eph 2:1-3), and *by choice* (1 Kings 8:46; Rom 3:9-18). We are sinners in Adam because he represented the whole human race, and when he sinned, we all sinned with him (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21-22). When Adam sinned, his nature was changed, and that sinful nature was passed on to all his children. Our *sin nature* is that indispensable part of our being that draws us toward things that are sinful and is perpetually hostile to God and His will (Gal 5:17). The *sin nature* is indispensable in that it is part of who we

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are from birth and it will not be removed from us until death. *We are sinners by choice* when we manufacture sin from the source of our volition and say “yes” to temptation. We can be tempted internally from the source of our sin nature, or externally from the world. Temptation is not sin, but is the opportunity to sin. Jesus was “tempted in all things as *we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15; cf. Matt 4:1-11). Lastly, *we are sinners in Adam*, because we are identified with him when he died spiritually in the Garden of Eden.

When it comes to our being condemned before God, it was the one sin that Adam committed in the Garden of Eden that is the greatest sin of all! Adam was created perfect and without sin, yet willfully committed rebellion against God when he ate the forbidden fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:16-17). Adam knowingly “took from its fruit and ate” and brought spiritual and physical death to himself as well as to all his descendants who were born after him (Gen 3:6). Scripture tells us:

When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of *a son* in his own [sinful]⁴ likeness, according to his [fallen] image, and named him Seth. (Genesis 5:3)

Adam’s sons were sinners. Cain and Abel both had to bring sacrifices to God to satisfy His holiness, and this

⁴ All bracketed words or comments found in NASB quotations are mine and are added for clarification of the biblical text.

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was because they were sinners in need of atonement.⁵ After the fall of Adam the human race grew in great numbers, but “the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Sinful men give birth to sinful men, and this goes all the way back to Adam, the first man. The Apostle Paul points out that all men are sinners in Adam when he writes:

Therefore, just as through one man [the first man, Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death [spiritual and physical] spread to all men, because all sinned [when Adam sinned]. (Rom 5:12)

For since by a man [Adam] came death, by a man [Jesus] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all [who believe in Him] will be made alive. (1 Cor 15:21-22)

According to the Apostle Paul, all humanity died spiritually and is subject to physical death because of the one sin of Adam. Even newborn babies die physically, though not because of any sin they personally commit since they are too young to produce sin of their own.⁶ Babies die

⁵ The word atonement means *to cover* (Heb *kaphar*) and has the idea of covering over that which offends. The purpose of atonement is to remove the offense and be reconciled to the offended party (i.e. God).

⁶ Babies who die before the age of God consciousness automatically go to heaven since they are too young to understand God’s grace-provision of salvation

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because of the sin Adam, and this is what Paul means when he writes “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men” (Rom 5:12).

Because Adam had the sentence of death imposed as an actual operational feature of his biological life, his descendants also have inherited a life principle which involves a built-in death principle. The moment a child is conceived he begins to die, and eventually the death principle wins out over the life principle and he does die. As the tendency toward death is inherited by all men, so also is the tendency toward sin. No descendant of Adam has ever lived to an age of conscious awareness of right and wrong without actually *choosing* wrong. He has become a deliberate sinner because he has inherited a sinful nature, which leads him to sin in practice. Thus, “death passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned.*” Each person continues under the divine judgment of death, not only because of Adam’s sin, but because of his own deliberate sin.⁷

Condemnation *in Adam* is sometimes a challenge for people to accept because they often say “it’s not fair.” Why should they be condemned because of another man’s

through the cross of Christ. The book *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* by Dr. Robert Lightner is an excellent resource that best explains baby-theology.

⁷ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 113.

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actions? Really, one could argue on the same grounds that God was unfair to send His innocent Son to die on the cross and bear the wrath that rightfully belongs to sinners. Biblically, God cannot be accused of unfairness because He has provided a way for men to be saved through the substitutionary atoning death of Christ. Adam freely sinned and brought death upon the human race, and Christ freely went to the cross and obeyed the will of His father and provided salvation for all who will trust Him as Savior. Death comes automatically to all who are born in Adam, and life comes to those who by faith trust in Christ as their Savior.

In his letter to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul painted a very dark picture about their life prior to salvation in Christ. Paul was forthright in his choice of words and never sought to soften the truth, especially when it came to the subject of sin. Paul stated:

And you [Christians at Ephesus] were [before salvation] dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course [patterned values] of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience [rebellious unbelievers]. Among them we too all formerly lived [before being saved] in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath [enemies of God], even as the rest [of humanity]. (Eph 2:1-3)

When men are without Christ, they are physically alive but spiritually dead. Being spiritually dead means no

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spiritual life! It means no capacity for understanding or appreciating things that God has revealed about Himself in Scripture. More so, on the negative side, it means the unbeliever has a natural affinity for things satanic and that he is drawn to the manmade institutions of this world which are in many ways hostile to God.

In the Bible, *death* basically means “separation,” not only physically, as the spirit separated from the body (James 2:26), but also spiritually, as the spirit separated from God (Isa 59:2). The unbeliever is not sick; he is dead! He does not need resuscitation; he needs resurrection. All lost sinners are dead, and the only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay. The lost derelict on skid row may be more decayed outwardly than the unsaved society leader, but both are dead in sin—and one corpse cannot be more dead than another! This means that our world is one vast graveyard, filled with people who are dead while they live (1 Tim 5:6).⁸

God is holy, and men are sinners who cannot save themselves. The biblical teaching is that helpless sinners must be rescued from their helpless situation. God must come to them with His gospel and “open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). Such grace on behalf of God is a display of His wonderful mercy toward them. Paul, who wrote about the terrible condition of the

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2, 17-18.

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Christians at Ephesus prior to their being born again, also described their salvation as an act of God's mercy.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were [spiritually] dead in our transgressions, made us [spiritually] alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

Here is God's grace in action! Prior to salvation, the Christians at Ephesus had been living in the trash heap of sin, wallowing in a state of spiritual death and headed toward the trash heap of eternity known as the Lake of Fire. Yet God, "being rich in mercy, because of His great love" reached down into their trash heap lives and gave them spiritual life at the moment they trusted Christ as their Savior and raised them up and seated them "with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6).

Over against the dark picture of human ruin presented in Ephesians 2:1-3, the Apostle now proceeds...to set forth the only existing hope for man, namely, the fact that God is "rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins." With full recognition of the depths to which man has fallen, it is nevertheless declared that there is abundant salvation for all who *believe*: a salvation which so far exceeds the ruin that it not only reverses all that man lost by the fall, but it lifts him up far above his original unfallen

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state to the highest conceivable position in heaven, there to share forever the fellowship and the glory of the Triune God.⁹

God took these people from a place of darkness and brought them into a place of light. He took them from death to life and raised them to the very heights of heaven so that their new life would forever be identified with Christ where He is, now seated at the right hand of the Father. We share that same life and position in Christ at the moment we trust Jesus as our Savior. At the moment of salvation we can say with the Apostle Paul that God “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). What’s amazing is that God revealed His love toward us while we were sinners and living in rebellion to Him.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath *of God* through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom 5:6-10)

⁹ Lewis S. Chafer, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI., Kregel Publications, 1991), 63.

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God revealed His love toward us while we were *helpless, ungodly, sinners*, and *enemies* who were hostile to Him. The Bible never paints a flattering picture of men, but rather casts them in an honest light and portrays them as helpless sinners in need of God's grace. Men do nothing to save themselves, whereas God does everything, and God alone gets the glory. That's the way it should be!

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh [before being saved], He [God the Father] made you alive together with Him [Jesus], having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Col 2:13-14).

The gospel is the solution to the problem of sin. It is the good news "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). A person is saved when He accepts this good news and trusts Christ as his Savior. Salvation is a free gift to sinners who do not deserve it. It is free to the sinner, though it cost God the death of His dear Son who died on the cross in the sinner's place. Peter tells us that Jesus died for our sins, "*the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). If a sinner got what he deserved, he'd burn forever in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15). God, by His wonderful grace, treats us better than we deserve.

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

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as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:8-9)

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

Good works never save. It is the work of Christ alone that provides salvation to sinners. It's not a matter of giving men what they deserve, but treating them better than they deserve, which is what grace is all about. "For by grace you have been saved through faith" are perhaps the sweetest words a sinner can hear at the moment he turns to Christ as His Savior. We come with the empty hands of faith, not trusting in ourselves at all, but casting ourselves completely on the finished work of Christ who completely bore God's wrath in our place on the cross. Even a mute quadriplegic who cannot speak or ever perform one kind deed can forever be saved if he trusts in Christ for salvation.

Throughout his entire life, the Christian is to continue in the truth that he is saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Good works are the expected fruit of the saved life, but they are never the condition of it. Men are saved to perform good deeds, but good deeds never save anyone, nor do they keep men saved. Paul made this very clear when he wrote to Christians at Philippi:

But whatever things were gain to me [good works according to the Mosaic Law], those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the

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surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish [Grk. *skubalon* – lit. fecal matter] so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the [imputed gift of] righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. (Phil 3:7-9)

Men are saved and declared righteous before God at the moment they place their faith in Jesus Christ as their savior. At the moment of faith in Christ, God gives them His righteousness as a gift (see Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Philip. 3:9). This gifting of divine righteousness is called *imputation*. The sinner is declared righteous at the moment he trusts Christ for salvation and is forever justified in God's sight.

Justification is a divine act whereby an infinitely Holy God judicially declares a believing sinner to be righteous and acceptable before Him because Christ has borne the sinner's sin on the cross and has become "to us...righteousness" (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 3:24). Justification springs from the fountain of God's grace (Titus 3:4-5). It is operative as the result of the redemptive and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, who has settled all the claims of the law (Rom 3:24-25; 5:9). Justification is on the basis of faith and not by human merit or works (3:28-30; 4:5; Gal 2:16). In this marvelous operation of God the infinitely holy Judge judicially declares

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righteous the one who believes in Jesus (Rom 8:31-34).¹⁰

Like the Apostle Paul, every Christian should desire to “be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the [imputed gift of] righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:9). Once we trust in Christ for salvation, we are at that very moment made right with God, and can begin the process of developing our spiritual life wherever we are. By this God is glorified.

After we come into a right relationship with God by trusting in Christ as our Savior, we can then “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). God sits both on a throne of judgment as well as a throne of grace. How we respond to God’s free-grace offer of eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ determines which throne we will stand before. God poured out His wrath on Jesus when He died on the cross as a substitute for sinners (Rom 5:6-10; 1 Cor 15:3-4). Jesus died a death He did not deserve and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to sinners. Scripture states “Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). Having satisfied every requirement of God’s holy demands toward sin, God is free to treat the worst sinner in grace and offer eternal life to those who accept salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

¹⁰ Merrill F. Unger, “Justification” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 729.

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For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Getting Right with God

Submitting to God

Submit [Grk. *hupotasso*] therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (Jam 4:7)

Submitting to God is the calling of every believer. The basic biblical idea of the Greek word *hupotasso* means *to subordinate oneself to another, to subject oneself, to obey*. It means we surrender our will to accomplish the will of a superior. In the case of the Christian, it means we first surrender ourselves to God and then to those persons whom He puts in charge over us for our wellbeing. Biblical examples of submission include:

1. Jesus submitting to God the Father (1 Cor 15:27-28).
2. Angels submitting to God (1 Pet 3:22).
3. The church submitting to Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22).
4. Jesus submitting to His human parents (Luke 2:51).
5. Believers submitting to their pastors (1 Pet 5:5; Heb 13:17).
6. The wife submitting to her husband—as the loving spiritual leader (Eph 5:22, 24; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5-6).
7. Christians submitting to God (Heb 12:9; Jam 4:7).
8. Christians submitting to human governmental authorities (Rom 13:1; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14).

In this chapter I will focus on the last two points (7 & 8) pertaining to the Christian obligation to submit to God as well as to human governmental authorities. Let me say up front that submission to God is always absolute, as God

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reserves the right to command complete obedience without exception. However, the Christian must be mindful when submitting to human authorities, as there may be times to reject human authority for the sake of obeying God (I will address this later in this chapter). It will prove helpful at this point to provide a brief presentation on the person and character of God.

The Bible teaches there is one God who exists as three distinct Persons within the Trinity (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2): **God the Father** (Gal 1:1; Eph 6:23; Phil 2:11), **God the Son** (John 1:1, 14:18; 8:58; 20:28; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8), and **God the Holy Spirit** (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 2:11-12; 2 Cor 13:14). All three are co-equal, co-infinite, co-eternal, and worthy of all praise and service. The three Persons of the God-head are one in essence (Deut 6:4; Isa 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 18). The Bible reveals God is **sovereign** (1 Ch 29:11; Dan 4:35; Acts 17:24-25), **righteous** (Psa 11:7; 119:137), **just** (Psa 9:7-8; 19:9; 50:6; 58:11), **holy** (Psa 99:9), **all-knowing** (Psa 139:1-6; Matt 6:31-33), **all-present** (Psa 139:7-12; Heb 13:5), **all-powerful** (Job 42:2; Isa 40:28-29), **immutable** (Psa 102:26, 27; Mal 3:6), **truthful** (2 Sam 7:28; John 17:17; 1 John 5:20), **loving** (Jer 31:3; 1 John 4:7-12, 16), **faithful** (Deut 7:9; Lam. 3:23; 1 John 1:9), **merciful** (Psa 86:15; Luke 6:36; Tit 3:5), **gracious** (Psa 111:4; 116:5; 1 Pet 5:10), and **eternal** (Deut 33:27; 1 Tim 1:17).¹

¹ Pages 25-30 of this chapter are extracts from my book, *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015). The extracts have been slightly modified to fit the material addressed here.

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At the pinnacle of God's attributes is His sovereignty. This means that God is free to act in whatever way pleases Him (Psa 115:3; 135:6; Dan 4:35). He is infinitely good, and all good things were created by Him, for Him, and to His glory. From Genesis to Revelation, God governs the lives of people and nations. People exist because God gives them life. David writes, "Know that the LORD Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves" (Psa 100:3). He determines the duration of each person's life, having final control over the day and cause of a person's death. It is written, "in Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them" (Psa 139:16). And Hannah, in her stately prayer says, "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:6). People live and die as God decides, "for in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28). God controls when and where people will live in history, for "He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Even the great rulers of this world exist because of His plan, for "It is He who changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding" (Dan 2:21). God has power over wealth and poverty, for "The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts" (1 Sam 2:7). The Lord is supreme over all His creation, "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps" (Psa 135:6). There is no one who can understand all His ways, or stop what He has set in motion. "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and

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among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35). God allows fallen angels and humans to produce sin and evil, but they never act beyond or against His sovereign will (Job 1:1-21; Psa 105:12-15; 1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Cor 12:7-10). God’s sovereignty over all creation is a prevailing theme throughout all of Scripture. God has many attributes, but His sovereignty is foremost, and the humble boast that they know Him (Jer 9:23-24).

Because God is sovereign, it means that He providentially controls all creation. God’s *providence* refers to His wise and personal acts, whereby He creates and controls circumstances in order to direct history according to His predetermined plan, all for His glory and the benefit of His elect. People live in the flow of history and are moved by the circumstances God controls. The Lord “does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35). God is good and “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11; cf. Psa 103:19; 135:6; Dan 4:35), and “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose” (Rom 8:28). By His sovereign will God created all things in heaven and earth, and sustains and directs them as He desires. God “is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col 1:17). The Lord knows all things at all times. He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt 10:29), and the ever-changing number of hairs on our head (Matt 10:30). He knows our thoughts before we think them (Psa 139:2), and our words before we speak them (Psa 139:4). He knows our wickedness (Jer 17:9; Mark 7:21-22), and chooses to love us by grace, in spite of our sinfulness

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(Matt 5:45; Rom 5:6-10; Eph 2:1-9). Some He elects to purpose, even from the womb (Jer 1:5; Gal 1:15). Because God is righteous, all His actions are just. Because He is loving and good, He directs all things for the benefit of His elect. The wicked are also under God's sovereign control, and He uses them for His own ends (Prov 16:4). "To be sure, evil has entered the universe, but it is not allowed to thwart God's original, benevolent, wise, and holy purpose."²

Providence is normally defined in Christian theology as the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill (Psa 145:9 *cf.* Mt. 5:45–48), he upholds his creatures in ordered existence (Acts 17:28; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3), guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men (*cf.* Psa 107; Jb. 1:12; 2:6; Gn. 45:5–8), and directs everything to its appointed goal, for his own glory (*cf.* Eph 1:9–12). This view of God's relation to the world must be distinguished from: (a) *pantheism*, which absorbs the world into God; (b) *deism*, which cuts it off from him; (c) *dualism*, which divides control of it between God and another power; (d) *indeterminism*, which holds that it is under no control at all; (e) *determinism*, which posits a control of a kind that destroys man's moral responsibility; (f) the doctrine of *chance*, which denies the controlling power to be

² Henry Clarence Thiessen and Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 122.

