

Bible Studies Recapitulated

Volume One: Communicating with God

by Dick Gibbs

Bible Studies Recapitulated: Communicating with God

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Bible Studies Simplified: Communicating with God

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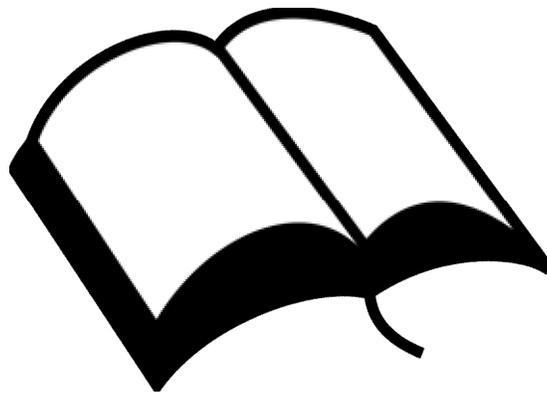
Part One

God

In This Part...

Chapter 1: *Qualities of God*

Chapter 2: *Acknowledging God*



Ps. 86:10—*For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.*

Chapter 1

Qualities of God

In This Chapter...

- A. God is the One True God*
- B. God is the Creator*
- C. God is the Sustainer of the Universe*
- D. God is Timeless and Immutable*
- E. God is Huge, but Personal*

A. God is the One True God

There have always been substitutes for the true and living God. Many gods have been raised up throughout history, and in the United States today, they are numerous. These gods frequently have no official names and no apparent connection with the supernatural. They are not usually recognized as “idols”, but they are clearly objects of worship and adoration. One example is money; others include sex, addictions, pleasure, recognition, possessions, and power...and there are many more. These are false gods, exalted by many devotees.

The ultimate truth that everyone will learn sooner or later is that there is only one God. Jer. 10:10 says, “But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King.” Being God, He puts idols in their place, as per Is 41:21-24, which says this:

“Present your case,” says the Lord. “Set forth your arguments,” says Jacob’s King. “Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good

or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable.”

Things that we rely on that exclude God have no real power, and are “less than nothing”. In Deut. 32:39, God declares, “See that I myself am He! There is no god besides me.” And in Ps. 50:22, we see what can happen if we ignore God. This verse says, “Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue.”

God’s rightful place as *the only God* is well established in Scripture. Ps. 82:18 says, “Let them know that you, whose name is the Lord—that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.” He is unique and distinct, our ultimate Superior. We can draw no other conclusion: God alone is God. In Is. 48:5 we see it again. This passage says this:

Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, “My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.”

Finally, Ps. 86:10 caps it, saying, “For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.”

All that we will study in this book is predicated on the existence of the one true God. That is the beginning of all faith and understanding. Failure to accept and honor this reality is the basis for all the bad that will ever transpire, and acceptance of it brings great promise that good can come to a dark and dismal world.

Seeing God as God, and recognizing His supremacy in all that exists, is the foundation for all the truth we will ever practice, all the good we will ever do, and all the prayers we will ever pray. The search is over! God has announced Himself, and ours is but to accept His Word as truth. Having acknowledged this, we can launch a quest for full knowledge of Him.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. How many true “gods” are there?

Question 2. Name some “false gods” or “idols” in your society.

Question 3. Privately answer this: Do you have idols or things that pull you away from God?

Other Scriptures

Ex. 3:14a—God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”

I Cor. 8:6—Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Remember

There is one God. He is our God, and our Father. He alone is God.

B. God is the Creator

We do not know what existed before God created the world, but we know that God was there, because without Him, nothing would exist. An existence without a Creator makes no sense, as there would be no original cause, or pre-existent force. The last book in the Bible, like the first, makes it clear who the Creator is, saying, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11). We cannot escape the truth that God made all things.

Heb. 11:3 offers this: “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” The psalmist also extolled God’s creative work, saying, “How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures” (Ps. 104:24). And Heb. 3:4b concludes that “God is the builder of everything.”

Creation is not an accident. It is the deliberate construction of reality as conceived, designed, and formed by God. This is confirmed in Ps. 102:25, which says, “In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.” We see this again and again, as in Ps. 100:3, “Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his...” And in Is. 64:8b, “We are all the work of your hand.”

God created us for eternal life and fellowship with Him. This is seen in 2 Cor. 5:4b-5, which says the following:

That is why He made us, “...we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling [body] so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by [eternal] life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”

Later, we will discuss the process for receiving eternal life, but for now we acknowledge that He created us for Himself. God also created us for “holiness”, or to live in ways that reflect “holy” behavior. This is given in Eph. 2:10, which says, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” This is rich soil for future studies; we will be exploring this concept and others connected with it in considerable depth.

Creation calls to us, beckoning us to embrace our Creator and to honor and recognize Him. Rev. 14:7 urges us to “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” When we look at creation all around us, we cannot deny the Creator. Rom. 1:19-20 confirms this:

...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Creation speaks to us...and we must listen.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What existed before creation? (Hint: “Nothing” is **not** the right answer)

Question 2. Why did God make us?

Question 3. What is the evidence for a “creator”?

Question 4. Do you believe that God created the universe and all that is in it?

Other Scriptures

Jer. 32:17—Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

Is. 43:7—...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

Jer. 27:5—With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.

Remember

God is the Creator of all that exists. How can we ignore such a great God as this? How can we take one step without wanting Him there with us?

C. God is the Sustainer of the Universe

We have seen that God alone is God, and there is no other. And we have seen that God created everything that exists. Now we want to see the hand of God in sustaining the universe. First of all, we see in Scripture that the universe is not unlimited, as some think. It is finite. The following statements and corresponding verses give evidence that the universe is limited:

- The universe was “formed”, and only finite entities have “shape”. Heb. 11:3 a —“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”
- Jesus Christ fills the whole universe. You can’t “fill” infinity. Eph. 4:10 c —“...in order to fill the whole universe.”

- The universe is a unified entity, that can be destroyed. 2 Pet. 3:10b (NET)—“...the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze...”
- The universe is a harmonious “whole”, which means it has boundaries. Col. 1:16b-17a—“...all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”
- The universe has an origin, so it is not infinite. Rom. 11:36a—“For from him and through him and to him are all things.”

And to be clear, God IS infinite, the origin and energy for all finite “existents” (all things that exist). As we begin to see God as the Creator and Sustainer of all creation, His infinite power becomes increasingly apparent. Is. 48:12-13 portrays His power in the following:

Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together.

Because of God’s power, when He speaks, the universe stands at attention. Is. 40:25-26 confirms this, saying this:

“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens; Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

Once again, God created and now sustains all things. This includes time, seasons, and even weather, as per Ps. 74:15-17:

It was you who opened up springs and streams; you dried up the ever flowing rivers. The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and the moon. It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter.

Ps. 65:9 says it this way: “You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.” We see this again in Ps. 135:7, which says, “He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth, he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.” We must be aware of Who is holding the universe together and is directing its course.

Daniel extolled God’s power, and His wisdom as well, in the way He sustains the universe. Dan. 2:21 says, “Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons...” We can see that God is the life of the universe. Later on, we will see that God not only *sustains* everything, He also *controls* it. It is time for us to open our eyes to see Who God really is.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Give one piece of evidence that the universe is finite.

Question 2. If the universe is not infinite, what is?

Question 3. What two qualities of God are most evident in God's creating and sustaining the universe?

Question 4. How is everything around you being sustained, from the galaxies down to the solar system, throughout the earth, and into the room or sky that now encloses you?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 147:5—Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Neh. 9:6—...You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

Ps. 89:11-13—The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it. You created the north and south...Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.

Job 12:10—In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Ps. 33:8-9—Let the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Remember

God sustains your heartbeat, your breathing, and your life...along with the rest of the universe. His sustaining power can become very personal to you, when you discover how to access it. That's where we're headed.

D. God is Timeless and Immutable

We are confronted with an inability to imagine the true length of eternity. Our perspective is mostly finite...limited to peanut butter and crackers and room temperature. To grasp for even a second anything *outside* of time is beyond our capacity. Yet this is God...He is **OUTSIDE** of time, because He *invented* time. He is not confined to any part of His creation, including time *and* space. He can be *anywhere* at *any time*...past, present, or future. He is not trapped by the present moment as we are. He is "free to roam".

Notice in Ps. 93:1-2 the contrast between eternal God and time-bound creation:

The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.

Time and the world are limited and constricted, but God is eternal. Of this, Ps. 90:2 says, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” This truth echoes throughout all of creation. You hear the voice of God: “I am the Alpha and the Omega”, says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty’” (Rev. 1:8). This sends chills up my finite spine, as I contemplate how far beyond description and imagination God is.

God is timeless, moving in and around time, as He chooses. But God is constant. In dealing with time and sequential events, He devised a plan for His creation, considering all its twists and kinks and seemingly unexpected turns. But He knew, indeed, has always known, all that would happen...and has accounted for every second and every molecule in every aspect of reality. And behind all the seeming unpredictability of creation and existence, there is an unchanging God...with a fixed plan. What may seem to be “fate” or “chance” or “coincidence” is all part of God’s plan. And He continues on all the same...without alteration.

Ps. 102:25-27 shows us the immutability of God, saying the following:

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

God remains the same. He is “pre-existent” and “persistent”, the initial Predecessor and the final Successor. No wrinkles. No slow-down. No thermo-dynamic decline. God stays the same...as does His Son. Heb. 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” We can only exclaim, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting” (1 Chron. 16:36). Apart from Him, “there is no God” (Is. 44:6b).

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Are time and eternity the same? If not, how are they different?

Question 2. Is God ever surprised by anything?

Question 3. Name one thing that has changed about God over time.

Other Scriptures

Jude 1:25—...to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Rev. 22:13—I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

Ps. 145:13—Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

Remember

God exists on a plane we cannot see, but He visits us on ours. He is eternal, but can occupy time in the manner He chooses. Behind the scenes, and in keeping with His eternal character and divine nature, He is always the same. What He is, He is forever.

E. God is Huge, But Personal

We have established the size and power of God. 1 Ki. 8:27 confirms our findings, saying, “The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you.” There is absolutely nothing in all of creation that can surround or limit God, because He has no boundaries or dimensions or any other qualities that confine Him to a space or a time. He is bound only by Himself, which cannot change. He is the eternal, immutable, boundless, holy God.

God is bigger than we can imagine, yet He is up close and intimate. He is not distant, even though He is “out there”. Wherever else He is, He is still right here. Jer. 23:23-24 confirms this, saying, “Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the Lord, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the Lord? ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’” God does not “come down” to us, or “go far out” to tend to distant stars...He is already there...and here. He “fills” everything in and around the universe, because he is everywhere.

We cannot comprehend this, and we have many questions. But, regardless of His extent and size, He is very personal...a real Being that knows us and knows everything about us...and He cares about us. Deut. 10:14-17 says the following:

To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today...For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome.

God chooses to love us, even though we are tiny and He is huge and infinitely powerful. And wherever we are, He is there also. Deut. 31:8 assures us of His presence, saying, “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” We begin to get a glimmer of what God thinks of us, even after we failed Him from the beginning. He loves us, and watches over us. Prov. 33:13-15 says, “From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth—he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.”

Finally, Ps. 136:5-9 recognizes God’s care for us, as follows:

...who by his understanding
 Made the heavens,
His love endures forever.
 who spread out the earth upon
 the waters,
His love endures forever.
 the sun to govern the day,
His love endures forever.
 the moon and stars to govern
 the night
His love endures forever.

God is everywhere. He sees us and knows our failings...yet His love for us goes on forever. That is grace! Big God, yes...but also big love.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Where is God?

Question 2. What is God's abiding feeling toward us?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 113:4—The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens.

Gen. 28:15—I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Prov. 5:21-22—For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.

Remember

It must always be recalled that God is the infinite, all-powerful Creator. We must never forget His bigness. Much of what we will understand about God and His plan for us is predicated on a perspective of God as huge and competent, and we ourselves as small and inadequate. At the same time, we must remember His love for us, because, as we shall see, love is the basis for His sharing His great righteousness and strength with us.

Chapter 2

Acknowledging God

In This Chapter...

- A. Giving Acknowledgement*
- B. Acknowledging God at Salvation*
- C. Acknowledging God after Salvation*

A. Giving Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement is not just a passing wave...it is giving full credit to something or someone, based on an understanding of the thing or person being acknowledged. Webster defines “acknowledge” as follows:

1. To admit as true.
2. To recognize the authority or claims of.
3. To respond to.
4. To express thanks for.
5. To state that one understands.

Applied to God, point by point, these would call for us to do the following:

1. Admit that God is real and that His Word is true.
2. Humble yourself and submit to His authority and will.
3. Respond to Him with faith.
4. Thank Him for everything.
5. Seek understanding in His Word.

The implications of acknowledging God go far beyond just casually nodding toward God as in a fleeting, social tip-of-the-hat. Acknowledging God is full recognition of all He is, and a true embracing of all He offers. (We will see more about what He offers in future studies.)

Prov. 3:5-6 gives a clear guide for acknowledging God, and suggests what we can expect when we do. This passage says the following:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

There are several implications in this passage that we must not miss, as follows:.

- “Trust in the Lord.” This is an exercise of faith, which we will discuss soon.
- “Lean not on your own understanding.” The smartest person in the world cannot know the ways of God apart from knowing the truths of His Word.
- “In all your ways...(wherever you are and whatever you do)...acknowledge Him.” We need to know more about this. To “acknowledge” Him, we must “know” Him...which makes learning about Him a primary objective.
- If you acknowledge God, truly recognize who He is, He will “make your paths straight”. He will show you the way.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. When is the proper time to acknowledge God?

Question 2. What is the main thing we must do before we can truly “acknowledge” God? (Hint: The answer is buried in the word itself.)

Question 3. What does God promise to do when we acknowledge Him?

Question 4: Are you presently acknowledging God?

Other Scriptures

Daniel 11:39—He [the king] will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him.

1 Cor. 16:18—For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition [acknowledgement].

Remember

Acknowledgement is true recognition of God. As we learn more about Him, our recognition will grow into admiration, and then into adoration. The key to “acknowledging” God is “knowing” God. So please keep reading.

B. Acknowledging God at Salvation

The most significant acknowledgement we will ever make toward God takes place at “salvation”. At salvation, we acknowledge God by acknowledging His Son. Salvation is that moment when we believe that Christ paid for our wrongdoings by His death, and that He was raised from the dead to conquer death and give us eternal life.

The “good news” is that we can share His eternal life by a simple act of faith in Him. John states this good news (the gospel) clearly...many times and in many ways. We see a good example of this in John 1:12-13, which says this:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband’s will, but born of God.

The “re-birth” that takes place at salvation is not “natural” , but *supernatural*. When we believe in Christ, we become qualified for a relationship with Him by supernaturally receiving credit for His righteousness. Rom. 3:21-22a says it clearly:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

He has done the work for us...all that is left is for us to do is believe in Him and His work. We do not have to work for it. And—in case you wondered—faith is NOT work. There is nothing about “believing” that brings merit to the one who does the believing. The merit is in the person and work toward which the belief is directed. Gal. 2:16 says, “Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.” And Eph. 2:8-9 adds, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

From the time we are saved and afterward, we are forever in Christ Jesus, the result of many things that take place in that moment. In the following list, we see a few of these :

- We are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19).
- We are redeemed...paid for by Christ’s death (Rom. 3:24).
- Eternal judgment is removed (John 3:18).
- We are made righteous (2 Cor. 5:21).
- We receive eternal life (John 10:28-29).
- We are indwelled by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:6).
- We are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30).
- All sins are blotted out (Is. 43:25).
- We become a child of God (Rom. 8:16).

We want to learn more about the new life that is given to us at salvation. Now that we are saved,

we want to know how to access all the privileges and benefits that can be ours because we are His children. The first thing we must know is that many provisions for living are *not given automatically*...there are conditions. It is the purpose of this book to explore and understand the conditions for accessing the benefits of grace, ways to meet those conditions, and what we can expect after they have been met. Most believers go through their entire Christian lives without knowing about these assets. This is a tragedy that can be averted.

This book is for believers...for those who have crossed forever the faith line to enter a permanent place in Christ. We have *received* life, and now we want to *live* that life. Gal. 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” There is a way to live the life of Christ, and that is what we want to see.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the greatest acknowledgement we can ever make toward God?

Question 2. What is the one thing we can do that will bring salvation to us?

Question 3. Name at least two things that happen to us at salvation.

Question 4: Have you believed in Christ?

Other Scriptures

John 3:16—For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Rom. 4:1-3—What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Remember

Salvation comes when we believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But that is only the beginning. That is the starting point for all the opportunities that God provides for us to grow in knowledge and grace, so that we can know the “fullness of God” in our lives and in our service to Him.

C. Acknowledging God after Salvation

After we have been born into the family of God, we have new “equipment” for relating to God in our daily lives. As we stated above, God makes special provisions available to us, so that we can live

in ways that please Him and give us full lives. His assets for living exist as “potentialities” for believers; they will always be available, but they are not given unconditionally.

We will always be “saved”, but we may not always look like we are. Our “performance” as Christians is based on our fulfilling certain conditions that make God’s enabling assets available to us. This is what we will be examining throughout the remainder of this book. We will address the question: “How is the Christian life lived?”

For starters, we want to acknowledge God, now that we are *believers*, to establish a base line for our thinking about Him. To help us do this, we will introduce the concept of “fear of the Lord”, which is *acknowledging* God in a spirit of *reverence* and *awe*. Fear is not defined as “terror”, as it relates to God, but as honor, submission, and faith. We acknowledge God *as God*.

Fear of God is the process of a believer opening up the “eyes of the heart” to *see* God. It is a basic attitude of God-consciousness, which will grow as we progress through higher levels of understanding and maturity. Fear of the Lord pre-sets the conditions for progress, and prepares us to learn. As we show reverence toward God, we will become open to hear His Word, to learn His ways, and to allow Him to make us productive.

With this reverence, we will also have greater resistance to sin. 2 Cor. 7:1 says, “Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit”, which is done by “perfecting holiness out of reverence [fear] for God.” Ex. 20:20 confirms this, saying, “God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.” Prov. 16:6 adds one more assurance: “Through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.”

It is essential for a new or “returning” believer to take the time early on, and from then on, to reflect on the qualities of the Infinite Creator and Ultimate Sustainer...to contemplate His being **with** us, **beside** us, and **in** us throughout each night and day. He is there, and you will be strengthened by gratefully acknowledging His presence in your life.

The thing that we seem to recognize first when we fear God is that He is bigger than we thought, and we are smaller. When we realize this, we discover that we are mostly helpless, and must depend on His strength to live in meaningful ways. This is why we must pay close attention to instructions that show us how to access His strength.

We have been chosen for a part in the play called the “Christian Life”...now we need to study the script to understand our part. Here we go.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. God’s assets for living exist as _____.

Question 2. What is the main question we expect to answer in this book?

Question 3. What does “fear of the Lord” help us to resist?

Question 4: When we fear the Lord, we recognize that He is _____, and we are _____.

Other Scriptures

Ps. 86:1—You are my God.

Prov. 3:6—In all your ways acknowledge him and He will make your paths straight.

Ps. 19:9a—The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

Ps. 33:18—But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love....

Prov. 19:23—The fear of the Lord leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.

Prov. 9:10—The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Remember

We want to learn how to live in awe of the Almighty God. An attitude of reverence will prepare us to acquire the spiritual assets we need to make our lives meaningful and fruitful.

Key Points: Part One

- God is infinitely huge, but loves each of us personally.
- We are small...we are not God.
- We acknowledge God when we are saved, and go on acknowledging him after that time, as we grow in grace in knowledge.

Segue to Part Two

We have seen grace and greatness in God. He is infinite, but He loves us...cares what happens in our lives. But we disappointed Him from the beginning, so He had to make plans for our reinstatement as His children, which He does through salvation. We still disappoint Him in our lives as Christians, but He has provided a way for our failures to be erased on an ongoing basis, so we can stand before Him each moment without the stains of sin. This is what we will study in Part Two.

Part Two

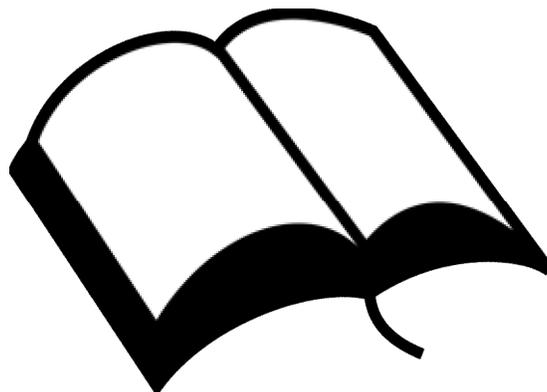
Dealing with Sin

In This Part...