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rational; and (g) the doctrine of *fate*, which denies it to be benevolent.³

God's providence is seen throughout the Bible. God brought Joseph to Egypt, by the evil actions of his brothers (Gen 37:23-28), and later used Joseph to deliver the very ones who betrayed him (Gen 45:5-8; 47:11, 27-28; 50:20). This was done to fulfill a promise given to Abraham (Gen 15:13; 47:11, 27-28). It was God's providence that drove Saul to chase after his father's donkeys, and then be led to the prophet Samuel and anointed king of Israel (1 Sam 9-10). It was God's providence that directed Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, so the baby Jesus would be born at the appointed time and place (Mic 5:2; Luke 2:4-6; Gal 4:4). Later, Joseph and Mary were compelled to go to Egypt, in order to preserve the baby Savior (Matt 2:13-15). It was God's providence that forced Aquila and Priscilla out of Rome by the emperor Claudius' decree, only to meet the apostle Paul in Corinth and join him in Christian ministry (Acts 18:1-3; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19). It was God's providence that put the Lord Jesus on the cross to be crucified by the hands of godless men (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Jesus died a substitutionary death, even for those who crucified Him (Rom 3:25; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

God's sovereignty, expressed through His providential control, produces confidence in those who know He is directing all things after the counsel of His will.

³ J. I. Packer, "Providence" in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 979-80.

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The growing believer knows “it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Where the Bible is silent, the believer seeks to discern God’s will through His providential direction as He guides people and circumstances as He pleases. God controls all of life (Gen 2:17; Job. 1:21; Psa 104:29–30; Eccl 12:7; Dan 5:23), human birth and calling (Psa 139:13–16; Jer 1:4–5; Gal 1:15), nature (Psa 147:8; Jonah 1:4; Mark 4:39–41), plagues (Ex 7–11; 12:29; Rev 16:10–11), the roll of dice (Prov 16:33; cf. Psa 22:18; Matt 27:35), health and sickness (Deut 28:27–30; 2 Ch 21:18; Psa 41:3; Acts 3:16), prosperity and adversity (1 Sam 2:7; Job 2:10; Isa 45:5–7), suffering (Psa 119:71; Heb 12:5–11), and the development of Christian character (Rom 5:2–5; 2 Cor 12:7–10; Jam 1:2–4). The Christian is asked to submit to God, the infinite personal creator who works all things after the counsel of His own will. We submit to God knowing that He is in control of all things and that He has graciously included us in His plans.

However, by His sovereign authority, God may permit His children to disobey Him for a time and walk outside His will. James wrote to such Christians who were not living in complete submission to God and he told them “submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jam 4:7). At first glance, it might appear that James was telling them to do two separate things: 1) submit to God and, 2) resist the devil. Actually, the first command takes care of the second. By submitting to God the believer is resisting the devil, since he cannot submit both to God and the devil at the same time, nor can he resist both at the same time. Satan very much wants control of a person’s life, and to the degree a person says “no” to God, he is saying “yes” to the enemy. There is no middle ground upon

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which a person can stand; he is either under God's authority or under Satan's authority. Each Christian must choose for himself who he will follow at any given moment; and though no one can force him to choose who he will follow, there are consequences for the choices he makes. God always calls the Christian to be obedient both to know and live His Word and resist the temptations of the enemy. Satan pressures the Christian to conform to his worldly system—which, at its core, excludes God and elevates man—and the weak believer yields to Satan's temptations in order to alleviate the pressures that are weighing on him. The Apostle Peter knew what it meant to cave into worldly pressures. After he publicly denied the Lord three times, he “went out and wept bitterly” (Matt 26:75). There is no joy in the heart of the Christian who turns away from the Lord and yields himself to Satan's pressures.

Now we turn our attention to God's command that we submit ourselves to those human authorities He's delegated to rule over us for our care. To obey those human authorities means we shall enjoy protection and praise from the same. To disobey governmental authorities is a sin that carries the threat not only of human punishment but also divine punishment. According to Scripture, human governments are God's agents sent to do two things: 1) punish those who do evil and, 2) praise those who do right (1 Pet 2:14).

Every person is to be in subjection [*hupotasso*] to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are established by God...Therefore it is necessary to be

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in subjection [*hupotasso*], not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. (Rom 13:1, 5)

Remind them to be subject [*hupotasso*] to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed. (Tit 3:1)

Submit [*hupotasso*] yourselves for the Lord's sake to every institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right. (1 Pet 2:13-14)

The believer is commanded to be in submission to governmental authority, and this includes the officers in prison who have their authority from the government. It is interesting that Paul and Peter both wrote the above Scriptures to Christians (Rom 13:1, 5; Tit 3:1) who were suffering unjustly under the Roman government which was corrupt in many ways; yet, that government was still ordained by God to serve His purpose in keeping basic justice and order within society. Christians are to submit to legitimate governing authorities and show respect at all times (i.e. governmental rulers, police officers, military officers, parents, teachers, coaches, employers, etc.). However, when a human institution oversteps divinely delegated authority and commands the Christian to disobey God, then the Christian has the biblical right and the duty to say “no” to that human authority.

There are biblical examples of believers who have engaged in legitimate civil disobedience to human governments. In every case, when the believer said “no” to governmental authorities, it was because the believer was

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commanded by humans to do something that directly contradicted God's will. The believer had the greater responsibility of saying "yes" to God, which meant saying "no" to the government. Examples of legitimate civil disobedience include:

1. The mid-wives who disobeyed pharaoh's command to kill all the newborn male Hebrew children (Exodus 1-2).
2. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship a golden statue (Daniel 3).
3. Daniel who disobeyed the command to pray to the human king as god (Daniel 6).
4. Peter who disobeyed the command to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:27-29)

In each of the above acts of civil disobedience, believers were commanded by governmental authorities to do something that contradicted God's Word. Human laws that command disobedience to God (i.e. denying Christ) must be distinguished from laws that permit disobedience (i.e. abortion). **The rule for the believer is that he is to obey human authorities so long as those human authorities do not command something that contradicts God's Word.** When there is a conflict between human and divine law, the Christian must obey divine law.

Human authorities should be viewed as protectors and regulators of freedom. When any system of human authority breaks down, it fails to regulate the balance between law and freedom. Law and freedom are necessary for each other. Law without freedom is tyranny. Freedom without law is anarchy. Both law and freedom are

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complimentary and beneficial, but each without the other is destructive.

The government of the United States of America has its authority from God (Rom 13:1, 5). The House and Senate propose and vote to pass federal laws with the approval of the President. Individual states pass their own laws, and state police officers enforce many of those laws, arresting violators who will eventually come to a courthouse and stand before a judge. The court determines guilt or innocence and the judge passes judgment where the punishment is ideally equal to the crime. Minor crimes bring a minor punishment; however, if the crime is serious, the person who fractured the law can be sentenced to probation or prison for a determined period of time, after which he is released and then has the opportunity to conform to society and adhere to its basic laws and enjoy the blessing of freedom. If a person fails to adhere to the divinely delegated laws of the land, then by his own decision he forfeits his freedom and will eventually find himself back in jail or prison.

Most inmates in prison understand and have enforced this very legal system within their own home. As a parent, they would convene with the other parent to create laws which, if accepted, would regulate the order of the household. As a parent, they would create and pass laws like the government, and like a police officer would enforce those laws with their children, and as a judge would sometimes execute punishment upon their children, and as a jailer would sometimes make sure the children stay locked in their room until they were ready for release. The parent might even put them on probation and regulate their behavior until such a time as the parent thinks the child is

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mature and responsible enough to have their full freedom again. Many inmates wrongly despise legitimate authority, yet the irony is that they operate by many of the same rules as the government that put them in prison.

God Himself is the supreme lawgiver. He is repeatedly acknowledged in Scripture as a righteous Ruler and Judge (Psa 11:7; 19:9; 119:137). However, we must not think of God as a hateful tyrant who creates and enforces laws as a means of suppressing mankind. God has provided His laws to His children for their protection as well as their physical and spiritual wellbeing. God's laws reflect His love and care for others. Just as a loving parent provides laws for their children in order to protect them and teach them what is good and right, so God gives commands to those whom He loves in order that they may be blessed. When a believer understands that God's laws spring from His loving heart, they say with the Psalmist "the law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver *pieces*" (Psa 119:72), "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psa 119:97), and "How sweet are Your words to my taste! *Yes, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!" (Psa 119:103). God is righteous, and all His commands are righteous, holy, and good.

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise
the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the
LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. (Psa 19:7-8)

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God always punishes His children in love and always for the purpose of instilling humility and respect. Sometimes the love of God can comfort the suffering believer, and sometimes it is the love of God that brings the suffering! The Scripture declares “my son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb 12:5-6). Every child of God will challenge His authority at some time, and God provides loving discipline to correct him and steer him into the path of righteousness.

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Heb 12:7-11)

Whenever God deals with His children, He always deals in love. God is always aware of what His children are doing and He is always in complete control of the outcome.

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Since God is sovereign, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, it means there are no accidents in the life of a Christian. The Christian finds himself in prison basically for one of three reasons:

1. He violated the laws of man which are ordained by God and he is suffering for his crime and needs to learn respect for divinely appointed authority (Rom 13:1, 5; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14; 4:15).
2. He violated the laws of God (though he may be innocent before man) and is under divine discipline (Heb 12:4-11). In this case, jail or prison is God's instrument for disciplining the rebellious Christian.
3. He is innocent before both God and man (like Joseph, Job, Peter, Paul and Silas) and God is testing his faith and/or calling him to service for the spiritual benefit of others (Gen 39-41; Job 1:1-2:10; 5:17; Acts 5:40-42; 16:22-25; 1 Pet 3:17; 4:12-14, 19; Jam 1:2-4).

In the first two categories the Christian is rightly suffering because of his sin (Heb 12:4-11; 1 Pet 4:15); whereas, in the third category, he is suffering for living righteously (Gen 39-41; Acts 5:40-42; 16:22-25; 1 Pet 3:17; 4:12-14, 19). Even in category one or two, the Christian can find some joy in knowing that God is disciplining him because He loves him enough to give him what he needs. Once the Christian recognizes God's loving hand of discipline upon him, he can experience joy if he will submit to Him and stop rebelling against the authority of His Word. The Christian who is in category three usually displays an attitude of praise to God because he realizes God is in control of his situation and that he is suffering for

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righteousness sake (see Job 1:21; 2:10; 13:15; Acts 5:40-41; 16:22-25).

A good example of believers who suffered for righteousness and praised God afterward were Peter and the apostles, who were wrongly commanded by the Jewish authorities “not to continue teaching” in the name of Jesus, to which Peter replied, “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:28, 29). Here was a case of legitimate civil disobedience. After the Jewish authorities received some counsel from a Pharisee named Gamaliel, they agreed to whip the apostles and send them on their way hoping the punishment was severe enough to deter them from further preaching.

They took his [Gamaliel’s] advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and *then* released them. So they [Peter and the apostles] went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. (Acts 5:40-41)

Imagine that! Here the apostles get flogged with a whip and then walk away “rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name” (Acts 5:41). Now, every Christian who is in jail or prison can ask himself what his attitude was when he got there. Was he complaining because he got caught for his crime? Was he whining because he felt like he was getting a raw deal? Or was he praising God because he knew he was suffering for righteousness sake like the apostles? In twelve years of jail ministry I’ve never met anyone in category three.

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Another example of believers who suffered for righteousness sake and praised God afterward were the apostle Paul and his companion Silas, who had been preaching the gospel in the city of Philippi. As a result of some false charges brought against them, a conflict arose with some men of the city and Paul and Silas were treated very severely.

The crowd rose up together against them [Paul and Silas], and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order *them* to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. (Acts 16:22-24)

Paul and Silas were doing the will of God by sharing the gospel of Christ, and what did they get for their Christian service? They were attacked, publicly humiliated as their robes were torn off them, and then were beaten with rods and thrown into prison. Yet, after all this horrible unjust treatment, the Scripture tells us “about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God” (Acts 16:25a). It was their attitude of praise in the midst of their suffering for righteousness that led to the salvation of one of the prison guards. This was all by divine design, as God led Paul and Silas to prison in order to share the gospel with a prison guard who believed in Christ and is now in heaven.

All three categories of suffering previously listed consider the believer only. The Bible speaks to the unbeliever only in regard to God’s gift of salvation (Acts

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16:30-31). If an unbeliever finds himself in jail, it is often for the purpose of humbling him under the hand of God so that he might be saved by trusting in Christ (John 3:16).

Divine Discipline Leading to Death

Divine discipline in the life of the Christian is designed to produce humility and to bring the disobedient believer into conformity with God's will. However, if the believer refuses to submit to God's will, the Lord may discipline that Christian to the point of death and bring him home to heaven.

If anyone sees his [Christian] brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death. (1 John 5:16-17)

It happens from time to time that a Christian will see another Christian "committing a sin." The apostle John distinguished two kinds of sin in the life of the Christian: the "sin not *leading* to death" and the "sin *leading* to death" (1 John 5:16-17). The "sin not *leading* to death" is any sin the Christian commits that does not warrant death from the hand of God, though it may bring divine discipline if the believer continues in it. It was a terrible sin when Aaron led the Israelites into idol worship (Ex 32:1-6), but God did not call for Aaron's death. Samson slept with prostitutes (Judg. 16:1-4), and though he was disciplined, the Lord did not kill him. When David had an affair with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah, it was a rotten sin that brought divine discipline. The Lord told David, "I will raise

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up evil against you from your own household” (2 Sam 12:11); however, the Lord also told David, “you shall not die” (2 Sam 12:13). It was evil when Solomon worshipped idols (1 Kings 11:1-10), but even here the Lord did not pronounce death for his sin. Peter argued with Jesus and tried to prevent Him from going to the cross (Matt 16:21-22), and later publicly denied the Lord three times (Matt 26:34-35; 69-75), but Peter was allowed to live. The apostle John twice worshiped an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9), but the Lord let him live and used him in ministry. These men committed terrible sins, but their sins did not result in death. God’s grace and mercy is very prominent all throughout the Bible, and He repeatedly gives us ample opportunity to confess our sin and turn back to him. Thank God for His great grace.

The sin that leads to death “denotes a sin habitually practiced by a believer, leading to God’s removing him from this life, but not taking away his salvation.”¹ It refers to the Christian who has become so sinfully rebellious that God disciplines him to point of death and takes him home to heaven. There are references in the Bible where God personally issued the death penalty for one or more of His erring Children who had defied His authority and these examples can be found both in the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Lev 10:1-3; 2 Sam 6:1-7; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 5:1-5; 11:30).

¹ Paul S. Karleen, *The Handbook to Bible Study: With a Guide to the Scofield Study System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 359.

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Under the Mosaic Law, God willed that sin be punished, but only some sins were punishable by physical death. The sins punishable by death under the Mosaic Law included: intentional murder (Ex 21:12-14; cf. Gen 9:6), attacking or cursing a parent (Ex 21:15), kidnapping (Ex 21:16), habitual rebellion against God (Deut 17:12), sacrificing to pagan gods (Ex 22:20), cursing God (Lev 24:15-16), working on the Sabbath (Ex 35:2), being a false prophet and leading Israelites into idolatry (Deut 13:1-5), religious human sacrifice (Lev 20:2), the practice of divination, sorcery or witchcraft (Ex 22:18; Deut 18:9-14), adultery and premarital sex (Lev 20:10-14; 21:9; Deut 22:20-22), sex with an animal (Ex 22:19; Lev 20:15-16), incest (Lev 20:11-12, 14), homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13), and the rape of a married woman (Deut 22:25-27).

When it came to punishing the offender, sometimes God Himself executed the sentence (Lev 10:1-3; 2 Sam 6:1-7), and other times it was carried out by Israel's leaders (Ex 32:19-28). In the New Testament, God does not call Christians to put anyone to death, but has delegated that authority solely to the governments of this world (Rom 13:1-4), or He does it Himself (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

The apostle Paul mentioned three stages of divine discipline when he wrote to Christians at Corinth who were partaking of the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor 11:27). The Lord's Supper symbolizes the love, humility, and sacrifice the Lord Jesus manifested when He came to earth and took upon Himself perfect humanity (the unleavened bread) and went to the cross and shed His blood (red juice) for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17; Eph 1:7; Phil 2:3-8). However, during the church

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fellowship, some Christians were sinning by getting drunk and others were selfishly eating all the food and leaving none for the poorer believers (1 Cor 11:21-22). After such selfish and sinful behavior, these arrogant Christians would then partake of the Lord's Supper! God Himself punished these believers for their arrogance. First, God used warning discipline (weakness), then moved to intensive discipline (sickness), and finally resorted to ultimate discipline (sleep). The term *sleep* is used in the New Testament to refer to believers who have died (John 11:11-14; 1 Cor 15:51-52). God decided to take the lives of some of these believers due to their failure to correct their own behavior, which was inconsistent with the values of the Lord's Supper.

He [Paul] is specifically teaching that some members of the church at Corinth were weak and others were ill because they would not judge themselves as they should and cleanse themselves, but came unworthily to the Lord's Table, and the result was that God had chastised them. ...There is, indeed, a mysterious phrase 'and many sleep' (1 Cor 11:30), which means that many were dead because they would not judge themselves.²

At the church at Corinth, some believers were judged and put to death by the Lord because of their sin. For the believer who is in perpetual sin and who does not listen to God, jail or prison can serve to meet the requirements of all three phases of discipline. God is very

² David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998), 56.

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patient, but His authority will not be rejected by the arrogant believer forever, for He “is able to humble those who walk in pride” (Dan 4:37).

The wise believer accepts God’s correction. David writes, “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Psa 119:71), and later states, “I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (Psa 119:75). The foolish believer rejects God’s correction, and if he perpetuates his sin, God may administer a final act of discipline and remove the believer from this world. Such death is the pinnacle of suffering in this life, but we should never conclude that it means suffering for eternity. All believers are eternally secure in Christ. At the moment of salvation, all believers are given eternal life and imputed with God’s righteousness (John 3:16; 10:28; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). They are forever kept by the power of God and cannot forfeit their salvation (John 10:29; Rom 8:38-39). This means that when a believer dies—whatever the cause—he is guaranteed heaven as his eternal home. At his resurrection, the Christian is guaranteed a new body just the like body of our Lord Jesus (Phil 3:20-21).

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly” when He is dealing with His children (Gen 18:25)? Yes, God always deals justly with His children! Many Christians are rightfully in prison because they failed to submit to God’s authority as well as those human governmental authorities He has established for the good of mankind. As a parent disciplines a child for disobedience, so God disciplines His children for disobeying Him (Heb 12:5-11). Sometimes that discipline comes in the form of jail or prison. God disciplines His children to produce humility

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that leads to obedience. God commands His children to obey the laws of the land and failure to submit to human forms of government is failure to submit to God (Rom 13:1, 5; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14)! For the Christian to overcome evil, he absolutely must learn submission to divine and human authority. *Submission* is a good word and needs to be evidenced more in the lives of Christians everywhere.

Overcoming Evil

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:21)

Evil refers to the sinful attitudes and actions of those who adhere to Satan's values and promote his agenda. Evil actions reveal an evil heart, for "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, [and] slanders" (Matt 15:19). Men behave in an evil way because their hearts are corrupt and prone to evil. It was not too long after the fall of Adam and Eve that "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). The Scripture reveals that the heart of every man is bent toward evil, and that "the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9a).

Evil can be moral or immoral, and in either case it is the product of willful creatures who oppose God and His will. Moral evil is seen in many people, but is observed most often in the religious person who does good works that he may be noticed and praised by men (Matt 6:1-5). The unbelieving Pharisees and Sadducees in Jesus' day are good examples of those who practiced moral evil. Jesus plainly acknowledged that they were very religious and could be observed in public places praying and giving their money to support their religious agendas (Matt 6:1-5; Luke 18:9-14); however, Jesus also revealed they were dead inside (Matt 23:27), and had only the appearance of righteousness (Matt 23:28). Those possessed with religious arrogance "trusted in themselves that they were righteous,

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and viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18:9). It was these people that Christ declared “you are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44). The Pharisees and Sadducees were very religious; but their religious values and practices were in disagreement with God and His Word and this brought them into direct opposition with the Son of God. When Jesus confronted and opposed their evil religious system, they chose to crucify Him rather than change their minds and practices. They paid a terrible price for rejecting the Son of God (Matt 23:37-38).

The world does not persecute “religious people,” but it does persecute righteous people. Why Cain killed Abel is explained in 1 John 3:12: “Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” The Pharisees and Jewish leaders were religious people, yet they crucified Christ and persecuted the early church.¹

Moral evil, which is at the base of all self-righteous religious systems, is more dangerous than immoral evil because it has the appearance of respectability and is often praised by many in society. Moral evil should not surprise us, “for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds” (2 Cor 11:14-15). Cults such as Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Unitarians find

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Books, 2001), 424.

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inroads into many of today's prisons and are often praised for their moral teachings, though they deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ and hold to a false teaching of salvation by human works. The morally arrogant person seeks to earn salvation by good works; but this is wrong, as salvation is completely by God's grace (Eph 2:8-9; Gal 2:16; Tit 3:5).

Immoral evil is usually condemned by society because it tends to be more destructive. Immoral evil consists of "evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness" (Mark 7:21-22; cf. Gal 5:19-21). Today's prisons are filled primarily with people given to immoral evil. To be clear, evil in every form is not acceptable to God and will send a person to the Lake of Fire; however, in Satan's world system, moral evil is more socially acceptable and often praised by governmental leaders because it helps to promote their agendas.

In order for the Christian to overcome evil in every form, he must grow spiritually and live in regular dependence on God the Holy Spirit to sustain and direct his life according to Scripture. The Holy Spirit will never lead the Christian independently of Scripture. Learning God's Word necessarily precedes living His will, as the Christian cannot live what he does not know. Change his mind and you'll change his ways. After regeneration, the Christian's mind is still filled with a lifetime of worldly thinking, which will cause him problems to the degree that it remains the basis for his decisions in life. If he thinks like the world then he'll live like the world. Worldly viewpoint should give way to the light of God's Word as the Christian begins

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to adjust his thinking and bring it into conformity with the mind of God. As Christians, we are always in the process of “destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). We do this so we will “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). For the Christian who is born again, overcoming evil starts with a change in his thinking that leads to a change in his behavior. Without solid thinking rooted in Scripture, the Christian will not be able to stand against the evil pressures Satan will put on him.

The Christian, whether saved before or after he got to prison, will face tremendous pressure to conform to the values and behaviors of those around him. Not only does the Christian face the external pressure of those who are weak and have given themselves over to Satan’s evil system, but he also faces the pressure of his own sin nature that has a natural affinity with the devil’s world. If Satan were a broadcaster sending out his radio signal, the sin nature would be that internal receiver that is automatically tuned to its message. There is a part of us that is corrupt and is naturally bent toward evil, whether moral or immoral, and we must be aware of this flaw within ourselves. We are given a new spiritual nature at the moment of salvation, which is naturally tuned to God’s message and is receptive to the Holy Spirit. The Christian’s new spiritual nature is continually in conflict with his old sinful nature, as these are in complete opposition to each other. The Apostle Paul tells us “the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these

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are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Gal 5:17; cf. Rom 8:5-8).

The old nature (which has its origin in our physical birth) fights against the new nature which we receive when we are born again (Gal 5:16–26). No amount of self-discipline, no set of man-made rules and regulations, can control this old nature. Only the Holy Spirit of God can enable us to “put to death” the old nature (Rom 8:12–13) and produce the Spirit’s fruit (Gal 5:22–23) in us through the new nature.²

Those in the world who have given themselves over to Satan’s evil system often demand that others in their periphery conform to their values. Persecution often comes in stages and is defined as “the suffering or pressure, mental, moral, or physical, which authorities, individuals, or crowds inflict on others, especially for opinions or beliefs, with a view to their subjection by recantation, silencing, or, as a last resort, execution.”³ Evil men employ pressure tactics of all sorts, including violence, in order to obtain their objective. In fact, it was during a time of great persecution by the Roman government that the apostle Paul wrote to Christians and told them they must “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). Satan was trying to destroy the early church and

² Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 2, 480.

³ Geoffrey W. Bromily, “Persecution,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 771.

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many in the Roman government were used by him to persecute Christians. Many Roman officials demanded that Christians recognize Caesar as a god to be worshipped, and if those Christians refused, then they would be persecuted and put to death. The Roman government did not separate state from religion, and if a Roman citizen refused to worship as the state mandated, that citizen would be guilty of treason and could face capital punishment. Many Christians living in Rome faced persecution because they refused to worship Caesar as a god, and the result was often torture and death.

The persecution of Christians became heightened in the summer of A.D. 64 when the emperor Nero falsely blamed them for a fire that had burned much of the city of Rome. The false charge unleashed the anger of many hostile citizens and the fury of Rome exploded against the early church and many Christians died a horrible death. Later, the emperor Domitian (ca. A.D. 81-96) carried out attacks against Christians and persecuted them as well. Herbert W. Workman writes:

Some, suffering the punishment of parricides, were shut up in a sack with snakes and thrown into the sea; others were tied to huge stones and cast into a river. For Christians the cross itself was not deemed sufficient agony; hanging on the tree, they were beaten with rods until their bowels gushed out, while vinegar and salt were rubbed into their wounds. ...Christians were tied to catapults, and so wrenched from limb to limb. Some...were thrown to the beasts; others were tied to their horns. Women were stripped, enclosed in nets, and exposed to the attacks of furious bulls. Many were made to lie on

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sharp shells, and tortured with scrapers, claws, and pincers, before being delivered to the mercy of the flames. Not a few were broken on the wheel, or torn in pieces by wild horses. Of some the feet were slowly burned away, cold water being dowsed over them the while lest the victims should expire too rapidly. ...Down the backs of others melted lead, hissing and bubbling, was poured; while a few ‘by the clemency of the emperor’ escaped with the searing out of their eyes, or the tearing off of their legs.⁴

To avoid such persecutions by Roman governmental officials, the Christian had only to denounce his faith and say, “Caesar is lord.” Some might argue that it would have been better to give recognition to a Roman emperor rather than suffer greatly or watch family members be put to death. However, the demands of Christianity (now, as well as then) are such that a believer can never worship a substitute for the living Christ. When confronted with persecution, any compromise of faith is shameful in the face of those who have testified for Christ with their life. The early Christians understood that there was never a time when they could deny Jesus as their Lord and be justified in doing so. Just as three Hebrew children in the book of Daniel stood before a mighty king and were willing to face suffering rather than deny the only true God (Dan 3), so thousands of early Christians were willing to face Roman persecution even if it resulted in their death.

⁴ Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1906), 299-300.

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Because persecution was part of the normal Christian experience in the early church, Paul knew there would be Christians who would be tempted to retaliate against their attackers and do evil to those who did evil to them. Unjustified attacks will stimulate the sin nature within the Christian. Because the sin nature is usually the first responder in evil situations, the Christian must be careful to exercise self-restraint and not act impulsively, but control his emotions. The Christian must be governed by God's Word and never by his hot temper, as the Scripture tells him to "be angry, and *yet* do not sin" (Eph 4:26).

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (Rom 12:17-19)

It's easy to retaliate and kick the one who kicked you, or hit the one who hit you, or curse the one who cursed you. But this is not the Christian way. Jesus suffered unjustly many times throughout His life, and especially during His illegal trials which led to His crucifixion. And even though He was verbally reviled, "He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet 2:23).

As children of God, we must live on the highest level—returning good for evil. Anyone can return good for good and evil for evil. The only way to

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overcome evil is with good. If we return evil for evil, we only add fuel to the fire. And even if our enemy is not converted, we have still experienced the love of God in our own hearts and have grown in grace.⁵

The persecuted Christians living in Rome could face their evil attackers with courage because they knew God was in control of their circumstances as well as their eternal destiny. By faith, the Christian has confidence in the face of suffering because he knows “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose” (Rom 8:28). Even if the Christian should face death, he knows he will leave this world and come immediately into the presence of the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), have a new home in heaven (John 14:1-6), receive his resurrection body (1 Cor 15:51-57; Phil 3:21), obtain his eternal inheritance (1 Pet 1:4-5), and enjoy the reality of the eternal life he received at the moment of he trusted Christ as his Savior (John 3:16; 10:28; 1 John 5:10). Jesus Himself stated “do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28).

Living in God’s will is not always easy, and it does not guarantee a positive response from others. The teaching of Scripture is that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). Sadly, there are many Christians who suffer for sinful reasons and it is good

⁵ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 1, 556.

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that they suffer, if it teaches them humility and respect for legitimate authority. The Apostle Peter tells Christians to “make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1 Pet 4:15-16). We cannot stop suffering in this life, but “it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong” (1 Pet 3:17). We cannot control what other people think or how they behave, but we can control our response to them, and we can make sure that what we do is pleasing to the Lord by being obedient-to-the-Word believers. In this way, we can overcome evil by doing God’s will for our lives; and this is good.

Jesus was not overcome by the cruelty and suffering he endured, but showed love and forgiveness to His attackers (Luke 23:34), and “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). Stephen, who spoke strong words of truth while filled with the Holy Spirit, prayed and asked God to forgive those who stoned him to death (Acts 7:60). Paul and Silas demonstrated loving concern for the jailer who kept them in chains, sharing the gospel with him when given the opportunity (Acts 16:22-31). Our lives may be vulnerable to the unjust pain and suffering caused by others, but we must look beyond the suffering and be willing to love even our attackers for the sake of Christ in the hope that they may come to know the gospel and be saved.

As Christians, we must learn to live above our circumstances and find joy in God and His Word rather than the circumstances of this life. Christian joy never fades

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because God and His Word are eternal and the world cannot touch the soul that is saturated with Scripture. There is a joy that comes from this world, but it is connected to the temporal things of life and can be lost in a moment or taken away. For many, their joy is dependent on circumstances, and such a worldly-joy is always weak because circumstances are unstable and always changing. The Christian can choose joy, even in the face of great hardship, because he knows his suffering is purposeful, being used by God in order to grow him spiritually.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jam 1:2-4)

Rejoicing in the midst of Christian suffering is an act of the will, not a natural emotional response. By faith the Christian chooses to praise God in the midst of his suffering because he knows God is using that suffering to produce the character of Christ in him (John 16:33; Rom 5:3-5; Jam 1:2-4). Even when the Christian faces death at the hands of violent attackers, he is to continually entrust himself to God as the keeper of his soul (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59).

The Christian overcomes evil when he adopts God's will for his life and follows it, no matter the cost. The Christian overcomes evil by committing himself to doing God's will according to Scripture and refusing to bow down to the evil pressures of weak people who have surrendered themselves to Satan's worldly system. To be sure, overcoming evil is not a onetime event, but a lifetime

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activity that has application not only in prison, but every aspect of life wherever evil is encountered. The remaining chapters of this book explain four basic activities the Christian needs to learn and incorporate into his life on a regular basis in order to advance spiritually and live strong in the will of God.

1. Submitting to God (Rom 12:1-2).
2. Learning Scripture (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17).
3. Living by Faith (Rom 1:17; 10:17).
4. Developing the Spiritual Life (Eph 5:18; Gal 5:16).

Learning Scripture

Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (1 Pet 2:2)

A Christian in prison has great potential for spiritual success because he has both time and opportunity to grow in God's Word. Most Christians living in society will tell you they are very busy living from day to day and often find it difficult to devote the time necessary to study God's Word as they ought. The Christian in prison has time, and lots of it. He can make the most of his time by getting into Scripture and learning and applying it daily. This will help his spiritual life during his time in prison as well as his time afterward.

When I was in prison, I utilized my time as best I could. I read my Bible daily, fellowshiped with other believers, prayed often, shared Scripture with others to encourage their walk with God, and grew spiritually. Oh, there was failure on my part on many instances, but I learned that occasional relapse into sin does not mean total collapse of the spiritual life. I could confess my sin and get back into fellowship with the Lord (1 John 1:9). Many of the practices I established in prison have been perpetuated in my life long after I was released. Many of the principles I learned in prison continue to guide my life to the present. Spiritual success—whether in prison or outside of prison—starts with learning God's Word.

Learning Scripture

We cannot live what we do not know, so learning God's Word necessarily precedes doing God's will. The Bible provides all the information the believer needs to grow spiritually (1 Cor 2:10-16; Eph 1:3-5), walk by faith (Rom 10:17), and attain Christian maturity (Eph 4:13; 2 Tim 3:16-17). As the Christian advances spiritually, he will eventually begin to manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). I've seen Christians reach spiritual maturity while living in prison, and they would manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit more often than the fruit of the flesh. No Christian ever reaches a place where he is completely without sin in his life (Eccl 7:20; Prov 20:9; 1 John 1:8, 10). However, the spiritual Christian will admit his sin, confess it to God on a regular basis (1 John 1:9), and keep seeking after God through His Word.