Chapter 3: The Problem of Sin

Chapter 4: The Source for Dealing with Sin

Chapter 5: The Solution for Sin



Rom. 3:23—...*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Chapter 3

The Problem of Sin

In This Chapter...

- A. Introduction to Sin*
- B. The Types of Sin*
- C. Lists of Sins*
- D. Sexual Immorality: Prime Example of Sin*
- E. Idolatry and Sin*
- F. Allies of Sin*

A. Introduction to Sin

Sin is the greatest problem in the universe. Sin was originated by, and is now supported through, the most powerful forces in all of existence, outside of God Himself. Sin has *supernatural* underpinnings. Sin is such a huge issue that the Son of God had to sacrifice His life to overcome it. Sin is not an “infraction” or a “misstep” or a “misdeed”...sin is the most horrible, monstrous, malevolent condition that can ever occur...and we do it all the time. We believe in Christ, and we are seeking God’s power and blessings, but we sin, because it is our “nature” to do so. We have a “sinful” nature.

Most of what we will study throughout this book is designed to address the problem of sin. This is because sin is not what it seems, and we underestimate its destructive capabilities, frequently ignoring the resources God offers to enable us to deal with it. In this book, we will bring out techniques for overcoming sin. These are clearly described and delineated in Scripture, even though they are often overlooked by preachers and Bible teachers.

(God, be gracious to us...we want to know how to deal with this unleashed dragon that stalks and attacks at every turn. We want to stay clean and live right. Show us in these studies how this is

done.)

When we look away from God, we instantly fall into sins of all sorts...sins of the eyes, the tongue, the hands, the feet, the heart, and so on. After all, we're only human, and when we are most "human", we are least "divine". If sin is present in our lives, we cannot access God's divine assets. Sin must be *avoided*...or *removed*. We will look at both of these.

Did we mention that sin is bad? It keeps us away from God's strengthening provisions. On the other hand, when we are close to God, we have opportunities to love, to trust, to grow, to understand, to witness, to serve, to rest, and many other things. We will study all of these. But when we sin, problems arise: self-destruction, harm to others, divine punishment, frustration, fear, unhappiness, isolation from God, relationship difficulties, etc.

With God: *production*. With sin: *destruction*. This is why Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Deliver us from evil." We must know more about this force from which we have to be "delivered". Fortunately, as we said, evil is well-defined in the Bible...to help us identify sin...and to prepare us to overcome it.

Generally, we tend to see sin as something others do...mistakes in behaviors or attitudes that we observe in them. Our own sins are harder to see. In evaluating ourselves, it is easy for us to focus on our own areas of strength, while throwing a shroud over our areas of weakness. We often look away from our own sins to avoid culpability for them. As we shall see, this only compounds our problems with sin. The cover-up is as bad as the crime, and we will explain *why* very soon.

Sin is not always what we think, and it is much more pervasive than we have realized. Many things in the main stream that we have come to accept through "custom" are not acceptable to God. And many sins go on without our even knowing they are sins. We will distinguish many of these, as well as review the sins that "everyone" acknowledges as evil.

Finally, we must know that we all sin. 1 John 1:8 and 10 make it clear that we "have" sin within us, and that we "do" sin. None of us can deny our sinfulness...not even the most mature and saintliest among us. But there is hope for us, and that is what we want to see. Thank God for His grace, and that He has provided the way for us to deal with sin. Keep reading.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is it our nature to "be"?

Question 2. Sin must be either _____ or _____.

Question 3. Name two things that we can do when we are close to God, and two things that are likely to happen when we sin.

Question 4: There is one person's sin that we tend *not* to look at. Whose is it?

Question 5: What is the exact percentage of the present human population that sins regularly?

Other Scriptures

1 John 1:8—If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:10—If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Isaiah 64:6a—All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags....

Isaiah 53:6a—We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way....

Rom. 3:10—As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one....”

Rom. 3:23—For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Remember

Jesus paid the penalty for sin when He died on the cross, and we are saved by believing in Him...but still, we sin. This is because we keep our “sinful nature” after salvation. Be not dismayed...God has created resources for us to counter sin, if we can just find them and use them. Sin is our number one problem, and not just a minor irritation. We ignore this destructive force at peril to life and peace.

B. The Types of Sin

In this section, we will look first at the “types” or “categories” of sins, and then in the next section we will look at “specific” sins. The following types of sins do not include all instances of sin, but provide a workable framework for sin taxonomies. We see the following categories of sin in Scripture:

- **“Not-of-faith” Sins.** Rom. 14:23b says, “...and everything that does not come from faith is sin.” This includes any thought or act that does not occur within the realm of faith. This will make more sense when we get into our studies on faith. For now, we can understand that the absence of faith in God and His Word creates a spiritual void, resulting in motivations that are self-serving and self-aggrandizing, and that rely on *self* for life’s plans and solutions, rather than on God. Furthermore, weak faith means weak resistance and reduced wisdom, which means we will easily fall prey to the forces of evil around us.
- **“Rejection-of-grace” Sins.** Heb. 12:15 (NET) says, “See to it that no comes short of the grace of God...” “Coming up short” or “falling short” means to actually “fail” God’s grace...or to REFUSE grace while accepting some substitute as the source for sustenance. Turning down what God offers...or thumbing our noses at grace...means we are trying to live our lives *our way*, and arrogantly attempting to carry on without Him. This

disappoints His plan for us, places one's *self* as his or her own "deity", and throws away God's love and grace as though they were trash. Failing grace is a sin of self-dependence, similar to the "not-of-faith" category of sins. Either condition creates discord between God and us, and truncates the flow of His grace.

- **Overt Sins.** These are the sins we can see, and the ones most commonly viewed as "heinous", though they are, as we shall see, no worse than the "invisible" sins. Gal 5:19-21 presents some of these overt sins, which include the following: sexual immorality, debauchery, witchcraft, discord, fits of rage, dissensions, drunkenness, and orgies. These are representative...and we will see many others.
- **Sins of the Heart (or Mind).** In Matt. 15:19, Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'." Jesus also said, "You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28). It is quite easy to sin in the mind...a hair-trigger phenomenon. Until we grow into maturity and learn how to walk in God's strength, we will not see and avoid the mines of temptation in our mental pathway. Matt. 15:18 adds, "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart and these make a man 'unclean'." We will see how the condition of the heart will determine our susceptibility to sin, and that our preparations to avoid and remove sin will also take place primarily in the heart.
- **Sins of the Tongue.** The tongue is the overflow for the heart. If the condition of the heart is evil, the output of the tongue will also be evil. Matt. 12:34-35 describes this process: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." According to Eph. 4:25-5:4, sins of the tongue include false testimony, slander, foolish talk, coarse jokes, obscenity, destructive speech, and comments that undermine the faith and walk of other believers.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Everything that does not come from _____ is sin.

Question 2. What kind of sin could be considered a sin of "refusal"?

Question 3. A fit of rage would be what type of sin?

Question 4. Where do the "things that come out of the mouth" originate?

Other Scriptures

Matt. 12:36-37—But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment

for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

Eph. 4:29—Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

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

Remember

Sins are better understood, easier to identify, and—as we shall see, more readily dealt-with—when we can visualize them in categories. The “types” of sins are compartments into which our knowledge of this “enemy” can be stored and retrieved. This knowledge will be useful, particularly when we learn how to “remove” our sins.

C. Lists of Sins

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

Prov. 6:16-19 describes seven things that God despises. These are premeditated sins that harm people:

1. Haughty eyes (having a proud look and demeanor).
2. Lying tongue (lies are the opposite of truth, the friend of evil, and a tool of Satan).
3. Hands that shed innocent blood (committing murder).
4. Heart that devises wicked schemes (premeditated sins against humanity).
5. Feet that are quick to rush to evil (addictions of all kinds).
6. False witness who pours out lies (hateful attempts to assassinate character by lying).
7. Man who stirs up dissension among brothers (evil efforts to divide or split or break apart fruitful unions among believers: churches, marriages, friendships, etc.).

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

- The sexually immoral (committing adultery and fornication).
- Idolaters (worshipping outside of faith in God or making *anything* more important than God).
- Adulterers (players, cheaters, swingers, and prostitutes).
- Male prostitutes.

- Homosexual offenders (those who “practice” a prohibited “lust pattern”).
- Thieves (taking what someone else has earned).
- Greedy (preoccupied with acquiring money, property, or things).
- Slanderers (gossiping, criticizing, maligning).

Are you seeing yourself yet? How about the categorized list in Gal. 5:19-21, which repeats some of the sins we saw in the last section:

1. Sexual sins: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery.
2. Serving false gods: idolatry and witchcraft.
3. Sinful attitude: hatred, discord, jealousy.
4. Sins of excess and addiction: drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

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

- Sexual immorality.
- Impurity (dirty thoughts, as well as actions).
- Lust (looking and wanting).
- Evil desires (imagining and wanting).
- Greed (idolatry in wanting).
- Anger (that leads to sin).
- Rage (screaming or destroying things or people in an emotional fit).
- Malice (hatred).
- Slander (destroying reputations).
- Filthy language (forbidden or offensive words).
- Lying (words that do not match the truth).

(Notice the repetition of “sexual immorality” in the lists. This topic will receive special attention in Section D. of this chapter.)

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

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

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

Some sins are not even listed, as such, even though they are said to violate God’s “standards” (we will have a chapter on God’s standards later on). Here are some standards that don’t jump out at us as occasions for sin, but these are either required or prohibited:

- “Make the most of every opportunity” (Col. 4:5*b*).
- “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs” (Eph. 4:29).
- “...everything not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23*b*).
- “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall” (Rom. 14:21).
- “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (Col. 3:17).
- “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:17).

These are standards that God has established, and failing to meet them is a sin. And then there’s the “biggie”, the over-arching standard for all believers, which is to love God and fellow-man, as we see in the following:

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

Failing to love God and man fall into an “uncatalogued” category of sin. And NOT LOVING is a sin! Anytime something is *required* in Scripture, and you don’t do it...or is *prohibited* in Scripture, and you do it...you are sinning. We can’t keep up with all the standards, so what can we do? We will see.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Name three things that God despises.

Question 2. What seems to be the first sin listed on most lists of sins?

Question 3. If you treat some people differently, based on money and status, for example, you are committing _____.