Good decisions are rooted in Scripture. As the Christian studies the Bible, he realizes it speaks to every area of life and not just parts of it. God is very thorough and has spoken perfect truth to mankind and provided a wealth of knowledge that will benefit him in everything. The man who closes himself off to God and His Word is a poor man. He is spiritually poor because he is shutting out the wonderful truths that reveal the many spiritual blessings God has provided (Eph 1:3; cf. Psa 119:162).

I recommend reading the Bible from Genesis onward, straight through to the book of Revelation, and then start over again. Certainly there are individual books to study, and doctrinal lessons to be gleaned, but it is only from a reading of the whole Bible that the Christian will gain a full sense of who God is, what He has accomplished in history, and where He is taking humanity into the future. Too often men study only parts of the Bible, or get their

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knowledge about God from Christian books other than Scripture, and this can lead to a limited and/or incomplete understanding of God. I've met Christians who correctly understand that God is love, yet incorrectly think that's all He is, and then have great difficulty understanding concepts such as the Lake of Fire. They struggle within themselves and say "how can a loving God send people to the Lake of Fire?" Yet, if they understood some of God's other attributes such as His holiness, righteousness and justice, they would understand the necessity of the Lake of Fire. If one starts in the book of Genesis and reads all the way through the Bible, he will gain a fuller understanding of God and realize that He has many attributes. According to Scripture God is:

1. *Sovereign* – He rules His universe as He pleases (1 Ch 29:11; Dan 4:35; Acts 17:24-25).
2. *Righteous* – He is upright in character (Psa 11:7; 119:137).
3. *Just* – He is upright in all His actions (Psa 9:7-8; 19:9; 50:6; 58:11).
4. *Holy* – He is positively good and completely set apart from sin (Psa 99:9).
5. *Omniscient* – He knows all things (Psa 139:1-6; Matt 6:31-33).
6. *Omnipresent* – He is everywhere (Psa 139:7-12; Heb 13:5).
7. *Omnipotent* – He is all powerful (Job 42:2; Isa 40:28-29).
8. *Immutable* – He never changes (Psa 102:26, 27; Mal 3:6).
9. *Truth* – He is truth and reveals truth (2 Sam 7:28; John 14:6; 17:17; 1 John 5:20).

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10. *Loving* – He acts in the best interest of others (Jer 31:3; 1 John 4:7-12, 16).
11. *Faithful* – He is consistent to fulfill His promises (Deut 7:9; Lam 3:23; 1 John 1:9).
12. *Merciful* – He is compassionate to the needy (Psa 86:15; Luke 6:36; Tit 3:5).
13. *Gracious* – He is kind to the undeserving and humble (Psa 111:4; 116:5; 1 Pet 5:5, 10).
14. *Eternal* – He forever exists before, beyond, and after time (Deut 33:27; 1 Tim 1:17).

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the Scripture reveals that God exists as a Trinity: God the Father (Matt 6:9), God the Son (John 1:1, 14 Matt 16:16), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). The Persons of the Trinity are co-eternal, co-infinite, and co-equal, and though they have differing roles in how they relate to each other and the creation, they are equal in essence. Being equal in essence means that all three Persons of the Godhead share the same attributes mentioned above.

Scripture also reveals that there was a time, nearly two thousand years ago, when God the Son took upon Himself true humanity (Gen 3:15; John 1:1, 14), was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18-25), in the chosen line of Abraham and David (Matt 1:1), born King of the Jews (Matt 2:2), lived righteously according to the Mosaic Law (Matt 5:17-19; Gal 4:4), never sinned (Heb 4:15), willingly died on a cross in the place of sinners (Mark 10:45; Rom 5:8), was buried in a grave and rose to life on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4), ascended to heaven where He is currently interceding for the saints (Acts 1:10-11; Rom 8:34), and will return to earth in the future to reign in perfect righteousness (Rev 19:11-16; 20:1-6). This same Jesus is

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now providing salvation as a free gift to all who come to Him by grace alone through faith alone (John 3:16; 1 Cor 15:3-4; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:9; Tit 3:5). Without Scripture, we would know nothing of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and we would not know how to be saved by trusting Him as our Savior.

The Bible reveals how the universe came into existence (Gen 1-2), that man is special from the rest of the creation because he is made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), the existence of both fallen and unfallen angels (1 Tim 4:1; Heb 1:14), what the angel Lucifer was thinking at the time he sinned and led his rebellion against God (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:12-18), where sin comes from and why the universe is cursed (Gen 3:1-24; Rom 8:22), why all men are born sinners (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21-22), how God alone solved the sin problem through the substitutionary death of His Son (Isa 53; John 3:16-18; Rom 3:23-26; 5:6-8; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:9; Col 2:13-14; Tit 3:5; Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), and that God will eventually destroy the universe and create a new heavens and new earth where only righteousness exists (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21-22). These are but a few of the wonderful truths revealed in God's Word that help form a biblical worldview and lead the Christian to see life from the divine perspective. Scripture pulls back the curtain and gives us glimpses into realities we could never come to know on our own except that God has spoken and given us absolute truth.

Study for Yourself

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a

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workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15)

The Christian must study the Bible for himself and try to understand what each human author intended when he wrote to his original audience. The science of interpretation is commonly called hermeneutics, from the Greek word *hermeneuo*, which means to *explain* or *interpret*. Hermeneutics is the working out of rules and methodologies for interpreting biblical texts. The best way to interpret the Bible is to read it normally, like any other book, and to give attention to the original languages, history and culture from which the human author wrote. This method of hermeneutics is commonly called the historical-grammatical approach to learning the Bible because it seeks to understand the Bible from the time and culture from which it was originally written.

Because we are separated from the people and events of Scripture by several thousand years, and because there is so much information, it becomes a difficult task to learn all there is to know in the Bible. We start by reading it for ourselves and getting what we can from the text, and then look to Bible teachers who have devoted themselves to a lifetime of study and become experts in the original languages, history and culture of the Bible. Many excellent Bible scholars have written helpful books which serve as tools to the serious student of the Bible. Here are a few basic points every Christian should know about the Bible and hermeneutics:

1. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books, written by approximately forty human authors over a period of 1500 years.

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2. The Bible is special revelation from God and about His will for all mankind.
3. The Bible is inspired in the sense that there are no errors or faults in the original Hebrew and Greek texts.
4. There is theological continuity to Scripture because God the Holy Spirit was behind each human author, superintending their writings, making certain that what was written was exactly what He intended; and He did this without removing their personal literary style or choice of vocabulary.
5. Never make a passage say something that it does not say within its context (e.g. Josh 24:15; 2 Ch 7:14; Jer 29:11; Matt 24: 13-14; John 21: Rev 3:20).
6. Spiritually gifted pastors and teachers are necessary in the church to help Christians understand the Bible (Eph 4:11-17). Christian teachers are not infallible, so their teaching must be verified (Acts 17:10-11; 2 Tim 2:15). A teacher should try to teach in such a way that the student can research the information for himself and verify what is taught.

The Christian should come to the Bible expecting to learn something from God, but it is helpful if he asks the right questions. Below is a list of basic questions every Christian can ask when he studies Scripture:

1. Who is the human author (Moses, David, Paul, Peter)?
2. Who is the audience (a person or group)?
 - a. Are they believers?
 - b. Are they unbelievers?
 - c. Are they a mixed group of saved and lost?

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3. What is the subject about which the author is writing (law, war, sin, the gospel)?
4. Are there historical or cultural issues to be aware of (how were women or slaves treated)?
5. Are there important words that need to be inspected closer (i.e. verbs, nouns, prepositions, theological words, etc.)?
6. Are there other passages in the Bible that speak about the subject (i.e. marriage, parenting, war, faith, etc.)?
7. Is there a timeless truth to be drawn from the passage (i.e. God is always faithful, God always speaks truth, sin is never right, man is lost without God, etc.)?
8. Can I apply this biblical truth to my life? We should realize that at times God spoke to certain people at certain times and the truth He spoke to them can never be applied to us today (e.g. the command God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; or the command to Israel to sacrifice animals, etc.).
9. How do I apply this truth to my life? This is a very important question, but should always be the last question, after we have studied what Scripture meant to the original audience.

Having a good hermeneutical system for studying the Scriptures is necessary for understanding. Reading the Bible consistently in a plain or normal way helps the Christian understand it the way God intended. For example, there were many prophecies that were literally fulfilled regarding the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and only a plain reading of those passages make

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sense (e.g. Psa 16:9-10; 22:1, 15-18; 31:5; 34:20; 68:18; Isa 9:1-2, 6; 53:1-12; 61:1; Mic 5:2; Zech 13:7; Mal 3:1). Certainly there are figures of speech, poetry, symbols, parables, and other forms of literary expression in Scripture that human authors used when writing under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit; however, even these are plainly seen and understood by the reader as he reads the Bible in a normal way.

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, and literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic [obvious] and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.¹

It is important to understand that even the best hermeneutical rules consistently applied are not enough to bring about a correct and full understanding of the Bible. We have Scripture to read for ourselves, but the Holy Spirit is the One who helps us to understand it fully and be persuaded to walk in its light. We have God's revelation, but only the Holy Spirit gives illumination. Illumination is "that influence or ministry of the Holy Spirit which enables all who are in right relation with God to understand the Scriptures."²

¹ David L. Cooper, *The God of Israel* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1945), iii.

² Lewis S. Chafer, "Revelation" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 94 (1937): 268.

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In illumination the Holy Spirit's work is not only to show what the Bible means, but also to persuade Christians of its truth. Illumination is the Spirit's work, enabling Christians to discern the meaning of the message and to welcome and receive it as from God.³

The biblical teaching is that only the Christian who has the indwelling Holy Spirit can fully know the things of God as they are revealed in Scripture. The indwelling Holy Spirit provides the Christian the capacity to fully understand and accept spiritual truths that would otherwise be out of reach. Spiritual truths that once were confusing to the unbeliever prior to salvation are made known and acceptable by the Holy Spirit after he is born again. Paul spoke about this when he wrote to Christians at the church at Corinth.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. (1 Cor 2:13-14)

The unsaved person cannot know the greater truths of God's Word, no matter how hard he tries. Because the unbeliever does not have the Holy Spirit within him, the result is that he "does not accept the things of the Spirit of

³ Roy B. Zuck, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Illumination" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 141 (1984): 125.

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God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14). To be clear, it’s not that the unbeliever chooses to misunderstand the things of God, as though it’s a matter of choice, but that he “cannot understand them” because he lacks the spiritual capacity altogether.

For the believer, there is a connection between learning Scripture and having a desire to serve God. A rebellious heart can obstruct a person’s understanding of Scripture (John 7:17; cf. Psa 119:34). Carnality can also impede a believer’s ability to learn Scripture since he is operating by his sin nature rather than the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:1-3). The newborn Christian is to be taught basic doctrines of the Bible (i.e. milk); however, advanced doctrines are only open to the maturing believer who is studying and applying God’s Word on a regular basis (i.e. meat; see Heb 5:12-16).

Apply the Scripture to Your Life

Christianity is not a spectator sport! Scripture teaches that we are to be “doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jam 1:22). Learning by itself is not enough, as we must apply God’s Word to our situations. We must love (1 Cor 13:4-8; 1 John 3:23), forgive (Matt 18:21-22), pray (1 Th 5:17), speak truth (Eph 4:15, 25), and live by grace (Col 4:6; Tit 2:11-13). These are but a few of the many Christian activities Scripture commands us to apply every moment of every day. There are many Christians who have made that very important first step in learning God’s Word—and it is a very important and necessary step—but it is only the

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beginning, as knowledge of Scripture must be applied if there is to be any benefit to the Christian and if God is to be glorified. Jesus pointed this out very clearly when He stated:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine [receives Scripture] and acts on them [applies what he learns], may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock, “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house: and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. “Everyone who hears these words of Mine [receives Scripture] and does not act on them [fails to apply what he learns], will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” (Matt 7:24-27)

The wise man is the one who both learns and lives Scripture, whereas the foolish man is the one who hears but fails to apply what he’s learned. The storms of life come upon everyone, but it is only the believer who learns and lives by God’s Word that is able to stand against life’s pressures because his house is built on a solid foundation. God has sent forth His Word and it will accomplish what He desires (Isa 55:11); yet, at the same time, every Christian is commanded to “let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). God’s Word is “living and active” (Heb 4:12), but it must be studied (2 Tim 2:15), received (Jam 1:21), and acted upon for there to be personal benefit in the

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Christian life (Matt 7:24-27).

As the Christian studies Scripture on a regular basis, paying attention to the plain meaning of the text, he will advance in his understanding of God as well as the many blessings He has provided. The Christian will see God's Word as beneficial for providing an understanding of the gospel message (John 3:16; 1 Cor 15:3-4), encouraging the believer to walk in truth (Psa 86:11; 119:97-106), to know God's will (Rom 12:1-2), to build his faith (Rom 10:17), to bring spiritual sanctification (Psa 119:9-11; John 17:17), to provide a stable life (Matt 7:24-27), to show the weakness of man (Jer 17:5), to reveal the strength of God (Jer 17:7), to provide a stable and righteous life (Psa 1:1-3), to teach divine viewpoint (Isa 55:7-9), to give wisdom (Prov 2:6-14), to give confidence (Isa 41:10), to protect from satanic and demonic influence (Matt 4:1-11; 2 Cor 11:3; Eph 6:10-13), and to lead to spiritual maturity (Eph 4:11-16; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 5:13-14; 1 Pet 2:2). These are but a sampling of the many benefits of a life that is invested in God's Word.

The growing Christian is one who is learning God's Word in order to live God's will. This is always the order of things. God has given His revelation to man, but it must be studied and applied if there is to be any benefit at all. The gospel is learned and the sinner believes in Christ for salvation. The Christian learns God's Word and is blessed when he lives by faith, obeying His commands and trusting His promises.

In the end, the learning of God's Word must ultimately manifest itself in the form of grace and love for others. Francis Schaeffer argued that *love is the final*

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apologetic. If, after all of our learning, there is no grace and love, then I would argue we have failed miserably in our task. The Apostle John declared: “we love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). As we learn about God and His love for us, our hearts are warmed and we are moved with compassion to love others in a truthful and sacrificial way for their wellbeing. True biblical learning should always lead to a life of biblical grace and love. Beware of teachers who claim to promote “God’s Truth” but are deficient in the grace and love it so bountifully promotes.

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The Christian living in prison overcomes evil when he learns to live by faith in God and His Word. Faith is the act of trusting or relying on someone or something, most often for the sake of personal benefit. Faith in God is a response to commands or promises He has given. When Abram was 75 years old God commanded him to “go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you” (Gen 12:1), and Abram responded positively to the divine command and “went forth as the LORD had spoken to him” (Gen 12:4). What the Lord commanded of Abram, by faith he obeyed. Faithful obedience is always the proper response to a divine command. The benefit for Abram obeying the Lord was the divine promise:

And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. (Gen 12:2-3)

Abram waited years for the son the Lord had promised. One evening God came to Abram in a vision and addressed his concerns about the lack of an heir and said, “now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them. ...so shall your descendants be” (Gen 15:5). The scripture then gives Abram’s response as, “he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

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Abram was already a believer as of Genesis 11-12 when he obeyed God to leave Ur of the Chaldees. This verse is a general statement concerning Abram's life of faith, since his belief in Jehovah was already clear from 12:1 and probably even earlier, at the end of chapter 11. The content of Abram's faith was what he heard and understood directly from God.¹

On that same evening, God ratified His promises to Abram with a covenant (Heb *berith* – a contract). Abram finally received the promised son (Isaac) when he was 100 years old, a quarter of a century after receiving by faith the initial promise given to him when he left his homeland under divine orders. Faith clings to the commands and promises of God, often in spite of circumstances or long periods of waiting.

The Christian is one who, like Abram, has trusted God at His Word (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 16:31; Eph 2:8-9). God has promised that whoever believes in Christ as Savior “shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Salvation is entirely through faith alone in Christ alone, as the believer is helpless to save himself and comes to the Savior on the basis of unmerited favor (i.e. grace). Once saved, the faith that was exercised in Christ for salvation is the same faith that sustains the believer during his Christian walk. At salvation, the Person of Christ was the object trusted and eternal life was the benefit. Once saved, God's

¹Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis: Exposition from a Messianic Jewish Perspective* (San Antonio, TX. Ariel Ministries, 2009), 275.

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commands and promises in Scripture are the object trusted and the believer's spiritual health is the benefit. God is glorified, both in salvation and the believer's spiritual health.

Biblically, faith is never a blind leap into the unknown, but a thoughtful act of the will by the believer who hears and understands God's Word and responds positively. Scripture tells us, "faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17; cf. 14:23; Heb 4:2; Jam 1:22). The healthy Christian life always starts by learning God's Word, and once learned, is applied by faith, moment by moment, as long as the Christian lives in this world. The word *faith* is used three ways in Scripture:

1. *Pistis* (Grk. noun) refers to what is believed and often points to a *body of teaching* (Acts 14:22; 16:5; Rom 14:22; Gal 1:23).
2. *Pisteuo* (Grk. verb) refers to the *act of believing* and means *to believe, trust, or have confidence* in something or someone (John 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 20:31).
3. *Pistos* (Grk. adjective) describes someone as *faithful, reliable, or trustworthy* and is used both of man (Matt 25:23; Col 1:7; Heb 3:5), and God (1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; Heb 10:23).

Faith, as a verb, demands an object, as it must have something or someone upon which to rest. To receive salvation, the unbeliever is told to "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31a). To be clear, faith does not save; God saves! Faith is merely the means by which the unsaved person receives salvation, as God alone does the saving. It's just like the faith a person has

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when he sits down in a chair; his faith does not keep him from crashing to the floor, the chair does. The chair gets all the credit for keeping him from falling. Though a person may exercise faith and receive a benefit, the object always gets the credit, and in the case of our salvation or spiritual health (i.e. our benefit), it is God alone who gets the glory.

Once saved, God does not take the Christian immediately to heaven, but leaves him in a fallen world to advance to spiritual maturity and to serve as His representative to others. While living in the world the Christian will, out of necessity, have to trust in things and people, even though these regularly fail. Scripture teaches that people fail (Jer 17:5), money fails (Psa 62:10), and governments fail (Psa 146:3), and the person who puts complete trust in them is a fool. Yet, people, things, and institutions must be trusted to some degree in order for life to progress and harmony to exist. From Scripture, the Christian realizes that humanity is prone to weakness and failure due to sin; therefore, he relies as little as possible on people and turns to God instead. If he's wise, the Christian will not even look to himself as a source of strength and guidance, knowing himself to be weak and unable to stand against the greater pressures of life. The Christian who lives by faith has admitted his weakness and turned to God for guidance and strength. Humility is necessary for spiritual advance and perpetuating a life of faith.

The apostle Paul was a great man, but he was intentionally made weak by the Lord who gave him a "thorn in the flesh" for the purpose of humbling him (2 Cor 12:7). Paul does not say what his "thorn in the flesh" was, but it obviously caused him problems and made him weak by human standards. Like any man, the apostle Paul prayed

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several times for the Lord to take it away, but the Lord told him no.

And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9-10)

By faith, the apostle Paul accepted the “thorn in the flesh” the Lord placed on him, because he understood its spiritual value. Paul did not like being made weak, but it was only in his weakness that he sought the Lord for strength. Often the Christian wants God to take away his suffering, yet it's that very suffering that keeps the believer close to the Lord! Why would God take away the very thing that keeps the believer humble and keeps him coming back to God for strength and guidance? The wise and humble believer learns to live by faith and say with the apostle Paul “most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Cor 12:9). The world does not understand such boasting; but then, the world does not know God.

As the Christian grows in his biblical faith he will submit to God (Rom 12:1), claim promises (Rom 8:28; 1 John 1:9), give his concerns to God (1 Pet 5:6-7), not surrender to fear (Deut 31:6-8; Isa 41:10-13), love others (1 Th 4:9), rejoice in difficult circumstances (Rom 5:3-5; 1 Th 5:16; Jam 1:2-4), pray continually (1 Th 5:17), be thankful to the Lord (1 Th 5:18), and develop a relaxed mental

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attitude (Isa 26:3; Phil 4:11-13). These are but a few of the experiences he will have as he lives by faith. Over time, the Christian's faith will be tested as he faces opportunities to grow in his relationship with the Lord (1 Pet 1:7), and in everything, he will learn that faith is the only thing that pleases God (Heb 11:6).

At times, living by faith means the believer does nothing more than trust God to do what He promised, as when the Lord told the Israelites (who were fleeing for their lives from the Egyptian army), "do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today" (Ex 14:13). As the Israelites stood by the shore of the Red Sea, they were to do nothing against the Egyptians, but rather watch the Lord do what He'd promised, for He said, "the LORD will fight for you while you keep silent" (Ex 14:14). In this example, the Israelites lived by faith and rejoiced afterwards as God destroyed their enemies by drowning them in the Red Sea (Ex 14:16-31; cf. the Song of Moses in Exodus 15).

At the Red Sea, the Israelites performed marvelously by trusting God to do what He'd promised. However, during the forty years of wilderness wanderings the Israelites complained to God over and over rather than live by faith, even though they had His promises in which He said He would provide and care for them. These same believers, who at one time saw God deliver them from their enemies, later doubted Him on a regular basis. The writer of Hebrews picks up on this failure by Old Testament believers and warns his Christian readers to "take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God" (Heb 3:12). God's promises and commands must be accepted

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and followed by faith; otherwise, there is no benefit to the believer!

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

It is a disaster when a believer fails to live by faith, especially since the Lord has made provision for every trial of life (1 Cor 10:13). Sadly, many believers have failed to claim God's promises and suffered needlessly, and this is what the Scripture is referring to when it says "the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Heb 4:2). Having God's promises is no guarantee the believer will trust in them. Trusting in God's promises or commands does not always alleviate life's problems, but it does provide the believer the ability to cope with them.

Living by faith sometimes means the believer does nothing but trust in the Lord to do exactly what He said (Ex 14:13-14); however, there are times when Scripture commands the believer to do something, and this is why James told his readers to "prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jam 1:22). Obeying God's Word is an act of faith. The believer learns what is commanded in Scripture and then decides, by faith, to obey God's will as it has been revealed. Sometimes this calls for personal action and sometimes it calls for no action at all. Discernment is learned over time as the

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Christian advances spiritually.

Another truth provided in Scripture is that living by faith may result in great blessing, and other times may result in great suffering. The believer is not to concern himself with the end result of either blessing or suffering, but is to live by faith and advance toward spiritual maturity. In Hebrews chapter 11, the writer shares both the blessing and suffering aspects of those who lived by faith. Regarding some of the blessings he says:

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, [and] put foreign armies to flight. (Heb 11:32-34)

Every Christian loves to hear the victory stories of those who lived by faith and overcame the adversities of life as God rescued them from their trouble. The Bible is encouraging because there are many victory stories and the Christian needs to hear them. God blesses the believer with many victories that result in deliverance and blessing. However, there are times when the Christian lives by faith in God and is obedient to His Word only to suffer great persecution and die at the hands of violent men. Regarding those who suffered for their faith the writer of Hebrews states:

...others were tortured, not accepting their release,

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so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. (Heb 11:35-38)

Faith in God is no guarantee the believer will live a life free from suffering or persecution. Too many preachers speak of the blessings of the Lord and the victories to be had while dismissing those clear passages in Scripture that speak about Christian suffering which is according to the will of God (1 Pet 2:19-21; 3:14, 17; 4:19). The growing Christian lives by faith in God, trusting His promises and obeying His commands, whether it requires him to sit still or be active. Sometimes being quiet and doing nothing is just as much an act of faith as speaking out and being busy (Psa 46:10; Jam 1:19). The believer learns discernment as he grows in wisdom.

The mind is very much like a garden that must be tended on a regular basis. What is sown is what is reaped. Where there is no faith, weeds will grow and worldly trash will settle. Without faith in God, the Christian is left to look to himself and the things of this world to sustain him, and soon realizes the pressures around him are simply too great to bear. Where Scripture is absent, pleasures are often pursued, but these fail over time, like everything else in life. Eventually, worldly pressures wear a person down, leaving only emptiness inside, or worse, a deep rooted sense of despair. Where God and His Word are absent, in

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that place darkness will settle. When the believer looks away from the Lord and becomes fixed on the things of this world he will find himself full of anxiety; however, relapse does not have to lead to collapse, as the believer can turn back to God and live by faith. God wants the Christian to have joy (Neh 8:10), peace (Isa 26:3), love (1 John 4:16-17), contentment (Phil 4:11-13), and every other attitude related to the abundant life (John 10:10). Only through faith can the Christian know the blessings that belong to him. This takes time, study, and a willingness to trust God at His Word. Without faith, the Christian cannot win; but with faith, he can only win.

Developing the Spiritual Life

Every Christian is to live spiritually unto the Lord, offering “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). The Christian in prison is able to live spiritually just as much as the pastor in the local church or the professor in the seminary classroom. The inmate’s geographical location or social status does not hinder his spiritual life at all. God the Father gives the Holy Spirit to every believer at the moment of salvation (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), and blesses him “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ” (Eph 1:3). At the moment the Christian is *born again* he is endowed with everything he needs to live spiritually and to fulfill all of his duties as a royal priest living in the Church Age (Rev 1:6), which duties include:

1. The giving of one’s body for service to the Lord (Rom 12:1-2).
2. The sacrifice of praise for worship (Heb 13:15).
3. The doing of good works and sharing with others (Heb 13:16; cf. Phil 4:18).
4. The sacrifice of one’s life for the benefit of others (Phil 2:17; cf. Phil 1:21-26).
5. The walk of sacrificial love (Eph 5:1-2; cf. 1 Pet 1:22).

The dynamic of the believer’s spiritual walk is predicated to a large degree on how much Bible knowledge resides in his soul. He cannot live what he does not know, and learning God’s Word necessarily precedes living His will. Knowing God’s Word does not guarantee a spiritual walk, as the believer may follow the world rather than the

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Holy Spirit (Jam 4:17; 1 John 2:15). Knowing the truth does not mean the believer will walk in it; however, the Christian cannot be spiritual without some knowledge of Scripture, and the more he knows, the more he's able to surrender his life to God and accomplish His will.

The Holy Spirit came to minister in the world in a special way on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is different today than it was for believers who were living under the Mosaic Law. Under the Mosaic Law the Holy Spirit indwelt and empowered only a few believers such as Artisans (Ex 31:1-5), Judges (Num 11:25-29; Jud. 3:9-10), Prophets (Ezek 2:2), and Kings (1 Sam 10:6; 16:13). In the current Church Age, every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor 6:19), and that indwelling is permanent because the believer is "sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph 1:13-14; cf. 2 Cor 1:21-22).

The *fact* of the indwelling Spirit is not revealed through any experience whatsoever; nevertheless that fact is the foundation upon which all other ministries to the child of God must depend. It is impossible for one to enter into the plan of God and provision for a life of power and blessing and ignore the distinct revelation as to *where* the Spirit is now related to the believer. It must be understood and fully believed that the Spirit is now *indwelling* the true child of God and that He indwells from the

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moment the believer is saved.¹

Since the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is working in the lives of all unbelievers to convince them that Jesus Christ is the only Savior (John 16:8-11), and that by grace alone through faith alone the worst of sinners may come to have eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28). The Holy Spirit is not working to convince the unbeliever of every sin, but only one sin, “because they do not believe in Me” (John 16:9). If a person rejects Christ as Savior and chooses death over life, he then falls under the restraining work of the Holy Spirit who holds back the lawless and destructive behavior of all those reside in spiritual darkness (2 Th 2:7).

The Holy Spirit’s pre-evangelistic work may be resisted by the unbeliever, but it cannot be stopped. The Christian should never argue with the unbeliever about the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Tim 2:24-25), but simply present the facts of Scripture and trust the Holy Spirit to do the rest (1 Cor 15:3-4). Too many Christians have tried to argue and wrestle the unbeliever into salvation, and this has resulted in frustration for everyone. The Christian is called to be a light, not make people see the light, as the latter is only something God can do (Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14; 2 Cor 4:3-4).

Once a person believes in Jesus for salvation, he is then delivered “from the domain of darkness, and transferred...to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13). This transference is instantaneous and permanent.

¹ Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 33.

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Once saved, the child of God instantly becomes a “new creature” in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 5:17), with the spiritual capacity to live righteously (Rom 6:11-14). The Holy Spirit permanently indwells the Christian and then works from the day of salvation onward to form the character of Christ in him. Some of the instantaneous work that occurs in the life of every Christian at the moment of salvation includes:

1. Regeneration (John 3:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 2:13).
2. Indwelling each believer (John 14:16-17; Rom 5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19).
3. Baptizing into union with Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27).
4. Sealing each believer with the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30).
5. Providing eternal life (John 3:16).
6. Imputing Christ’s righteousness (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).
7. Providing every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3).
8. Providing a spiritual gift for the edification of others (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:27-31; Eph 4:11).

The wonderful spiritual riches God bestows on the believer at the moment of salvation are a joy to discover and experience. God has given the Christian everything he needs to live the spiritual life, and no prison wall or evil environment can suppress the Holy Spirit or His work. On many occasions I’ve witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of prison inmates who were sharing the gospel, walking in the Spirit, praying, singing hymns, giving thanks, and living in joy despite their environment. These believers were truly a light in a dark place, and the light of God’s Word shone bright in their hearts and lives. They were not sinless believers, but they were humble and

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honest, willing to confess their sin and get right with God when they had a moment of relapse into the flesh (1 John 1:9; cf. Psa 32:3-5).

After salvation, the Holy Spirit continually works in the life of the Christian until he leaves this world for heaven. It should be noted that the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit requires obedience from the Christian if there is to be any fruit at all. The Spirit does not force Himself on the Christian, but calls him to a daily walk of fellowship together to accomplish the will of God the Father. After salvation, some of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit includes:

1. Glorifying Jesus in the believer's life (John 16:14).
2. Teaching through Scripture and gifted spiritual speakers/writers (John 16:13-15; Eph 4:11-16).
3. Recalling Scripture to the believer's mind (John 14:26; 16:13).
4. Filling the believer (i.e. empowering and guiding; Eph 5:18).
5. Sustaining the believer's spiritual walk (Gal 5:16, 25).
6. Illuminating the mind by making Scripture understandable (1 Cor 2:11-13).
7. Promoting the use of the believer's spiritual gift (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-10, 28-30; Eph 4:11).

The above list provides the major activities of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian after salvation, and they are all positive things the Holy Spirit is doing in the church age. All of these activities require the believer to comply with the Spirit's ongoing ministry. Unfortunately, the Christian can say "no" to the Holy Spirit, and this

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happens when he grieves and/or quenches the Holy Spirit's activity in his life (Eph 4:30; 1 Th 5:19).

The Christian faces temptations of every imaginable kind because he lives in a fallen world that is currently controlled by Satan, whose societies and institutions are under his evil influence. Temptation is not sin, but the opportunity and enticement to sin. When the Christian commits sin, he does so against the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Grieving the Holy Spirit occurs when the Christian knowingly commits sin.

The Scriptures often testify to the fact that the Spirit of God is holy and that He is a person. The indwelling presence of this holy person constitutes the body of a believer a temple of God. In the nature of the case, the presence of sin in any form grieves the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, when the Christian is exhorted to “grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30), it is an appeal to allow nothing in his life contrary to the holiness of the Spirit. It is clear that the one cause of grieving the Holy Spirit is sin.²

Quenching the Holy Spirit “may simply be defined as being unyielded to Him, or saying, ‘No.’ The issue is, therefore, the question of willingness to do His will.”³ The Christian quenches the Holy Spirit in his life when he refuses to follow His directions to pray, worship, love,

² John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI., Zondervan Publishing, 1977), 200.

³ *Ibid.*, 197.

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serve, or engage in any other activity the Scripture teaches. Because the Holy Spirit is never removed from us due to sin, He is therefore quenched “in the sense of resisting or opposing His will.”⁴

Be Filled with the Spirit/Walk by the Spirit

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

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

The Christian is called to “be filled with the Spirit” and to “walk by the Spirit” (Eph 5:18; Gal 5:16). These are two commands that are very important to understand and help to keep the Christian’s spiritual life on track and headed in the right direction. The believer who is filled with the Spirit and walking by the Spirit will know what it means to live the victorious life.

Throughout Scripture, the word “filled” (Grk. *pleroo*) means to be guided, controlled or influenced by something or someone (Acts 5:3, 17; 19:28-29). To “be filled with the Spirit” means the believer is being influenced or directed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit always directs the believer to right thinking and right behavior in accordance with Holy Scripture. Regarding the filling of the Holy Spirit, Warren Wiersbe states:

⁴ Ibid., 197.