Question 4. What is the two-prong command that covers all others?

Other Scriptures

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

Prov. 16:5—The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.

Remember

There are lists and lists of sins. And there are many sins not on the lists, but identified through principles and standards given in Scripture. The most important truth we will learn about sin is not how bad it is, and not even that we all sin, but that God in His grace has made provision for sin, so that we do not need to be buried under a mountain of it in our lives. We will explain.

D. Sexual Immorality: Prime Example of Sin

Since sexual immorality is at the top of most sin lists, and because it is so pervasive in history and in our society as a problem sin, we offer this special discussion on this intensely-attractive, but extremely destructive, practice.

God decrees against sexual immorality. We see this in the Old and New Testaments alike. In Lev. 18:6-23, there are specific prohibitions against sexual immorality, and clear descriptions of what we are to avoid. The following list of forbidden activities gives the male slant, but adapts to females:

- Do not have sex with a close relative.
- Do not have sex with your step-mother.
- Do not have sex with your sister or step-sister.
- Do not have sex with your granddaughter.
- Do not have sex with an aunt.
- Do not have sex with your sister-in-law.
- Do not have sex with a woman and her daughter or granddaughter.
- Do not have sex with a woman during her monthly period.
- Do not have sex with a neighbor's wife.
- Do not lie with a man.
- Do not have sex with an animal.

This sets the stage for our discussion of sexual immorality. We are focusing on this particular brand of sin, because it is so common, and because its effects are so devastating. Few people have not committed some form of sexual sin, even if it is only in the mind, so any discussion of this sin applies to virtually everyone.

In 1 Cor. 6:12-20, we see that sexual sins offend all three members of the Trinity, as follows:

1. In 1 Cor. 6:13b we see offense against God the Father: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”
2. In 1 Cor. 6:15 we see offense against Jesus Christ the Son: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!”
3. In 1 Cor. 6:18-19a, the offense of sexual immorality goes against the Holy Spirit: “Flee from all sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he

who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

Job 24:15-24 gives the pattern for adulterers that has been seen so many times in history, and that is still being followed today. We will quote verse 15 and verses 22-24, to make a point, but the entire passage should be read for maximum benefit. What we see in the following is the motif for "adulterers":

The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, "No eye will see me," and he keeps his face concealed. . . . But God drags away the mighty by his power; though they become established, they have no assurance of life. He may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut off like heads of grain.

Life goes on normally; the person committing sexual immorality believes he is "getting away with it". He may even be prosperous in business or advancing into upper echelons of society, but God is watching him, and the bitter outcomes that abide will haunt him for as long as he continues...and likely beyond. Mark Rutland said, "Lust steals the joy of human sexuality. Lust destroys homes, families, consciences, and minds. And...lust kills." (Endnote 1...Endnotes are on page 110.)

Sexual lust is never satisfied. Rutland added the following concerning lust:

The greater problem with Lust, however, is that in getting its object, nothing is "settled". Lust fulfilled "has" nothing. It must immediately start over. Hence, the law of diminishing return drives the lustful ever closer to the brink of sexual burnout. Jaded and seared, the lustful must constantly veer deeper into the bizarre and twisted for titillation. (Endnote 2)

Eph. 4:19 expresses this well: "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." They want more, because it takes more to keep the thrill going. It is spiritual quick-sand with no bottom. This is why even a "hint" of sexual immorality cannot be allowed, as per Eph. 5:3a, which says, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality. . . ."

This battle does not go on in an open field, but in dark and quiet places, beginning in the secret chambers of the heart, where imagination joins the sinful nature to embrace evil. Sexual enticement creeps in on cat's paws, and we never see it coming. Before we know it, we are in its claws. Fighting against such primal and supernatural forces is going to require more than resolution. We need all of God's weapons to fight this one.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Which of the three members of the Trinity is offended by sexual sins?

Question 2. What outcome occurs at some point in the life of an "adulterer"?

Question 3. Name two areas in which sexual immorality is particularly harmful.

Question 4. When will sexual lust be satisfied?

Other Scriptures

Prov. 2:16—It [wisdom] will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words. . . .

Ex. 20:14—You shall not commit adultery.

2Tim. 2:22a—Flee the evil desires of youth.

Remember

Sexual temptation seems irresistible...enticing going in, but bitter coming out. Sexual sins destroy the ones committing them, and others, as well. Sexual immorality is a degenerative condition, which must be corrected.

E. Idolatry and Sin

Put simply, idolatry is valuing anything more than we value God, or making anything we do more important than doing God's will. Idolatry is seen as worship of idols, which can be anything that distracts us from preoccupation with God. When we focus on idols, we look away from God, and we don't need some statue or icon in front of us to do it.

Greed is often seen as an idol. 1Tim. 6:9-10 says the following:

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

Greed branches into all kinds of sins, such as murder, envy, stealing, lying, jealousy, slander, and hatred. This is why Paul advised Timothy, continuing with the passage cited above, to "flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11). Paul warned the Corinthians similarly: "Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14).

We looked at sexual immorality in the previous section as a prominent sin, and now we see it in connection with idolatry. Sexual sin, like greed, is frequently associated with idolatry. Eph. 5:5 says, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of God." Sexual sin and greed are "idols".

Choosing a path of sexual immorality or greed is tantamount to choosing a "god" other than God. This is the result of a search for fulfillment apart from God. Matt. 6:24 informs us, "No one can serve [worship] two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to

the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Solomon fell into the trap of choosing lesser “gods”, as we see in 1 Ki. 11:4: “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.” And the story goes that he was not happy with his choice.

Joshua set up the choice of “gods vs. God” for his people, saying, “But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15).

Moses offered a similar choice to his people:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him. (Deut. 30:19)

Elijah also gave a choice: “If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Ki. 18:21).

When we chase any substitute for God, it is inevitable that we will forget God, and when we forget God, we will depend on other resources to meet our financial, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. And we will be disappointed. Our help and protection come only from the true and living God. We will see this clearly by the time we finish our studies.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What two patterns of behavior stand out as “idols”, or “false gods”?

Question 2. What wise man chose his wives’ gods over his own?

Question 3. Elijah gave his people a choice between _____ and _____.

Question 4. What happens when we chase after a substitute for God?

Other Scriptures

Rom. 1:24-25a—Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. . . .

Gal. 1:6—I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

1 Cor. 8:4b—We know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no god but one.

Remember

Idols can be anything that takes our eyes off God. This can be many things, not just sinful patterns. Health, finances, relationship problems, loss, and even success can distract us from our focus on God. There is plenty to draw us away from an awareness of and faith in the living God. What we will learn is how to avoid the lure of useless impostors.

F. Allies of Sin

Sin has allies. The group of allies from which sin derives its power represents an “axis of evil”. These are forces beyond the scope and capability of our will and strength to manage. This co-op of subtle but devastatingly destructive powers wrestles us to the ground spiritually, teaming up to overwhelm us with confusion and wickedness. Their purpose is to rule us, control our thoughts and behavior, and entice us to ignore and dishonor our God.

Any one of these allies can defeat us easily, but we must face the combined force of all of them working together. For us to think that we can fight these forces on our own is ludicrous to the point of being ridiculous. We need to understand our enemies...and we need to know our limitations before we confront them.

The axis of evil includes the world, our sinful nature, and Satan. We want to introduce each of these individually.

The World. James 4:4 says, “Friendship with the world is hatred toward God,” while 1 Jn. 2:15-16 admonishes us with the following:

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

The greatest danger in this place called “the world” may be found, not in sordid, unseemly patterns of behavior, but in our pride (“boasting”). We will see this truth time and again throughout our studies: Pride and arrogance will bring us down faster than anything.

Pride is our attachment to the world...and pride is a *big* sin. It is the gateway to many other sins, and puts us in “opposition” to God. Prov. 16:5 says, “The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.” James 4:6 adds, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Grace is found when we are “humble”, a spiritual posture that has many applications, as we shall see. And when grace flows due to humility, two notable things occur: 1) we can “resist the devil” (James 4:7)...and 2) God will “lift us up” (James 4:10). We need grace to *flow*.

The world works closely with the sinful nature and Satan. Love for the world will pull us away from God, sometimes by imperceptible degrees. Spiritual traps and dangers permeate the world, and we must be prepared to see the ambushes coming, and deal with them.

The Sinful Nature. Since the time that Adam and Eve “sinned” in the garden, we have received an inherited nature which delights in sin. Gal. 5:19-21 shows us the acts of the “sinful nature”, as follows:

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

When we sin, as we will see very soon, the sinful nature “takes over” and becomes the driving force for our behavior, rather than God. The propensity this nature has for sin, and the strengthening it gets from the world and Satan, make it...not just a “tendency” to do wrong...but a “dynamic force” pushing us toward evil. We are not equipped to control this force by our own strength, and—to be sure—this force is spring-loaded to perform sins and acts of self-righteousness. And it will also thwart our spiritual performance and progress. This nature is always with us...right at home in our hearts.

Paul said of his sinful nature: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Rom. 7:18). We can accomplish nothing with the sinful nature in charge, so we must find a way to “de-throne” this tyrant. And we will.

Satan. Satan is evil...but he is beautiful...attractive...appealing. From our perspective, he is irresistible. He is also tricky...cunning...deceitful. He makes us believe good is bad and bad is good. Ps. 10:13 suggests the way Satan deceives, saying, “Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, ‘He won’t call me to account’?” Satan makes us believe God doesn’t “really” require the things He commands.

Satan deceives us the way he did Eve in the garden, and we are just as gullible as she was. Satan queried her with this: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’” (Gen. 3:4)? Satan will do anything to get us to doubt God and His Word.

If we are moving toward God, Satan will throw up roadblocks to stop us, and the more we grow, and the bigger a threat we become to him, the more attention Satan will pay to us. But God is greater, as we shall see, so we do well not to be deterred by Satan. Satan operates in so many forms and at so many levels, we will need to consider his ways throughout future studies. We basically underestimate how powerful he is, and how much help we will need to keep him from overpowering us. The thing he wants most is for us to attempt to fight him by ourselves. We *need* reinforcements...and they *are* available.

Conclusion. Satan does his work to stimulate sin, and the world welcomes all sinners. But these are not the worst. We have discovered the real enemy...and it is us. We are our own worst foes...and “we” are occupied by “sinful natures”, sometimes known as our “flesh”. The enemy is inside of us, and it is deadly.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the “axis of evil”?

Question 2. Is it possible for us to “show hatred” toward God? If so, how?