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“Be filled with the Spirit” is God’s command, and He expects us to obey. The command is plural, so it applies to all Christians and not just to a select few. The verb is in the present tense—“keep on being filled”—so it is an experience we should enjoy constantly and not just on special occasions. And the verb is passive. We do not fill ourselves but permit the Spirit to fill us. The verb “fill” has nothing to do with contents or quantity, as though we are empty vessels that need a required amount of spiritual fuel to keep going. In the Bible, *filled* means “controlled by.” “They... were filled with wrath” (Luke 4:28) means “they were controlled by wrath” and for that reason tried to kill Jesus. “The Jews were filled with envy” (Acts 13:45) means that the Jews were controlled by envy and opposed the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. To be “filled with the Spirit” means to be constantly controlled by the Spirit in our mind, emotions, and will...But how can a person tell whether or not he is filled with the Spirit? Paul stated that there are three evidences of the fullness of the Spirit in the life of the believer: he is *joyful* (Eph 5:19), *thankful* (Eph 5:20), and *submissive* (Eph 5:21–33). Paul said nothing about miracles or tongues, or other special manifestations.⁵

The Christian is commanded to be filled with the Spirit, but never forced. The filling of the Spirit is

⁵ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Books, 2001), 48.

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conditioned on the believer's willful surrender to do God's will. More so, the filling of the Spirit is an ongoing action in the life of the believer as he continually yields himself to God. The Christian must consciously live each moment of each day looking to God and thinking Scripture in every situation (Col 3:1-3, 16; cf. Psa 1:1-3). It is interesting to note that the filling of the Holy Spirit was often followed by divinely sanctioned speech (Luke 1:41-42; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 13:8-10; Eph 5:18-21). Lewis S. Chafer comments about the filling of the Spirit as follows:

To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit fulfilling in us all that God intended Him to do when he placed Him there. To be filled is not the problem of getting *more* of the Spirit: it is rather the problem of the Spirit getting *more* of us. We shall never have *more* of the Spirit than the anointing which every true Christian has received. On the other hand, the Spirit may have all of the believer and thus be able to manifest in him the life and character of Christ. A spiritual person, then, is one who experiences the divine purpose and plan in his daily life through the power of the indwelling Spirit. The *character* of that life will be the out-lived Christ. The cause of that life will be the unhindered indwelling Spirit (Ephesians 3:16-21; 2 Corinthians 3:18).⁶

Once "filled with the Spirit" the believer is then to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16). The word *walk* translates the Greek verb *peripateo* which carries the idea of

⁶ Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual*, 43-44.

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continuous action. The verb is in the active voice which means the subject (i.e. the Christian) is to produce the action himself. The verb *walk* is preceded by the Greek noun *pneuma* (Spirit), which is in the dative case and expresses the idea of means; that is, he is to walk by means of the Holy Spirit. To put it simply, the Christian is to live his life in dependence on the Holy Spirit just as an elderly person may rely (or lean) on a cane or walker to move about.

The New Testament calls the Christian life a “walk.” This *walk* begins with a step of faith when we trust Christ as our Saviour. But salvation is not the end—it’s only the beginning—of spiritual life. “Walking” involves progress, and Christians are supposed to advance in the spiritual life. Just as a child must learn to walk and must overcome many difficulties in doing so, a Christian must learn to “walk in the light.”⁷

Being filled with the Spirit means the believer is allowing the Holy Spirit to guide his thoughts and actions. To walk in the Spirit means the believer is walking in moment by moment dependence on the Holy Spirit and living in accordance with God’s Word. These truths are simple to understand, the challenge is in learning to execute them on regular basis rather than caving into the sinful pressures of the world.

⁷ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2, 479.

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Confess Your Sins

Who can say, “I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin”? (Prov 20:9)

Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins. (Eccl 7:20)

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

Once a person is *born again*, he is saved from the penalty of sin (Rom 8:1; Eph 2:5, 8), the power of sin (Rom 6:11-14), and will ultimately be saved from the presence of sin when God takes him to heaven and gives him a new body like the body of Jesus (Phil 3:20-21). Though Christians have a new nature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), they still possess a sinful nature and have the capacity to commit every sin possible (Rom 7:19-21). Even the apostle Paul admitted that “evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good” (Rom 7:21). When the Christian sins, he breaks fellowship with God, though he does not forfeit his salvation (1 John 1:3-10; cf. John 10:28).

During the commission of a sin, the Christian says “no” to the Holy Spirit and says “yes” either to the internal temptations of his sin nature or the external temptations of the world around him. As stated before, temptation is not sin, but the opportunity to sin. Sin can be either visible (words/actions) or invisible (mental) to others. The act of sin does not occur until the Christian yields to the temptation. A Christian may be tempted to lie, but he does

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not commit the sin of lying until he yields to the temptation and actually tells a lie. A Christian may be tempted to steal, but he does not commit the sin of stealing until he yields to the temptation and actually steals. At the very moment the sin is committed, fellowship with God is broken. The Christian is then under the control of his sin nature and is operating within Satan's world-system and remains there until that sin is confessed and fellowship with God is restored.

The word "confess" translates the Greek word *homologeō* which was a legal term used of a criminal who confessed his crime before a judge, admitting he was guilty of the accusation brought against him. When we sin, we are in violation of God's Word, and when we confess that sin, we are admitting that we are guilty as charged by God. To obtain forgiveness, we simply come to God and confess our sins by specifically naming them to Him. For example, we simply say to God "Father, I lied" or "Father, I lusted", and so on. God, who alone forgives the Christian's sin, requires nothing more than simple confession on the part of the believer and promises forgiveness every time (1 John 1:9).

God's forgiveness is never because the Christian feels sorry for his sin, or has paid penance, or done some other self-justifying act. Forgiveness comes to the Christian because of the work of Christ who has born every sin on the cross. To ask the Christian to pay for his sin would be double jeopardy, because Christ has already paid the price for sin when he died on the cross. The Christian confesses his sin because he wants forgiveness and is seeking to restore fellowship with his heavenly Father. Regarding confession of sin, John F. Walvoord states:

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Complete assurance is given that this approach to the sin problem is acceptable to God. It is not a question of doing penance nor of inflicting chastening punishments upon oneself. Nor is it a matter of leniency with the Father when He accepts the confession. The whole act is based upon the finished work of Christ, and the question of penalty is not in view. The price for restoration has already been paid. Accordingly, the Father is *faithful* and *righteous* in forgiving, not merely *lenient* and *merciful*. The Father could not do otherwise than forgive the Christian seeking forgiveness, for His own Son has already provided a complete satisfaction for sin. The process from the human side is, accordingly, amazingly simple.⁸

The believer, at any moment of his Christian life, is either carnal or spiritual. When carnal, the Christian's thoughts and actions are directed by his sin nature and he is out of fellowship with God. When spiritual, the Christian's thoughts and actions are directed by the Holy Spirit and he is in fellowship with God. Feelings have nothing to do either with carnality or spirituality. In fact, the Christian may feel great and be under the influence of his sin nature, or feel terrible and be under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Commission of sin gets the believer into a state of carnality and confession of sin restores fellowship with God.

When the believer is controlled by his sin nature his life will line up with world's value system and he will

⁸ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 202.

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manifest the fruit of the flesh (Gal 5:17-21). When the believer is controlled by the Holy Spirit his life will line up with the teaching of Scripture and he will manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). After the believer has learned to be filled with the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit, there is a need to grow daily through the intake and application of the Word of God.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph 5:15-17)

Time and testing are the final elements necessary to spiritual growth, as the Christian will not go from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity without them. While in prison, the Christian must take advantage of the time afforded to him and study God's Word often and seek to make application whenever opportunity presents itself. He must make certain that he does not give in to the evil pressures of his environment, but stands for the Christian faith and lives for the will of God. As he grows spiritually, the following characteristics will manifest in his life and he will:

1. Submit to God's will (Jam 4:7; cf. Rom 12:1-2).
2. Seek to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31).
3. Display a godly love (1 Cor 13:4-8; 1 John 3:23).
4. Speak biblical truth (Eph 4:15, 25).
5. Show humility (Eph 4:1-2).
6. Be forgiving (Matt 18:21-22).
7. Encourage others to do good works (Heb 10:24).
8. Want to fellowship with Christians (Heb 10:25).
9. Pray for others (2 Th 1:11).

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10. Build others up in the Lord (1 Th 5:11).
11. Be devoted to fellow believers (Rom 12:10).
12. Live by faith (Rom 1:17).

God calls every Christian in prison to know and utilize the spiritual blessings He has given (Eph 1:3). This requires study and a willingness to live a holy life in complete dependence on the Holy Spirit. As a result of living spiritually, Christian virtues such as love, grace, humility and kindness will shine forth like a bright light in a dark place. Where the light of Christianity shines, there a soul is free to live and love, even in the midst of spiritual darkness where evil forces rage. For all the inmates in prison who read this book, I pray with the apostle Paul:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. (Eph 1:17-19)

Biblical Humility¹

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phi. 2:3-4)

Pride is the culprit that has led many persons to jail or prison. We push to promote our will above the will of God. Satan did the same, and it resulted in his fall (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:12-18). In Scripture, the humble are sometimes described as those who live in impoverished or difficult conditions (Deut 15:7; 1 Sam 2:7; 2 Sam 22:28; Jam 1:9); however, the inward virtue of humility does not automatically belong to those who are poor or suffer life's hardships. Humility is a lowliness of mind, an inward quietness before the Lord that reflects a poverty of spirit. The humble know they need God and seek Him for wisdom, guidance and strength. Humility is not a natural quality, nor does it come easily, but it is what the Lord requires of His people (Mic 6:8; Eph 4:1-2; Phi. 2:3-4). The humble live with a constant sense of their weaknesses and inabilities to cope with life apart from God, and are keenly aware of their sinful nature and propensity to turn away from the Lord and befriend the world. Humility is not a

¹ This chapter is a modified extract from my book, *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015).

Biblical Humility

sense of worthlessness, but unworthiness of the Lord's love and blessings. The humble realize they deserve nothing good in this life, and any blessing they receive is from God's grace.

Humility in the spiritual sense is an inwrought grace of the soul that allows one to think of himself no more highly than he ought to think (Eph 4:1–2; Col 3:12–13; cf. Rom 12:3)...It requires us to feel that in God's sight we have no merit and to in honor prefer others to ourselves (Rom 12:10; cf. Prov 15:33). It does not demand undue self-depreciation but rather lowliness of self-estimation and freedom from vanity. The Gk. term *praotēs*, "gentleness" (rendered "meekness" in KJV) expresses a spirit of willingness and obedience and a lack of resistance to God's dealings with us. But humility must also be expressed towards those who wrong us, in order that their insults and wrongdoing might be used by God for our benefit (*see* Acts 20:18–21). It is enjoined of God (Psa 25:9; Col 3:12; James 4:6, 10) and is essential to discipleship under Christ (Matt 18:3–4).²

Humility should not be thought of as passivity or weakness. On the contrary, the humble person pursues righteousness and justice (Mic 6:8) and can be very bold and outspoken. Moses was very humble when doing the Lord's will and standing confidently against Pharaoh to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus

² Merrill Frederick Unger, "Humility" *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

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chapters 3-12). Jesus was humble when driving the money changers from the temple (Matt 21:12-13), or rebuking the Jewish leaders for their arrogance and hypocrisy (Matt 23:13-33). Humility is not thinking less of self, but more of others. Paul writes, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Phi. 2:3). True Christian humility is voluntary—or self-imposed—as the believer surrenders his personal desires in loving service to others for their spiritual and material benefit. Humility has the notion of child-like dependence, as Jesus taught His disciples (Matt 18:3-4). The greatest display of humility is found in God the Son who left His glory in heaven (Phi. 2:5-8; cf. John 17:5), became a man (John 1:1, 14; Heb 10:5), became the servant of others (Mark 10:5; John 13:1-17), and ultimately “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phi. 2:8). The glory of humility is seen at the cross (John 12:23, 32-33), where Jesus gave His life as an atoning substitutionary sacrifice for others (Rom 5:6-10; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 2 Pet 3:18).

Humility is the basis for teachability, as David writes, “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way” (Psa 25:8-9). We sin when we ignore God and try to live independently of Him. Sometimes God uses difficult circumstances to humble us and bring us to the place of perpetual dependence on Him, even though it is our nature to fight against being in the helpless place (read Dan 4:28-37; 2 Cor 12:7-10). Being in the difficult situation—the place of suffering—is sometimes exactly where God wants us, and “the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position” (Jam

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1:9).

Scripture provides a true estimation of reality, allowing us to see God, the world and ourselves from the divine perspective. The Bible teaches that we come from God and that we have worth because we are made in His image (Gen 1:26-27). We live and breathe and eat and enjoy life because God provides for us every moment of every day (Matt 6:25-32). God seeks out the humble, for he says in Isaiah, “to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa 66:2). And Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). “Jesus does not demand visible self-abasement (cf. Mt. 6:16 ff.; Mk. 2:18–19) but a total trust in God that expects everything from him and nothing from self.”³ This is strength through weakness, victory through humility, realizing “the battle is the LORD’S” (1 Sam 17:47; cf. 2 Ch 14:11; 20:15). Scripture reveals the victories of life are not by self-effort, for the Lord declares, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zech 4:6), and, “He gives strength to the weary, and to *him who* lacks might He increases power” (Isa 40:29). Ultimately, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psa 34:18).

Humility is freedom from arrogance. Arrogance is

³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1155.

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an overbearing self-importance which leads to rejection of Divine truth and authority. An arrogant person has a false estimation of himself, his abilities, and the world (1 John 2:16). An arrogant person believes *perception is reality* (Isa 1:18; 55:8-9). According to the Bible, human perception is merely a rough approximation of reality, but it is never equal to it. An arrogant person has an inflated sense of his own abilities and self-worth which leads to pseudo-confidence (1 John 2:16). An arrogant person rarely sees his own faults, but only the faults of others (Jude 16).

The prideful person rejects God and His revelation and seeks to operate independently of the Lord. The believer needs to be aware of pride, for “Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling” (Prov 16:18). Arrogant people rarely see their own faults, but almost always focus on the faults of others. Solomon writes about prideful men and states, “When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom” (Prov 11:2), and, “A man’s pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor” (Prov 29:23). It is the humble person who finds success in life; not necessarily a worldly success, but a divine success, in which the believer lives by faith and pleases the Lord (Heb 11:6). I have found the virtue of humility is an asset to the believer wherever he is, whether in prison, or living in the free world.

Biblical Humility

Love your Enemies¹

Loving your enemies is a biblical command. We love by faith and not by feelings. Love can be a real challenge for the believer in prison. This is because prison harbors some of the worst people in the world, people who normally operate by hatred toward others, seeking to control and degrade them. Jesus told His disciples to “love your enemies” and to “do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27). As a Christian, I’ve often wrestled with the command to love my enemies. It does not come naturally or easily. Biblical love and worldly love are different. Worldly love is often couched in terms of affection or how I feel about someone. For many years I used to think I was supposed to have warm fuzzy feelings for my enemies. I now realize that’s wrong. **Biblical love is a commitment to seek God’s best in others.** I don’t have to like a person to be committed to them and to seek their best interest according to God’s values. I can apply biblical love to everyone, whether it’s my spouse, my child, my brother, my coworker, or even my enemies.

The word *love* in Luke 6:27 is a translation of the Greek verb *agapao*. The verb *agapao* is in the *imperative mood*, which means Jesus is commanding believers to love their enemies. It’s important to understand that God commands our mind and will, but never our emotions. It’s

¹ This chapter is a modified extract from my book, *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015).

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impossible to command an emotion. Feelings simply respond to thought and action. I can have an imaginary thought and experience a real emotion. For example, I could sit in a room by myself and imagine an evil woman killing a helpless infant by strangling him to death. I could then imagine this woman disposing of the baby's body and then going on with her life and being successful and prosperous and never being caught or punished for the murder she committed. Though fictional, this image in my mind evokes emotion within me. Anger is the emotion that comes as a response to a perceived injustice, real or imagined. My emotions cannot differentiate reality from fiction. They only respond to the thoughts in my mind, and when I have thoughts of injustice—whether real or imagined—I get angry. Emotion always follows thought. As I think, so I feel.

Loving our enemies has little to do with how we feel. If anything, we love them by faith in spite of how we feel. We don't have to like our enemies to love them. We don't have to approve of their false beliefs, sinful lifestyle, or cultural values, but we are commanded to love them. Loving our enemies means that we identify those who hate us, and perhaps mean to harm us, and commit ourselves to their best interest by seeking God's will for their lives. We love them by praying for them, acting in a Christian manner and speaking God's truth to them when given the opportunity.

Biblically, there is no greater expression of love than Jesus Christ. All that Jesus said and did was done graciously and in love towards others. Certainly the love and goodness He displayed to His enemies was never based on their worthiness. Jesus displayed love and goodness

Love your Enemies

when:

1. Healing the sick (Matt 8:1-4).
2. Casting out demons (Matt 8:16).
3. Feeding the multitudes (Matt 14:19-20).
4. Speaking divine Truth (John 1:14; 14:6).
5. Dying for sinners (Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4).
6. Providing eternal life (John 10:28).