Question 3. What sin will take us down faster than any other?

Question 4. Do you think Satan works more by direct attack or by stealth?

Question 5. One of sin’s three allies lives within us. What is its name?

Other Scriptures

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

Gal. 6:8—The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Rom. 8:8—Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

James 1:14-15—...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Heb. 3:12—See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Remember

One of the central themes in all the teachings we will examine is that strength for good comes from God, and not from us. Nowhere is the need for something beyond ourselves more apparent than in our dealings with the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need help.

Chapter 4

The Source for Dealing with Sin

In This Chapter...

- A. Keeping the Law Does not Make us Pure*
- B. Grace and Power at Work*
- C. God's Love and Mercy*

A. Keeping the Law Does not Make us Pure

We have had much to say about sin, and how bad it is, and how much it violates God's standards, and so on. So it seems that our first priority would be to cinch ourselves up, prepare ourselves to race out and fulfill all the rules, and NOT SIN. But this would mean living out our life IN CHRIST, by having faith IN OURSELVES, believing that we are capable of keeping God's righteous laws. We have much to learn.

There is nothing wrong with the standards specified in the Law, as framed in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. The problem is that we can't follow them. We are *unable* to keep the Law. If we break ONE law or violate ONE standard, we are "lawbreakers" (James 2:8-10).

We must begin our discussion of the Law with an admission that we can't live up to it. The Law is not the problem...we are. We will get to the "alternative" to law-keeping soon...and see what we *can* do, since we *can't* keep the Law. For now, we just want to see that we will not get badges or rewards for "law-keeping", because *we can't do it*. Gal. 4:9 reminds us that the slavery of law-keeping should be avoided, because only misery and disappointment will result from efforts to follow it. This passage says the following:

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

The trap for new believers is that they think (usually because this is what they have been told) they can go out and perfect their behavior by observing certain rules. This is futile. We will see soon how we can “do good” and “produce righteousness”, but we must admit right off, or learn the hard way, that it is not “determination” to do good that makes it happen.

Keeping the law did not work for salvation, and it will not contribute to our Christian walk. Gal. 3:2b-3 makes this clear, saying, “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

It is well-established in Scripture that the Christian life is not to be lived by human effort. Why? Because God doesn’t need our efforts...He just needs our trust and our cooperation. We will break these apart in Chapter 5. In essence, self-motivation and self-effort are works of the “flesh”, which is the “sinful nature”. We have to be careful not to get ahead of ourselves here, but we have already reported that, “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). This is true, *even if what we do comports with the Law!*

If we are not pleasing God, even when we are “trying”, we will hit wall after wall and wonder why nothing seems to work out. Yet we are told to be “pure” and to “live a holy life”. Consider 1 Thess. 4:7, which exhorts, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” We do not know yet how to become pure and live a holy life, but we must be clear at the outset: Memorizing a bunch of laws, rules, standards, and so on, and trying to keep a mental or literal chart on how well we are following them, WILL BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE...and WILL NOT PLEASE GOD! This is because we are looking at *ourselves* to sustain this effort...and we simply aren’t strong enough to do it.

This is a lot to think about. When we explain how it is we DO please God, all of this will become clear.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the specific number of laws that we have to break to be considered “lawbreakers”.

Question 2. What is the role of human effort in achieving our spiritual goals?

Question 3. Attempts to keep the law are actually works of the _____.

Question 4. We are called upon in Scripture to be _____ and to live a _____ life.

Other Scriptures

James 2:8-10—If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the Law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

1 Thess. 4:1—Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more....

Rom. 6:14—For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Remember

We are incapable of keeping the Law, so we must find another way to please God.

B. Grace and Power at Work

If we were to summarize the purpose of this book, it would read like this: Our objective is to learn how to use the techniques that God specifies that enable us to get closer to Him, so we can draw on the assets that He makes available to empower us to live meaningful and productive lives. Based on this summary, here is a general outline for the Christian life:

1. Learn and apply the techniques from God's Word.
2. Get closer to God.
3. Draw on His assets and blessings.
4. Continually receive His grace and power to live clean and fruitful lives.

Each of these steps carries provisions and conditions that we must meet, which may start to sound a little complicated, but I can assure you that God's grace methods are not complex...a child can learn them and follow them. But they are specific, and that is why we want to learn *exactly where* the mother lode for grace and power is. First of all, however, we need to see what "grace" and "power" are.

At this point we are still on the topic of sin, so we want to understand "grace" and "power" as basic assets that can help us deal with sin. We begin with definitions from *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*:

- Grace is "favor done freely without expectation of anything in return". (Endnote 3) Grace is God's attitude toward man. God loves man, and grace enables those of us who believe in Him to have peace and fellowship with Him. Grace was expressed at the cross when He gave His Son for our sins. Now, grace is seen in what He provides for our lives as believers...both materially and spiritually.
- Power is "the ability to act or produce an effect; the possession of authority." (Endnote 4) God's power holds the universe together, from the most distant galaxies to the most minute quantum particles. That power is given to believers who accept it, and efforts to live the Christian life without it is equivalent to living "in the flesh".

It is by grace that we are given *eternal* life at salvation, and this grace is also the basis for receiving God's power during our *temporal* lives. We will see specific conditions for accepting grace and receiving power as believers. Without these, we are nothing, and can achieve nothing. Grace and power will enable us to perform good deeds, overcome sin, testify to the resurrection of Christ, and serve God. In a nutshell, grace and power will allow us to do the following:

1. Become "godly".
2. Fulfill God's requirements.
3. Please God.
4. Exhibit the love and righteousness of God.

The "doing" of these things, will come from the great "Doer". God's grace operates by His power to become the means and opportunity for good living and divine service.

When we trust God, we believe *He* has the power to do what needs to be done, or, as Paul put it, "that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 7b). Paul believed that God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). Peter expressed this also, saying, "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 4:11b).

2 Pet. 1:3 concludes it this way: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." The power that comes through grace is "all we need". This means that understanding it and acquiring it are crucial. We want to "understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe in Him" (Eph. 1:19). That is our quest.

Grace and power are available, as we see in the following verses:

- 1 Cor. 3:10—By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. . . .
- Rom. 15:15-16—I have written you boldly, on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus. . . .
- 2 Cor. 1:12—We have conducted ourselves in the world...in the holiness and sincerity that are from God...not according to worldly wisdom, but according to God's grace.
- 2 Cor. 6:7—...we use truthfulness and the presence of God's power.
- 2 Cor. 13:4—For to be sure he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.
- Eph. 3:7—I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.
- 1 Cor. 15:10—But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them, **yet not I** but the grace of God that was with me. (Emphasis mine.)

"Yet not I". This theme resonates throughout Paul's writings. Paul tried tirelessly to make us under-

stand how grace and power work. The concepts of grace and power are foundational. We will see progressively how they work to help us overcome sin, especially when we get to Chapter 5.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What are two qualities of God that get the “work” done?

Question 2. Which of the following is the greatest source of power? 1) support groups, 2) vitamins, 3) self-discipline, or 4) God’s grace.

Question 3. Everything we need can be found in His divine _____ .

Other Scriptures

1 Cor. 2:4-5—My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

Job 36:22—God is exalted in power. Who is a teacher like him?

Acts 6:8—Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Remember

The only worthwhile deeds we do are those done in God’s power, and the only worthwhile lives we live are those lived in God’s grace.

C. God’s Love and Mercy

Love and mercy provide the impetus for God’s plan, which offers salvation, for starters, followed by provisions for living. The key solution for sin lies in the operation of love and mercy, which leads to our forgiveness and an ability to associate with a holy God. We are forgiven initially at salvation, which qualifies us for eternal life, and then we are given a way to receive forgiveness repeatedly in life, so that we can walk in fellowship with God, and in the bounty of His blessings.

By being forgiven for the sins we inevitably commit in our daily lives, we are able to participate in God’s gracious love and mercy, which allows Him to perform His work through us. We will study this topic in much more detail, but first we must understand that the *source* for all forgiveness is God’s love, expressed toward us as mercy. We will allow the space here for a rather long passage that describes God’s mercy at work. This passage appears in Eph. 2:4-10, which says the following:

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God

raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Who does the work at salvation? God. And who does the “good works” that God prepared in advance for us to do? As we have begun to see, it is God. We do not *earn* God’s grace and kindness, not when we are saved, and not now as believers. God’s view of us comes through the prism of His Son, who wipes us clean to make us presentable to the Father.

Ps. 33:18 says, “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.” God looks favorably toward us when we trust and acknowledge Him, and when we attach our hope to His love. We can have confidence in God’s love. Ps. 33:22 adds, “May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.” Our understanding of this love will be the basis for embracing the techniques that are now waiting for us in the wings. These will show us how to bring God’s forgiveness, power, and provision into our lives.

Love is the prompt for mercy, which generates conditions for the forgiveness of our sins. In the next chapter we will look deeper into the treasure chest of God’s love, as we examine the **first technique**. We will discover that grace works for us when we expose our souls to His mercy, following a simple, though exact, protocol.

God loves us, and therefore He has provided a way for us to deal with sin. Even when we fail, we can keep God’s grace-line open, as we shall see.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. We receive forgiveness initially at _____, and then we are given a way to receive forgiveness repeatedly in _____.

Question 2. Love prompts _____ and _____ prompts forgiveness.

Question 3. When our sins are forgiven by God in our daily lives, what is God then able to do through us?

Other Scriptures

Is. 54:10—Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed.

Ps. 106:1—Praise Jehovah! Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever.

Micah 7:18-19—Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You

will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Remember

God's love for His children stays constant, operating at all times to provide ways for us to live in communion with Him. God's love generates mercy, which activates forgiveness. Because of this, we not only have eternal life, but have access to His love, mercy, grace, and power...every day.

Chapter 5

The Solution for Sin

In This Chapter...

- A. Confession of Sins*
- B. Alternative Forms of Confession*
- C. Fellowship as Seen in 1 John 1*
- D. The Holy Spirit vs. the Sinful Nature*
- E. Discipline for Unconfessed Sin*
- F. Abusing Grace*

A. Confession of Sins

One of the big surprises for many new believers is that evil is still part of our lives. The Holy Spirit comes to live within us at salvation, and never leaves us as long as we are alive. But we still have a sinful nature, and we showed earlier how the powerful forces of the world and the devil conspire with our nature to perpetuate sin in our lives.

Keep in mind that Christ paid for all our sins on the cross. They are paid for, but not necessarily forgiven at the moment. At salvation, the slate is wiped clean, but soon after that time, we commit one sin or another, thus beginning a life-long struggle with sin. It is easy to sin, and the requirements NOT to sin are so exact and stringent that it is almost impossible not to stray. The battle rages around us, so we must *give priority* to addressing sin in our lives, or we will not be successful and effective as Christians.

We have already seen how some believers try to beat sin by keeping the Law. Others address sin by assuming a “holy” appearance and posture once or twice a week, gathering with other “aspirants to

holiness” to exchange approval and assuage spiritual failures. If others around us periodically acknowledge our spiritual “worthiness”, we may remain content with hiding the sins we know we commit...and we might even hide them from ourselves. But the result? Not acknowledging our failures to ourselves begins a process of denial that extends to God, thus preventing God’s forgiveness, because we are concealing our sins. Hiding sins from God is always disastrous. We will explain.

When we honestly examine ourselves and identify the things we do and think, the bad things, we can lay these out before God, so He can forgive them. He knows about them already, of course, but He wants us to come before Him...with our sins in our hands...so we can present them to Him, in full recognition of His love and grace and mercy, whereby **he can forgive them**. If we hide them from God, they will remain our personal cache of evil, and fester inside of us...unforgiven.

We will study the first chapter of 1st John shortly, but for now we want to see the process for our getting forgiveness in a key verse in this epistle. 1 John 1:9 (NET) says, “But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” Keep it simple. Faith in and use of God’s method for forgiveness will bring forgiveness to us. When we believe this technique and exercise it, we will be forgiven...and cleansed. The technique...is confession of our sins.

According to Vine, the word “confess” comes from the Greek word, *homologeō*, which means to “speak the same thing” (Endnote 5), or to *agree* with God by identifying an act, thought, or condition that we know He considers “wrong”. When we *confess*, we are virtually reflecting God’s view of our sin, thus acknowledging His love and mercy in forgiving that sin. Ultimately, this is an acknowledgement of the work of His Son on the cross, where the sin was paid for.

Notice the phrase in 1 Jn. 1:9: “all unrighteousness”. When we acknowledge the sins we know and remember, the sins that we *don’t know*, or that we *can’t remember*, will be cleansed, along with the ones we know and identify.

We need to insert a parenthetical note here to clarify that the epistles of John were addressed to *believers*, which means that the process of confessing sins is NOT part of the salvation experience, and is effective for BELIEVERS ONLY. We should also interject that confession is to be given to God the Father only, and not to an intermediary, such as a priest or other confidant. There is no evidence that confessing to others contributes to our forgiveness.

We want to see some examples of confession in this section, and will complement these with a list of additional passages at the end of Chapter 28. That list contains over 60 scriptural references dealing with confession. For now, here are some instances of confession for your immediate perusal:

- Lev. 5:5—”When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.” This has changed a little for us in the “Church Age”, in that no priest is involved in our forgiveness. The concept of confession, however, is the same.

- Ps. 32:5—“I confessed my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.’ And you forgave me. All my guilt is gone.” In verse 6, David adds, “Therefore, let all the godly [believers] confess their rebellion...that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment [or discipline...more on this later].”
- Ps. 51:5—“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”
- Prov. 28:13 (NET)—“The one who covers his transgressions will not prosper, but whoever confesses them and forsakes them will find mercy.” “Confess” is, essentially, to name, and “forsake” implies a change based on that identification. That does not mean we will never commit the sin again, because we probably will, but it shows a *true agreement* with God about the sin, indicating that we share his disdain for it. It should be noted, as we anticipate a future study on the topic of “change”, that confession can *never* be an excuse to sin. Confession is not a license, as many have discovered, much to their chagrin.

When we confess our sins, we can have CONFIDENCE that God is forgiving us. And there is no need for guilt after we are forgiven, no matter how far we have gone astray, or how long we have been there. To confess and not accept the covering made available through the work of Christ is to deny grace and insult God. After confession, we must accept forgiveness and move on.

When we understand the loving and tender nature of God’s forgiveness, we cannot refuse to thank Him, amazed at His mercy. And when we are in a mode of thanksgiving and worship, sin will not find a landing place in our hearts. When we access His forgiveness, and *walk close to Him*, as we shall see, we can perform good acts in His power...and live in a spirit of adoration for Him.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the sole method for believers to get forgiveness for the sins we commit?

Question 2. Why did I not mention the part about standing barefoot in the snow for three days to atone for our sins?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 65:3—When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.

Is. 16:18—Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

Is. 6:6-7—Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has

touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Ps. 103:11-12—For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Remember

Confession of our sins is KEY to our daily walk with God. Apart from this simple technique, we will have no joy and no production in our Christian lives. Confess now. Confess often.

B. Alternative Forms of Confession

We have established the centrality of confession as a key to our Christian walk. Since confession is so important, we must make sure that we have the full picture of what confession is and how it works.

There is a tendency for us to rationalize our own behavior, to excuse our own mistakes, and to justify our own actions. Sometimes we want to wrap ourselves in a cloak of self-righteousness and convince ourselves and others that we are really okay, and that we deserve God’s favor and blessings. But we are mistaken if we think that we are not sinful, or that somehow we can manage our own cleansing.

Jer. 2:22 confirms the futility of self-cleansing, saying, “Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,” declares the Sovereign Lord.” David understood the correct process for cleansing, and expressed it in Ps. 32:5: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” David knew to do the following: 1) confess directly to God, and 2) be aware that God is the only one who cleanses. We confess *only* to God...the *only* forgiver.

Identifying specific sins directly before God is the primary method for confessing our sins, but we want to isolate and briefly describe several alternative forms of confession that Scripture indicates are acceptable for forgiveness. We see these in the following:

- **Asking for Forgiveness.** If we can’t remember all our sins, or if we are in the heat of battle on the job, or driving in heavy traffic, or fighting through some health crisis, or experiencing relationships that are strained, and so on...we may have to resort to a streamlined version of confession, seen as a simple request for God to forgive us for our sins. Jesus used the phrase “forgive us our sins” in a prayer that He taught to His disciples (see Lk. 11:4). And David used confessional shorthand occasionally, as seen in Ps. 51:2, in which David pleaded: “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” **God sees our hearts**, so He is well aware when a shorter version of confession is actually an

“honest” confession...or, conversely, when it is an effort to keep our sins under wraps. Forgiveness will *never* occur unless the heart is involved in the confession.

- **Pleas for Forgiveness.** The key component in confession is a true spirit of humility toward God, and an admission that we have failed. A “plea” for forgiveness is an intensified form of “asking for forgiveness”. In Ps. 25:17-18, David was looking for forgiveness and relief, when he prayed, “The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.” In verse 11 of this same passage, he pleaded, “For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.” A sincere plea for forgiveness will be heard.
- **Daniel’s Prayer of Confession.** Daniel 9 presents a great prayer of confession, in which Daniel uses some “bulk” terms for sins. Sins are often “lumped” or “bundled” together in confessions, seen with such labels as “my sins”, “my weakness”, “my not obeying”, “my rebelliousness”, “my turning away”, and so on. Sometimes, as in Daniel 9, these bulk terms are mixed with specific sins. When we approach the “throne of grace”, God looks first at our motives and the condition of our hearts. Words can help us relate to the process, but God does not want specific words, *unless the heart is genuinely behind them*. We will quote Daniel 9: 18-19 here, to show the heart-felt nature of Daniel’s prayer of confession:

Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.

- **Additional Forms of Confession.** Daniel’s prayer was answered following his confession, which meant that the confession worked, but there are still other forms of confession that God honors. We will compact these into the following, for the sake of brevity:
 - ◊ **Being Sorry for Sins.** In Ps. 38:18, David showed regret over his sin, saying, “I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.” Paul also suggested that sorrow for sins can play a part in confession, saying, “...yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.... Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation [of the temporal kind, meaning “deliverance through restoration”] and leaves no regret...” (2 Cor. 7:9-10, in part; cf, James 4:8-10)
 - ◊ **“Turning Away From” or “Forsaking” Evil.** The idea of “turning away” from and “forsaking” sin is seen in Is. 55:7, which says, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” The process of turning away is

first and foremost an internal event in the heart...tantamount to confession.

- ◇ **Lifting up Our Souls to God.** This is wordless submission to God's mercy and grace, as expressed in Ps. 86:3-5a, which says, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. You are forgiving and good, O Lord..."
- ◇ **Showing Humility.** This is expressed very well in Lk. 18:13-14: "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Humility is always a key component in the confession process.
- ◇ **Repentance.** 1 Ki. 8:46a, 47a, 48a, and 49, quoted together, says, "When they sin against you...if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you...and say 'We have sinned'...and if they turn back to you...then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause....And forgive your people." "Repentance" is a form of confession, meaning to "change our attitude" toward our sins to match God's view of them.
- ◇ **"Generic" Naming of Sins.** Sometimes we can have a specific sin in mind, but name it only as a generic sin, without articulating it categorically or semantically. An example of this is seen in 2 Sam. 12:13, which says, "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" He actually had more than one sin in mind, involving adultery and murder...but he handled them generically and in bulk.

The main point we want to establish in this section is that confession, and real change, take place first on the **inside**. As we learn about God's techniques and promises...and mature...we will refine confession, and see more clearly the connection between self-disclosure and *heart attitudes* that reflect God's view of sin. The objective of confession is to align our assessment of our own sins with God's assessment. That is the heart-view that God wants to see in us.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Who can we confess to and get cleansing?

Question 2. Name three alternative forms of confession.

Question 3. Will God accept a reasonable explanation for a sin, and forgive us because we faced unusual or extenuating circumstances?

Question 4. When God evaluates the quality of our confession to determine acceptability, where does he look?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 51:9-10—Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Ps. 79:9—Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.

2 Sam. 24:10—David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.”

Remember

God looks at the heart. When we approach Him with humility and a sense of His greatness and mercy, this attitude will get forgiveness for us faster than many well-chosen words. We must not let failure own us, but we must own up to our failure.

C. Fellowship as Seen in 1 John 1

We want to be “clean”, meaning that all our sins are forgiven, not just so we can be sparkly and shiny, but for a very good reason: It is only when we are cleansed of all sin that we can fellowship with God. This means many things, as we shall see, but—for now—we will see fellowship as having God nearby to help us in every way.

The first chapter in John's first epistle presents confession as “naming” our sins, but that does not negate the positive effects of the other forms of confession. A condition of contriteness in the heart is the most important component in the confession process, as we have seen.