These are but a few of the loving and good acts of Christ. We are all naturally drawn to the pleasant things that Christ did such as healing the sick and feeding the hungry. Yet, in love and goodness He also spoke perfect truth to others, even if they hated Him because of it. Sometimes it is an act of love and goodness to point others to God by sharing the truth they need to hear, even if it exposes their sin and makes them feel uncomfortable. I think this can be done gently and with respect.

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, **with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition**, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)

Sometimes people respond positively when hearing God's Word, but often they respond negatively. At one time, Jesus told the Pharisees, "You are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth" (John 8:41). It amazes me that there were many who hated the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love your Enemies

Being a Christian means being like Christ. It means learning His Word and acting as He would act. Unbelievers are sometimes positive to Christian love and goodness, but sometimes they are negative to it, even hating the Christian for being like Christ. In fact, Jesus warned His disciples that they would be hated for following Him and said, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man” (Luke 6:22). This is a difficult saying and certainly one that should make every believer count the cost of discipleship. However, though there are times we will face opposition for our Christianity, there is much about the Christian life that is beautiful. There is a love and kindness in Christianity that the world does not know and never will, because it does not know Christ. Though we cannot say and do all that Jesus did, nor can we be as perfect as He was; yet we are to strive to love and do good to others as Christ commands. Sometimes loving our enemies and doing good means being gentle and kind and tender, meeting physical and spiritual needs as they arise, but others times it means speaking strongly, rebuking, and even giving offense. There is a time to speak softly and graciously in order to preserve peace (Psa 34:14; Prov 15:1, 18; 16:32; 17:14; Rom 12:18; 14:19; Heb 12:14); however, there is also a time for strong language to correct those who need it (Matt 16:21-23; 23:13-39; Acts 13:9-11; 1 Cor 3:1-3; Gal 2:11-14; Heb 5:11-14). **How we behave in love depends on what the other person needs to bring them to God.** Love can be both gentle and strong. Grace means we’re doing it sacrificially for their best interest. Remember, **Biblical love is a commitment to seek God’s best in others.**

An Ambassador for Christ¹

The moment I believed in Jesus Christ as my Savior, I became part of God's family. This means that I am related to the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16), the One who loved me and gave Himself for me that I might enjoy the forgiveness of my sins and eternal life (John 3:16; Eph 1:7). Jesus Christ is divine royalty, and to be related to Him is to be elevated to a place of honor. The Christian, wherever he is, is to see himself as he relates to Christ. Unfortunately, many Christians think like peasants rather than seeing themselves from the divine perspective. We are what God declares, and we should learn to think and live as He directs.

During my time in prison, the Lord blessed me with opportunity to study His Word, pray for others, and to share the Gospel when given occasion. The Lord used me as His ambassador to unsaved persons. I had the privilege of witnessing some men come to faith in Christ and to be reconciled with God.

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not

¹ This chapter is a modified extract from my book, *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015).

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counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:18-20)

An ambassador is an official dignitary who represents the country that sent him into a foreign land, and his message is derived from the sending ruler. The Christian ambassador represents the Lord Jesus Christ who has called and equipped him to speak on His behalf to those outside of Christ's kingdom (John 18:36; Acts 26:17-18; Col 1:13-14). The Christian message is simple, that God reconciles us to Himself through the cross of Christ (2 Cor 5:18-21; Eph 2:13-16; Col 1:19-20; 1 Pet 3:18), providing us forgiveness for all our sins (Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14), and the gift of His righteousness which makes us acceptable to Him (Isa 61:10; 2 Cor 5:21; Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9).

God does not have to be reconciled to man, because that was accomplished by Christ on the cross. It is sinful man who must be reconciled to God. "Religion" is man's feeble effort to be reconciled to God, efforts that are bound to fail. The Person who reconciles us to God is Jesus Christ, and the place where He reconciles us is His cross.²

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 649.

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As Christian ambassadors, “we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5). God always goes before us and providentially coordinates our meetings with others, working in their hearts to receive our message (John 16:7-11), and rescuing from Satan’s captivity those who believe the gospel (2 Cor 4:3-4; 2 Th 2:24-26). God never forces Himself on anyone, but neither does He leave unpunished those who reject the Christian message (Rev 20:11-15). Those who disregard God’s gracious offer of salvation choose to continue in Satan’s world system (John 15:19; Rom 1:18-25; 1 John 2:15-17), selecting darkness rather than light (John 3:19-20), and choosing the path that leads to eternal destruction (Matt 7:13-14). As heavenly ambassadors we are responsible to present a clear biblical message, and though we may passionately seek to persuade, we are not accountable for how others respond to it.

As an ambassador of Christ, we are to speak and act with dignity at all times. We are to be clear in speaking God’s truth to people who are made in His image (fallen as they are). We are to point them to Christ that they might turn to Him for salvation and be born again to a new spiritual life (1 Pet 1:3, 23). We are to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), “with grace” (Col 4:6), and “with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15-16). There’s no place for hostility in the Christian life, for “the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (Jam 1:20). Scripture tells us:

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are

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in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26).

In closing, the Christian ambassador is one who adheres to the highest standards of moral excellence according to Scripture as he serves the Lord and communicates His message that God reconciles us to Himself through the cross of Christ (2 Cor 5:18-21; Eph 2:13-16; Col 1:19-20; 1 Pet 3:18), providing us forgiveness for all our sins (Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14), and the gift of His righteousness which makes us acceptable to Him (Isa 61:10; 2 Cor 5:21; Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9).

Wisdom from God¹

The Christian in prison will succeed to the highest level only when He learns and lives by God's wisdom. Biblical wisdom is the skill necessary to apply God's truth in whatever situation we find ourselves. It does not always mean things will turn out the way we want, but rather that God is glorified in all we say and do.

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion, a wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:1-7)

According to verses 2-6 we see a five-fold purpose for Proverbs: 1) "to know wisdom and instruction," 2) "to discern the sayings of understanding," 3) "to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity," 4) "to give prudence to the naïve," and 5) "to

¹ This chapter is a modified extract from my book, *Making a Biblical Marriage*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015), 107-111.

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understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.”

The Hebrew word *hokmah* (translated “wisdom” in verse 2) appears forty-five times in the book of Proverbs and is the common theme of the book. In a general sense, wisdom is the knowledge necessary to perform a task successfully. Overall, the book of Proverbs is a compilation of wise sayings which provide the necessary instruction for making good choices in life. The book of Proverbs belongs to that group of biblical literature classified as wisdom writings; and the didactic nature of Proverbs made it useful for parents who wanted to instruct their children, as well as teachers who wanted to instruct their students. A proverb is a concise and pithy statement that summarizes an experience or compares two things; thus capturing a principle that benefits one throughout his life. Often it is teaching by analogy.

In verse 7 Solomon tells his readers that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; [whereas] fools despise wisdom and instruction.” In this antithetical parallelism, Solomon contrasts the healthy humble minded person who fears the LORD with the arrogant person who shuns Him. The attitude of the heart determines how a person responds to God’s revelation. The person who fears God respects His authority and responds properly to His word. The fool is the one who is devoid of God’s word, or rejects it after hearing it.

The Bible contrasts divine wisdom which comes from God, and worldly wisdom which ultimately comes from Satan (James 3:15-17). **Divine wisdom** is the knowledge necessary to perform a task in conformity to His

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standards and values. Examples of divine wisdom include:

1. **Artistic wisdom:** The ability to create works of art (e.g. the artisans who created the garments for Levitical priests as well as the articles of worship in the Jewish Temple, Ex 28:3; 31:2-5; 1 Ki. 7:14).
2. **Academic wisdom:** The ability to learn about God's world (e.g. zoology, biology, botany, etc.) and write books (e.g. Solomon's proverbs and songs, 1 Ki. 4:29-34).
3. **Judicial wisdom:** The ability to decide legal matters for God's people (e.g. Judges, Solomon, etc. 1 Ki. 16:28).
4. **Military wisdom:** The ability to defeat God's enemies (e.g. Joshua, David; Prov 20:18; 21:22; 24:6).
5. **Governing wisdom:** The ability to lead God's people into His will (e.g. Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah, Church Elders, etc.).
6. **Serving wisdom:** The ability to meet the needs of others (e.g. Deacons, Acts 6:3).
7. **Teaching wisdom:** The ability to communicate clearly God's Word to others (e.g. Moses, Paul, etc., Col 1:9).
8. **Spiritual wisdom:** The ability to live God's will in accordance with His Word.

Worldly wisdom is the knowledge required to live in Satan's fallen world, has the appearance of real wisdom, but is actually deceptive and seeks to ensnare people in Satan's schemes (Ex 7:11; Col 2:23; Jam 3:14-15). Those who are called wise in a worldly sense are actually fools by God's estimation. The majority of people in this world operate according to worldly wisdom and live their lives

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outside of God's will.

Examples of worldly wise men include the magicians of Pharaoh's court who were demonically enabled to replicate some of the miracles performed by Moses (Ex 7:11), and Nebuchadnezzar's counselors who claimed to be able to interpret dreams and have spiritual insight into his future (Dan 2:12-18). The apostle Paul spoke out against worldly judgments which have "the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col 2:23); and James admonished his readers to be on guard against "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" which is a wisdom that "does not come down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic" (Jam 3:14-15). In the end, worldly wisdom is always Satan-serving; whereas divine wisdom is always God-serving.

We do well to know that it is possible to lose wisdom and become a fool. We know that even Lucifer was once wise, for the prophet Ezekiel tells us that he had "the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezek 28:12). Ezekiel goes on to say that Lucifer's "heart was lifted up" because of his beauty and his wisdom became corrupted by reason of his splendor (Ezek 28:17). From within himself Satan's wisdom was turned to foolishness. Through Isaiah the prophet, God gives us a glimpse into Satan's mind, and tells us what he was thinking in his heart. At the time of his foolishness Satan declared:

"I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount

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of assembly in the recesses of the north. ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ (Isa 14:13-14)

Lucifer created his kingdom of darkness when he sinned, and through temptation he brought down to death the first humans when he convinced them to turn from God and follow his advice. Now all men are born into this world of darkness, into Satan’s kingdom, born in Adam, born in sin. The minds of all men are darkened by the sin nature and have a propensity toward foolishness. Even after regeneration, men’s minds are not suddenly wise, but still dark from all the world’s philosophies. Two things must happen before a saved person can have God’s wisdom: 1) he must learn to fear the Lord, and 2) he must discipline his mind to seek truth. The fear of the Lord and seeking truth go together like two sides of a coin.

The fear of the Lord is to acknowledge Him as Lord and His right to rule over our lives and to respond with obedience. Solomon declares that we are to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Eccl 12:13). The fear of the Lord is that healthy reverence the believer has for God, knowing that He is the Sovereign Lord of the universe, and that as His creature we do well to submit to Him.

To seek truth means we apply our minds to know God’s word, and once we know it, to apply His truth to every area of our lives. Jesus declared “the man who hears my words and does them shall be compared to a wise man who built his house upon the rock” (Matt 7:24). Here, Jesus tells us the wise man is the one who hears His words and does them. There is order here, for one cannot live what he does not know, and knowledge of God’s word must

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precede application to life.

Jesus, as our role-model, spent His entire life learning and living by His Father's teaching. Luke tells us that Jesus, as a child, "continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom" (Luke 2:40). Messiah, speaking in Isaiah 50:4 states, "He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple." Jesus woke each morning to give His ear to the Father's instruction. Mark tells us in his Gospel, "In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there" (Mark 1:35). It is healthy to fear the Lord and seek His instruction for every area of our life.

God's greatest expression of wisdom is the cross of Christ. To those who hold to worldly wisdom, "the word of the cross is foolishness" (1 Cor 1:18). To those who are saved, the cross of Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). Divine wisdom always leads one to God through the cross of Christ. Any so-called wisdom that does not lead one ultimately to the cross of Christ is pseudo-wisdom. God has rejected the world's wisdom, and the world has rejected His.

One knows he has found wisdom when he has found the Lord; for true wisdom exists only in relation to Him. One knows he is growing in wisdom when he fears the Lord, respecting His authority and doing the things that are pleasing in His sight. The believer is benefitted, and God is honored, when His word is understood and obeyed on a regular basis.

The wise believer knows his place in God's

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creation; that he is the creature, and God is the Creator, and there is submission one to the Other. The fool is the one who blurs the creator/creature distinction, and sets his will against the will of God. The fool is devoid of God's wisdom, and his words and actions reveal his darkened heart. On the other hand, the wise man learns God's word that he may live His will, and this too is revealed through his words and actions.

Lastly, the wise believer seeks to incorporate God's word into every area of his life, and does not compartmentalize, leaving some areas to self. Wisdom gives order and purpose to life, and affords one the knowledge necessary to make good choices. The wise believer is able to understand the world around him, and knows why things are the way they are, and why people behave the way they do. Wisdom gives one hope for the future, because Christ is coming back, and He will reign in righteousness and truth (Rev 20:1-6).

Below are forty Scriptural truths regarding biblical wisdom:

1. The Lord possesses and operates by His wisdom (Psa 104:24; Prov 3:19; Jer 10:12).
2. Wisdom comes from the Lord (1 Kings 3:12; Prov 2:6; Dan 2:21; Jam 1:5).
3. God's wisdom is found in Scripture (Psa 19:7; 119:98; Jer 8:9; 2 Tim 3:15).
4. Jesus, while in hypostatic union, had to learn wisdom day by day (Luke 2:40, 52; Isa 50:4).
5. Wisdom is better than riches (Prov 8:11; 16:16).
6. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psa 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10).

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7. Wisdom lies first in what we think, then in what we say and do (Psa 51:6; Col 4:5).
8. The humble receive wisdom (Prov 11:2).
9. Wisdom can be communicated by speech or writing (1 Ki. 11:41; Prov 15:7; 1 Cor 2:6-8, 13).
10. The one who loves his soul seeks wisdom (Prov 19:8; 24:14).
11. Wisdom is pleasant to the soul (Prov 2:10).
12. Wisdom is better than strength (Eccl 9:14-16).
13. A wise man accepts reproof and instruction (Prov 9:8-9; 10:8).
14. The wise man has persuasive speech (Prov 16:23).
15. The wise man boasts of the Lord (Jer 9:23-24).
16. The wise man accepts Jesus as his savior (1 Cor 1:18-31).
17. Christ is the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor 1:24).
18. The wise man walks in righteousness (Hos. 14:9).
19. The wise man hears and acts on the words of Christ (Matt 7:24).
20. The wise man engages in good deeds done in gentleness (Jam 3:13).
21. The wise man controls his temper (Prov 29:11).
22. The wise person avoids intoxication (Prov 20:1).
23. Military victory comes by wise guidance (Prov 20:18; 21:22; 24:6).
24. Wise men hang-out together (Prov 13:20; 15:31).
25. The wise decide judicial matters (Ezra 7:25; 1 Cor 6:1-7).
26. The woman of excellence speaks wisdom (Prov 31:26).
27. The wise parent disciplines his child (Prov 29:15).
28. A wise child is better than a foolish ruler (Eccl 4:13).

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29. The wise child accepts his parents discipline (Prov 13:1).
30. A wise son makes his father and mother happy (Prov 23:15, 24; 27:11; 29:3).
31. Wisdom helps a man understand his culture (Eccl 1:13).
32. Wisdom helps the believer discern the future (Deut 32:29).
33. One does not have to be old to be wise (Dan 1:4; Matt 11:25).
34. Wisdom leads one away from evil (Prov 3:7; 14:16).
35. The wise man learns from nature and others (Prov 6:5; 24:30-34).
36. An accepted bribe blinds the eyes of the wise (Deut 16:19).
37. The wisdom of the world is foolishness (1 Cor 3:19).
38. The fool is the one who rejects and despises wisdom (Prov 1:7; 23:9).
39. The rod of suffering belongs to the one who lacks wisdom (Prov 10:13; 14:3).
40. There is a worldly/demonic wisdom (Ex 7:11; Col 2:23; Jam 3:14-15).