To reduce the size of this section, we ask you to use your Bible to follow our analysis of this chapter. We used the *Interlinear Bible* (Endnote 6) to study the truths found in this chapter, but almost any translation will serve to unveil the concepts this passage teaches. We will present this passage with as much conciseness as possible, as we explore it verse-by-verse.

1 Jn. 1:1-3 indicates that John was an eye-witness to the life of Christ, and enjoyed first-hand fellowship with Jesus. He says he is reporting what he had “seen and heard”, and then he presents to them the basis for their fellowship with each other. The fellowship bond they had with each other was predicated on their mutual fellowship with God, and, if either they or John broke their fellowship with God, their fellowship with each other would also be broken. The *prerequisite* for fellowship with each other is fellowship with God.

Fellowship with each other is a *byproduct* of our fellowship with God. This is desirable, but the primary objective of fellowship with God is an end in itself, and is the paramount goal of John's epistle.

1 Jn. 1:4 presents John’s reason for writing this epistle, which is to give them “full joy”. We will see later that love, joy, and peace are outcomes and indicators of fellowship. He is telling them that his purpose is to give them the pathway to fellowship with God.

1 Jn. 1:5 reports that God is pure, holy, perfect, and totally above wrongdoing of any kind. This refers to God’s perfection and glory, also known as “the light”. This is the perfect God we want to approach...we want fellowship with His perfection, in which no blemish or darkness exists.

1 Jn. 1:6-7 tells us that—if we claim to have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness—we lie. In other words, it *is not true* that we can have fellowship with God and still be operating in darkness. Darkness, easily recognizable as sin, prevents fellowship. From this passage, we learn that “walking in the light” precedes Jesus’ “cleansing us from all sins”. It is in the light of His perfection that our sins can be seen. When we bring our sins to His light, they are **exposed**, so He can forgive them. If we refuse to bring our sins to His light, they will not be forgiven, and *we will not have fellowship with Him!*

Living in the light is not “living perfectly”, because we can’t; rather, it is facing our imperfection in the light of His love and grace, which bring forgiveness. **Light is the key to cleansing, and cleansing is the key to fellowship.** And the process is instantaneous, since light immediately dispels darkness. Restoration to fellowship at confession is *immediate*.

1 Jn. 1:8 lets us know that we cannot hide our sinfulness. When we refuse to acknowledge our sinful state, we are deceiving ourselves, on the basis of a lie (from Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature). This is normal human psychology, but it works against us spiritually. When we look into our spiritual mirrors, we must see the truth about our sin, and realize how much our cleanliness and worthiness for fellowship depend on the mercy and grace of God. When we truly see ourselves, we will be ready to confess.

1 Jn. 1:9 gives us the heart of this technique, which is to acknowledge or identify our sins before God. This is the specific act of bringing our sins into the light. This is naming our sins AS SINS, saying the same thing about them that God says, agreeing with Him about them, and acknowledging that only He can correct our errors through forgiveness. Faithful admission is then greeted by faithful forgiveness. He is FAITHFUL to forgive us...it works 100% of the time, when we confess.

1 Jn. 1:10 concludes by reminding us that we—as believers—commit many acts of sin, which is why we must confess them often. We can’t correct our sins on our own, so we must depend on God to forgive them...and then to give us help in changing our sinful pattern (more on “changing” our sinful pattern will be provided soon).

The implications and outcomes of fellowship with God are wonderful and amazing. We will see these clearly in upcoming studies. Honest, humble confession of our sins is the means for regaining our fellowship-walk with God, and—as we shall see—unlocking His power within us. Fellowship is the difference between “living in the light” and “living in darkness”. Without fellowship, a power outage will occur, and we will be operating in the dark.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What does it mean to be “cleansed” of our sins?

Question 2. What is “darkness”, as seen in 1 Jn. 1?

Question 3. Why did John write this epistle? (Hint: See 1 Jn. 1:4)

Question 4. When fellowship with God is lost, how is it recovered?

Other Scriptures

Amos 3:3—Will two walk together unless they are agreed?

Eph. 5:13—But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said, “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Jn. 3:20—Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

Remember

Fellowship with God is the condition we seek, and the basis for anything good or worthwhile that we will ever do. To have fellowship, we must be cleansed...we must confess.

D. The Holy Spirit vs. the Sinful Nature (pivotal study...read carefully...twice)

We receive the Holy Spirit at salvation (Gal. 3:2; 4:6). This begins a relationship that continues until we die or until Jesus comes back. But the sinful nature stays with us and a contest is set up between our nature and the Spirit of God, and both of them reside inside of us. We are no match for God, so it seems He would just eliminate any efforts to go against Him, but *God has given us choice*, so we can choose the forces of evil and sin over Him...and we do it all the time, vows and resolutions notwithstanding.

So the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit are in conflict. Gal. 5:17 says, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” This verse follows verse 16, which instructs us to “live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Verse 18 then adds this: “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” So living by...or in the power of...the Holy Spirit enables us to avoid the trap of gratifying sinful desires. And being

led...or controlled by...the Holy Spirit keeps us from operating “under the law”. As we shall see later, living under the law is the same as being under the control of the sinful nature.

Living in the power of the Holy Spirit...being controlled by the Holy Spirit...gives us the ability to produce the “fruit of the Spirit”, which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23a). On the other hand, the works of the flesh (sinful nature) are “sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Gal. 5:19-21).

We will classify being controlled by the Holy Spirit as “spirituality”, and being controlled by the sinful nature as “carnality” (from the word “carnal”, or “related to flesh”). What, though, determines whether we are controlled by the Spirit or by the sinful nature? Obviously, if we are *not* “living in the light” and are thus “living in darkness”, we will not be controlled by the Spirit. This means that the control of the Spirit is related to our being “in the light”, or *in fellowship*. **If we are in fellowship, we will be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and not by the sinful nature.** This is central, and is why it is so important to stay “in fellowship”.

Sin disrupts fellowship and puts the sinful nature in charge, a condition that will last until we confess our sins and are restored to fellowship. Keep in mind that restoration is “immediate”, but so is loss of fellowship, which can happen in the blink of a wandering thought. Sin happens quickly, and with devastating effects that have been largely underestimated. Fellowship means control by the perfect God, while its absence means control has been passed to the sinful nature...in league with its insidious pals, the world and the devil. This is why confession must be a perpetual practice, because the margin between spirituality and carnality is so narrow, and these can change so quickly.

Control is crucial. Rom. 8:6b says, “...the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” Gal. 5:25 admonishes, “...keep in step with [meaning “walk by”] the Spirit.” When we are controlled by the Spirit, and “walking by Him”, we will be “living in the light”. Eph. 5: 10 links *living in the light* with *walking by the Spirit*, showing that the fruit of the light and the fruit of the Spirit are the same.

To confirm this, compare Gal. 5:22-23, quoted earlier, with Eph. 5:10, seen here: “...for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.” Then compare Eph. 5:11-12 (deeds of darkness) with Gal. 5:19-21 (works of the flesh). See the connection? “Living in the light”, which we saw in the last section as “being in fellowship”, is equated to “walking by the Spirit”, or “being controlled by the Spirit”. “Living in darkness” is the same as “being controlled by the sinful nature”.

Maybe we’re getting bogged down, here. But the conclusion is simple: Being in fellowship results in spirituality, or the control of the Holy Spirit, while being out of fellowship is tied to carnality, or the control of the sinful nature.

Later in Eph. 5, we see a clear reference to the “control” of the Holy Spirit in verses 18 and 19, as follows: “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” That which fills us, such as alcohol, controls us. When the Spirit “fills” us, He controls us...and all of this is hinged on fellowship.

So which will it be: the sinful nature or the Holy Spirit? Which will we choose to control us? If it is the sinful nature, we do nothing...the sinful nature will do its dirty work all on its own. If it is the Holy Spirit, we must *confess* to stay in fellowship, to qualify us for the Holy Spirit's control and leadership.

We will see over the course of our studies many benefits that emanate from the control of the Holy Spirit. We will cite a few of them here:

- The Holy Spirit teaches us. (Jn. 14:25-26)
- He teaches us about the deeper things of God. (1 Cor. 2:10-11)
- The Spirit gives us competence. (2 Cor. 3:4-6)
- The Spirit provides and activates gifts that enable us to help each other. (1 Cor. 12, especially verses 7-11).
- The Holy Spirit produces fruit through us. (Gal. 5:22-23)
- He works miracles among us. (Gal. 5:3)
- He even prays in our place because we do not know what to pray for. (Rom. 8:26-27)

There is much more to this...and we'll get to it. For enrichment or clarification of this pivotal study, refer to the chart, "Spirituality/Carnality Flowchart", at the end of Chapter 28.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. A great internal battle goes on inside of us between the _____ and our _____.

Question 2. What breaks fellowship?

Question 3. What condition must exist for us to be controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Question 4. Living in the light is equated with control of the _____.

Question 5. Living in darkness is equated with control of the _____.

Other Scriptures

Rom. 8:5—Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Rom. 5:8—Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

1 Jn. 1:9 (NET)—If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.

Remember

When we confess our sins, we are restored to fellowship. When we are in fellowship, we will be controlled by the Holy Spirit...until we sin again, at which time the sinful nature will resume leadership, pending our next confession. The need for confession is CONSTANT!

E. Discipline for Unconfessed Sin

A good parent will use discipline to correct and guide a child, not to satisfy his own anger. The term “wrath” has been used in the past to describe God’s response to sin and rebellion, but this is a “human” quality that makes God’s plan sound like a campaign for vengeance or rage. The opposite is true. God uses divine discipline, based on love and grace, to bring us to “repentance”, or *confession*. Everything He does regarding us is designed to draw us closer to Him, where He can energize us, protect us, and fellowship with us...without forcing us to act, and without taking away our freedom of choice.

God deals with us in *love*, not in anger or disgust, even though His discipline can be quite painful. Since the objective of discipline is to get us to use the *techniques* we are learning, then the *condition for discipline* is that *we are not using them*. At the present time, we have only seen one of the techniques, which is confession of our sins, so we are examining discipline as a means for God dealing with “unconfessed sin”. He wants to TEACH us to confess, and then prod us, as needed, to make sure we follow through.

In Rev. 3:19, Jesus told the apostle John, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” This is a perfect picture of the sequence of God’s discipline. Here is the normal order for discipline: 1) God loves believers, 2) God gives discipline or rebuke for unconfessed sins, as needed, 3) repentance or confession takes place, and 4) forgiveness is given and fellowship is restored.