Wisdom from God

Dealing with Fools¹

Fools are everywhere. There are many fools in prison, and there are many fools in the world. The growing Christian, wherever he is, is learning to cast off his own foolishness and live wisely, as God directs. The fear of the Lord is the starting point for divine wisdom.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
(Prov 1:7)

The *fear of the Lord* for the unbeliever is fear of His judgment (Matt 10:28), and it is a fear that can lead to Christ for salvation (1 Cor 15:3-4). For the believer, the *fear of the Lord* is a profound reverence for God because He is holy, righteous and just (Psa 89:14; 1 Pet 1:15-16). It is a healthy fear that leads to knowledge and obedience. Moses wrote, “You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name” (Deut 10:20). The *fear of the Lord* discourages sinfulness because we know He will discipline us in love if we turn away (Heb 12:5-11). The *fear of the Lord* is to hate what God hates; for Scripture reveals, “the fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth” (Prov 8:13). The fool has no fear of God, and he is said to “despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7b).

¹ This chapter is a modified extract from my book, *Making a Biblical Marriage*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015), 113-119.

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The Bible, especially Proverbs, contrasts the wise man (Heb *ḥokmā*; Gk. *sophía*) with the fool (Heb *ʿwīl*, *kʿsīl*, *nābāl*; *sākāl*; Gk. *áphrōn*, *mōrós*, *anóētos*).² Wisdom (Heb *hokmah*, Grk. *sophos*) is the beneficial instruction necessary for making good choices that agree with God’s Word. The Bible contrasts divine wisdom which comes from God, and worldly wisdom which ultimately comes from Satan (James 3:15-17). Divine wisdom is the knowledge necessary to perform a task in conformity to God’s standards and values. Biblical wisdom is based on God’s revelation in the Bible and leads to moral uprightness. The wise man “will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel” (Prov 1:5; cf. 2:5); however, “fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov 1:7b). The fool rejects the wisdom of God in Scripture which leads to salvation and righteous living. The fool can be educated or uneducated, rich or poor, white or black, old or young, male or female. He is friendly toward the world and its philosophies and values that promote human wisdom and accomplishments. “A fool is not necessarily one who is marked by a low IQ but one who leaves God out of his consciousness...The fool is the man who does not take God into consideration in every area of his life.”³

² Allen C. Myers, “Fool”, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 390.

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Designed to Be Like Him: Understanding God’s Plan for Fellowship, Conduct, Conflict, and Maturity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 55.

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The word [fool] is used in Scripture with respect to *moral* more than to intellectual deficiencies. The “fool” is not so much one lacking in mental powers, as one who misuses them; not one who does not reason, but reasons wrongly. In Scripture the “fool” primarily is the person who casts off the fear of God and thinks and acts as if he could safely disregard the eternal principles of God’s righteousness (Psa 14:1; Prov 14:9; Jer 17:11; etc.). Yet in many passages, especially in Proverbs, the term has its ordinary use and denotes one who is rash, senseless, or unreasonable. The expression “you fool” (Matt 5:22) is used in the *moral* sense, means “wicked,” and seems to be equivalent to judging one as worthy of everlasting punishment.⁴

The fool, according to Solomon, is a fool by choice and never by chance. He can stop being a fool anytime he’s ready to learn and apply God’s word. He makes himself a fool by the way he *thinks*, and is identified as a fool by the way he *speaks* and by his *behavior*. Over time, folly can be so ingrained into a person that neither kindness nor suffering can remove it from them. Here are some biblical facts about the fool:

1. The fool is a fool by choice and never by chance (Prov 1:22-33). “How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge?”

⁴ Merrill Frederick Unger, R. K. Harrison, Howard Frederic Vos et al., “Fool”, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

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- (Prov 1:22). “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind” (Prov 18:2; cf. 14:9). He can stop being a fool anytime he’s ready to learn and apply God’s word.
2. The fool can be recognized by his outward behavior. “Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone *that* he is a fool” (Eccl 10:3).
 3. The fool loves to slander others. “He who conceals hatred *has* lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool” (Prov 10:18). Slander is the intentional circulation of a falsehood about another for the purpose of destroying their character.
 4. Wickedness is like a game to fool, and it thrills him to do evil. “Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, and *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding” (Prov 10:23).
 5. A fool can spout proverbial wisdom, but it has no meaning to him personally. “*Like* a thorn *which* falls into the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools” (Prov 26:9; cf. 15:2, 7). There are people who have some biblical knowledge, but because they are a fool it becomes distorted and twisted to their own harm and the harm of others. “A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are the snare of his soul” (Prov 18:7; cf. 10:8, 10).
 6. Children are naturally bent toward foolishness and the loving parent seeks to discipline it out of them. “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him” (Prov 22:15). “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother” (Prov 29:15).

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7. The foolish child rejects his parent's discipline. "A fool rejects his father's discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible" (Prov 15:5).
8. Over time, as the fool becomes an adult, his folly becomes entrenched in his heart and he is very resistant to any external pressures to change. "A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool" (Prov 17:10). "Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *yet* his foolishness will not depart from him" (Prov 27:22).
9. The fool is a grief to his father and mother. "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother" (Prov 10:1; cf. 15:20). "He who sires a fool *does so* to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy" (Prov 17:21; cf. 19:13).
10. The fool ruins his own life and fights against God. "The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the LORD" (Prov 19:3).
11. Fools like to argue with others without a just cause. "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel" (Prov 20:3). It's better to avoid the fool rather than pursue conflict with him. "When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, the foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest" (Prov 29:9; cf. 20:23).
12. Fools are arrogant and often storm through life without consideration of others. "A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless" (Prov 14:16).
13. Those who employ a fool feel the painful effects of his stupidity. "*Like* an archer who wounds everyone, so is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by" (Prov 26:10).

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14. Fools repeat the same ugly acts over and over. “Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly” (Prov 26:11).
15. Fools have no control of their emotions. “A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back” (Prov 29:11; cf. 25:28).
16. Fools pursue worldly pleasure and ruin themselves. “The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure” (Eccl 7:4).
17. The words of the wise are gracious, whereas the words of the fool express wickedness. “Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness” (Eccl 10:12-13).
18. The person who befriends a fool causes himself harm. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov 13:20).

Dealing with the fool:

Wise men often do not answer the fool because he’s not teachable; though there are times the fool needs to be corrected so that his false estimation of himself does not go unchecked. Wise men leave the presence of the fool, as there is no benefit to his company. When one encounters a fool, there are several things one should do depending on the encounter.

1. Once a fool is identified, don’t provoke him, or you will bring grief on yourself. “A stone is heavy and

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- the sand weighty, but the provocation of a fool is heavier than both of them” (Prov 27:3).
2. Avoid speaking in the presence of a fool, or at least keep your words few. “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words” (Prov 23:9). Fools despise wisdom, so they despise those who speak and live by wisdom.
 3. Don’t answer the fool in the midst of his foolishness. “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him” (Prov 26:4). It is foolish to try to correct the fool, and is itself a display of folly that reveals a lack of biblical understanding.
 4. There are times to address the fool so that he does not think himself wise. “Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes” (Prov 26:5). This type of correction does not seek to correct the fool, but only his false estimation of himself. Wisdom discerns when to answer the fool.
 5. Lastly, make the conscious decision to leave the presence of the fool in order to spare yourself any pain. “Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge” (Prov 14:7). This is because “the foolishness of fools is deceit” and there is no truth in their speech (Prov 14:8b).

The information in this chapter has application for the believer who is in prison, but also for when he is released into society. God’s truth is relevant in all situations, all the time.

Dealing with Fools

What Does it Mean to be a Man?¹

What does it mean to be a man? The answers are as varied as the people who give them. Some would point to genetics, anatomy, or character. Others measure men by their accomplishments, by the battles they fight or trials they overcome. The first man (like the first woman) was created in God's image (Gen 1:26-27), and was given specific responsibilities (Gen 2:15-18). God created the man to be in a relationship with Him, to think and act in ways that conform to His character. Man was also created to be in a relationship with a woman (Gen 2:21-25). However, since the historical fall (Gen 3:1-7), manhood has been diminished and perverted, as men seek to define themselves independently of God and contrary to His original design. The world has many worthless men (Deut 13:13; Prov 6:12-14; 16:27-28), and some have perverted their relationship with women (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10). But the godly man delights himself in the ways of the Lord (Psa 1:1-3), loves his wife (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19), walks humbly, and pursues righteousness, justice and love (Psa 132:9; Mic 6:8; Tit 2:11-12).

There is no greater expression of manhood than the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God became a man (John 1:1, 14), manifested grace (John 1:17), lived holy (John 6:69; Heb 7:26), faced adversity with Scripture (Matt

¹ This chapter is a modified extract from my book, *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015).

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4:1-11), and perpetually pleased His Father (John 8:29). He came not to be served, “but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He always spoke truth, both strong and gentle (Matt 23:13-39; John 8:1-11), even in the face of hostility (John 8:40). He welcomed children (Matt 19:13-14), cared for the sick (Matt 8:14-16; 14:14), fed the hungry (Mark 6:35-44), and made the humble feel loved and forgiven (Luke 7:36-50). The King of kings and Lord of lords manifested Himself as the Servant of servants when He humbled Himself and washed the feet of His disciples that they might learn humility (John 13:1-17). By the end of His earthly life He’d completed His Father’s work, saying, “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4), then He faced the cross and laid down His life for others (John 10:11, 15, 17; 1 Cor 15:3-4). The Giver of life has given His life that others might know His Father’s love (1 John 3:16).

A man, in the biblical sense, is a man who models his life after Christ. He is a man who knows what it means to walk with God. He is a Christian in the fullest sense of the word. He is, first and foremost, in a relationship with *the Man*, the Lord Jesus Christ, and has been born again into a new life (1 Pet 1:3). He puts on “a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Col 3:12), and denies “ungodliness and worldly desires” and lives “sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit 2:12). He continually studies Scripture in order to live God’s will (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), and strives toward spiritual maturity (2 Tim 3:16-17; Eph 4:11-16). He regards others as more important than himself, and looks out for the interests of others (Phil 2:3-4). He is filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), and walks in the Spirit (Gal

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5:16). He lives in fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-7), trusting Him to guide and sustain him in all things. His life is being transformed, to think and act less like the world (Rom 12:1-2), and conform to the image of the One who saved him (Rom 8:29). He does not love the world (1 John 2:15-17), but shows gracious love to his enemies who live in the world (Matt 5:43-45; Rom 12:19-21). He shows love within the body of Christ (1 Th 4:9; 1 John 3:23), and helps the needy, widows and orphans (Jam 1:27). As a son, he honors his father and mother (Eph 6:1-3), as a husband, he loves his wife as Christ loves the church, providing, protecting, and honoring her always (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7), and as a father, he teaches his children the ways of the Lord (Eph 6:4; cf. Deut 6:5-7). These are not all of the characteristics of the mature Christian man, but they are among the most important.

What Does it Mean to be a Man?

Walking with God¹

I was blessed during my time in prison because the Lord was with me. The blessing came because I learned to submit myself to the Lord and walk with Him. Oh, there were times I briefly walked away from the Lord, but He was always at the place where I left, and He always welcomed back as I came confessing my sin and seeking His grace. The Lord desires all His children walk with Him, wherever they are.

Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. (Gen 5:22-24)

The genealogical record of Genesis chapter 5 is repetitious: men *lived* and *died*. The repetition is broken with one man, Enoch, as Moses wrote, “God took him” (Gen 5:24). God decided His friend, the one who “walked” with Him, would not see death, so the Lord took him directly to heaven. “The word *walk* implies a steady, progressive relationship and not just a casual acquaintance. To walk **with God** is the business of a lifetime, and not just

¹ This chapter is a modified extract from my book, *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*, (Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Publishing, 2015).

Walking with God

the performance of an hour.”² It is written in the New Testament, “By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God” (Heb 11:5).

Enoch walked with God because he was His friend and liked His company, because he was going in the same direction as God, and had no desire for anything but what lay in God’s path. We walk with God when He is in all our thoughts; not because we consciously think of Him at all times, but because He is naturally suggested to us by all we think of; as when any person or plan or idea has become important to us, no matter what we think of, our thought is always found recurring to this favorite object, so with the godly man everything has a connection with God and must be ruled by that connection. When some change in his circumstances is thought of, he has first of all to determine how the proposed change will affect his connection with God—will his conscience be equally clear, will he be able to live on the same friendly terms with God and so forth. When he falls into sin he cannot rest till he has resumed his place at God’s side and walks again with Him. This is the general nature of walking with God; it is a persistent endeavor to hold all our life open to God’s inspection and in conformity to His will; a

² William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 38.

Walking with God

readiness to give up what we find does cause any misunderstanding between us and God; a feeling of loneliness if we have not some satisfaction in our efforts at holding fellowship with God, a cold and desolate feeling when we are conscious of doing something that displeases Him. This walking with God necessarily tells on the whole life and character. As you instinctively avoid subjects which you know will jar upon the feelings of your friend, as you naturally endeavor to suit yourself to your company, so when the consciousness of God's presence begins to have some weight with you, you are found instinctively endeavoring to please Him, repressing the thoughts you know He disapproves, and endeavoring to educate such dispositions as reflect His own nature. It is easy then to understand how we may practically walk with God—it is to open to Him all our purposes and hopes, to seek His judgment on our scheme of life and idea of happiness—it is to be on thoroughly friendly terms with God.³

Walking with God starts with a relationship. It is a relationship in which we are rightly related to God by faith (John 3:16), and one that continues in faith (2 Cor 5:7), trusting Him in all things (Prov 3:5-6). To “walk with God” is the ideal standard for a believer (Lev 26:3-12; Gal 5:16, 25; Eph 4:1; Col 2:6-7; cf. Rev 3:4). It does not mean a life of sinless perfection; rather, it means that when we sin, we handle it in a biblical manner with humility and confession

³ Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1893), 51-53.

Walking with God

(e.g. 2 Sam 12:1-23; cf. 1 Kings 11:4; 1 John 1:8-10). Walking with God means we go in the same direction He is going, and like a friend, we are glad to share in His fellowship (1 John 1:1-10). It means God is regularly in our thoughts, and we live every day conscious of Him and His will for our lives (Rom 12:1-2; Col 3:16-17). Walking with God means we are open and honest with Him about everything, and agree to let His light shine in our lives, not fearing what it exposes (1 John 1:5-7). It means being sensitive to what may offend Him, and making every effort to please Him through a life of faith (2 Cor 5:9; Heb 11:6). May we all learn to walk with the Lord.

Wrestling with God¹

God blesses and disciplines. He comforts and corrects. He meddles in our affairs. He never leaves us alone. Why should He? He loves us too much to leave us where we are. He wants the best in us and from us. He wants to mature us. Sometimes we resist Him, like a child wanting our own way; we fight Him, thinking we know best. I'm talking about believers. I'm talking about myself.

Jacob was a man with a strong will. His name in Hebrew means *heel grabber*, or *supplanter*. Jacob's life had been marked by self-reliance as he supplanted others for selfish ends. He wanted his way and pushed to get it by whatever means necessary (read Gen 25-36). God permitted Jacob to have his way for much of his life, but there were turning points where God humbled His servant. Genesis 32 records a turning point where God physically crippled and mentally humbled Jacob.

Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.²³ He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone, and a man [*theophany* - God in human form] wrestled

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with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him [God crippled Jacob for life]. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel [Heb *God fights*]; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob named the place Peniel [Heb *face of God*], for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." (Gen 32:22-30)

Jacob fought a "man" that night, not realizing he was wrestling with God (Gen 32:28-30). It was God—in human form—who started the fight, and Jacob might have declined the match if he had actually known his opponent. Jacob was accustomed to defeating others, but he lost this time. He lost in a way that together hurt and helped him. He was both crippled and blessed by his Victor. Jacob limped away a better man.

Jacob memorialized the place where God changed his life. He called it "Peniel", which in Hebrew means "the Face of God." He knew, deep down inside, that his encounter with God could have ended his life, and in humility said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (Gen 32:30).

Wrestling with God

I think the fight shows something about God and believers and the way we are with each other. God sometimes cripples us before He blesses us, and sometimes we fight with God before we realize He's on our side to help us. We can be so stubborn at times!

Wrestling with God

Final Thoughts

These truths have been tested by many Christians since the church began nearly two thousand years ago and have been proven to sustain the believer in the harshest situations and to bring glory to God. The prison environment sometimes provides a concentration of evil, but victory in the Christian life is not deterred because of that environment, since God and His Word are greater than anything Satan can create. Many people fall victim to the tyranny of inmates who are given over to evil and who perpetuate Satan's values in many of America's prisons. Yet, there are strong believers who have laid hold of God's Word and walked by means of the Spirit and proven to be a light in a dark place. Such men are heroes, having stood against the tide of evil that plagues our prisons today. God continues to look for good men, solid Christians, who will stand for truth and righteousness and show love to the unlovely and grace to the undeserving. We need more Christian heroes to take a stand for Christ in America's jails and prisons and hopefully this book will provide some insight on how to accomplish that task.

Sola Gloria Dei – To God Alone is the Glory ~

Final Thoughts

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