Because God loves us, He disciplines us so we will honestly reflect on our sins and repent...i.e., change our minds about our sins, so that our view of them will match His. But we must be clear, God does not approve of sin, and will not ignore it. Sin will incur discipline, if left untended, and this discipline can be severe, up to and including physical death. We must not take it lightly. 1 Cor. 10:8 reports an occasion in the Old Testament when sexual immorality resulted in the death of twenty-three thousand Jews in one day! Ouch!

Even if discipline reaches an extreme point, we must recognize that discipline is for our good. Prov. 3:11a advises us, “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke...” Job 5:17 adds, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.”

We should be thankful for discipline, because it teaches us and makes us *better*. Prov. 15:32 says, “He

who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.” Therefore, we should actually “love” discipline, as called for in Prov. 12:1, which says, “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.” If we accept the discipline...and respond to it...we will benefit from it. And get this...if the discipline is being administered because of unconfessed sin, and we *confess*, the *discipline stops!*

Discipline is an opportunity for us to make correction. This is why Heb. 12:5-11 encourages us strongly to endure the discipline with gratitude. This passage, quoted here in part, says the following:

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son....God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

When the outcome of discipline is our return to fellowship, we will regain the control of the Spirit, or “share in His holiness”, so that His fruit can be produced through us...a “harvest of righteousness and peace”. Are you beginning to see how this works? God wants us to stay in fellowship, and He will pressure us (not force us) to confess and stay there. It’s that simple.

We should also distinguish what happens with believers who sin, as compared with unbelievers, who are totally under the influence of their sinful natures. God disciplines believers because we are His children. Unbelievers, on the other hand, will not be “corrected through discipline”, but will ultimately “stand judgment” for not believing in Christ.

1 Cor. 11:31-32 sheds light on the judgment of *unbelievers*, as opposed to the judgment of *believers*. Verse 31 says, “If we [believers] would judge ourselves [confess our sins], we would not be judged.” This particular “judgment” refers to the discipline of believers, not the eternal judgment that unbelievers face. Verse 32 adds: “When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.” The consequence for the sins of believers is *discipline*, not *condemnation*.

Finally, we want to give a brief preview of future studies by indicating that not all suffering is “discipline”. If all our sins are confessed, any suffering we experience is not for discipline, but for testing and training. God is teaching us to “trust Him”, a subject we will cover thoroughly in future studies. We will study suffering, testing, training, and growth...down the line.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Even in discipline, God is dealing with us in _____ .

Question 2. According to what we have studied so far, when we are being disciplined, what is God trying to get us to do?

Question 3. What does it mean to “judge ourselves”?

Question 4. If we see a fellow believer suffering, can we just assume that person is being disciplined?

Other Scriptures

Ex. 34:6-7a—And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished....”

Ps. 39:11a—You rebuke and discipline men for their sin.

Heb. 12:7-8—Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Remember

Because God loves us, He will provide discipline to get us to confess our sins, so we can return to fellowship with Him. Everything we will ever do for, with, or by God, hangs on our being in fellowship with Him.

F. Abusing Grace

Before going further, we should issue a caution: Use forgiveness, but don’t abuse it. Is there a danger that we will abuse God’s grace? Maybe...if we use grace and forgiveness as *excuses* to sin. But the act of using our freedom of choice as an opportunity to sin is itself an action of the sinful nature, and the only way we can neutralize the sinful nature is to confess our sins and stay in fellowship. If we confess continually, we will have the power to avoid sin, including the sin of using grace as a way to beat the system in order to sin at-will.

Paul addressed this problem with the Romans (seen below) and gave some very definite limits for such assumptions. Grace is great, and God delights when we access His grace offerings consistently and enthusiastically. But grace must not be seen as an opportunity to live our lives without responsibility.

Grace makes provision for us, but our responsibility is to use what God gives us without abusing it. It is possible to misuse grace in a way that grieves God. This is what we see when a believer understands the principle of forgiveness, but applies it as a “get-out-of-jail-free” card, so he can go right back to his crimes. We need to understand how grace works, and we must recognize when we are abusing that grace. At the same time, we must use grace fully, because this is what God intends...and what delights Him.

God is loving. He forgives and *loves* to forgive, based on His Son's work. Love and grace enable His justice and righteousness to work with forgiveness. If they didn't, we would all be condemned. But because He loves us, He provides a way for us to be forgiven.

Keep in mind that God has given us *choice*, so we are free to sin...but not without consequences. When we sin we will face loving discipline, which can be severe and quite painful, even deadly, and we must keep short accounts on our confession-list to stay clean and avoid this. At the same time, remember that *God looks at the heart*, which means that He KNOWS if we are not sincere in our confession, and He sees when we are not truly seeking His forgiveness. Insincere confession is NOT confession at all. It is simply religion...a religious ritual with no effect...a display of godliness, but denying the power in it.

Grace increases as sins increase. There are no sins that God will not forgive, if they are honestly confessed. Grace "fits all sizes". God knows about our sins before they are committed, and His plan is designed to deal with them. Rom. 5:20 says, "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more..." The purpose of the Law is to expose our sins, and as our sins become greater, grace adjusts to take care of them.

Rom. 6:1-2 follows the reference to "grace increasing", with a caution not to abuse grace: "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" The questions are rhetorical. *Of course* we should not go on sinning, and must *not* "live in it any longer". We "died to sin" *positionally*, or in our eternal state, at salvation; but we often "live in it" *conditionally*, in our temporal state. But we do not *want* to live in sin, which is why it is so important for us to deal with it correctly.

If we think we can sin and that it will not be *recognized as sin*, we will not see the need to *honestly* confess it, thus we will not be forgiven, even though we think we are okay. The *application* of grace must be done in the *way* of grace. Grace forgives, but it will not excuse without confession...and that means *honest* confession. Insincere confession used to provide a pretext for sin will only compound our spiritual jeopardy. Once again, God sees the heart and knows our motives.

When we are "clean" and controlled by the Spirit, we can claim the following promise from Ps. 37:3-7:

Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noon day sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

Doing things God's way brings His blessings. Before you are through with these studies, you will understand this fully.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. God's grace must never be used as a pretext to _____ .

Question 2. If we are not _____ in our confession, it will not count. (Hint: More than one answer may be correct.)

Other Scriptures

Rom. 6:12—Therefore, do not let sin [your sinful nature] reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Remember

We can't wink and nod when we deal with God. All cards must be on the table. Confession is about coming to God with an honest heart and sincere acknowledgement of our wrongdoing. If our hearts still treasure sin and are harboring plans to continue a sinful pattern, we are abusing grace, and we will not sustain fellowship with such a devious scheme.

Key Points: Part Two

- Sin is the biggest problem we face.
- We have a sinful nature that cooperates with Satan and the world.
- God solved the sin problem by sacrificing His Son...as our substitute.
- Christ's sacrifice makes it possible for us to be saved simply by *believing* in Him.
- God also honors His Son's sacrifice in dealing with our sins *after* we are saved.
- The technique God uses for removing our sins is *honest confession* to Him.
- If we do not confess our sins, they are not forgiven, and we will be disciplined.

“And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that way; wicked fools will not go about on it.” (Isaiah 35:8)

Segue to Part Three

Confession is the starting point for all other techniques. It will apply to prayer, study of the Word, faith, training, surrender, and other techniques that we will be learning that enable us to mature and serve God in the way He directs. In Part Three, we will continue to feature Technique 1 (“Confession”), as we introduce and explore Technique 2 (“Prayer”).

Part Three

Being Devoted to Prayer

In This Part...

Chapter 6: *Parameters for Prayer*

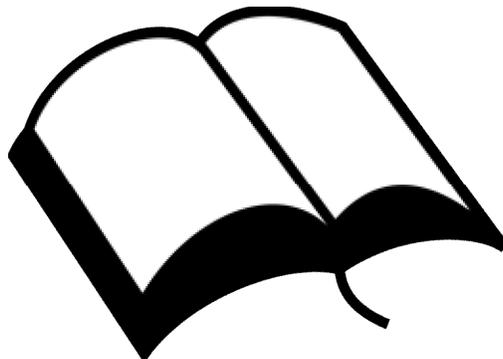
Chapter 7: *Planning our Prayers*

Chapter 8: *Warming up for Prayer*

Chapter 9: *Conditions for Prayer*

Chapter 10: *Faith and Prayer*

Chapter 11: *God's Will and Prayer*



1 Thess. 5:17—*Pray continually.*

Chapter 6

Parameters for Prayer

In This Chapter...

- A. Being Devoted to Prayer*
- B. What is Prayer?*
- C. To Whom do we Pray*
- D. What do we Pray For?*
- E. Paul: Our Model for Intercessory Prayer*

A. Being Devoted to Prayer

Prayer is a *technique* that is crucial to Christian living. Rom. 12:11-12 says, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, *faithful in prayer*” (emphasis mine). Being “faithful” in your prayers means praying *reliably* and *consistently*. Prayer is the underpinning of joy and hope, the greatest expression of “zeal” and “spiritual fervor”.

Prayer is *fundamental* for all believers. Converted Jews in the early church were enthusiastic about their Christian experience, as we see in the following: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). They did it all: Bible study, mutual edification, and fellowship...all ensconced within a custom and practice of perpetual prayer. Prayer and study were at the heart of all they did.

We want our time here on the earth to count for the Lord. When we are praying, we are making good use of our time. We will get rewards in heaven for service we do here, and prayer is “creditable service”. Sometimes we think we are not doing enough for the “kingdom”, but if we are praying faithfully, we are chalking up credits, *and* we will have a positive effect in the world. (See Matt. 6:5; James 5:16)

Col. 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Here we see something

we can be fully committed to: *devotion to prayer*. We can pray anytime, anywhere, in all kinds of “weather”. Through prayer, we can freely engage God moment-by-moment...breath by breath. 1Thess. 5:17 admonishes, “Pray continually.” Prayer is something we are to do without stopping. It is an expression of God-consciousness (pre-occupation with God) and fear of the Lord (awe, reverence, and faith), as we raise our hands and our hearts to Him, our heavenly Father.

A major part of our growth as believers involves integrating prayer into every aspect of our lives...in moments of crisis...or in times of ease. Phil. 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in **everything**, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (emphasis mine). There is no aspect of our lives that is unrelated to God. The more consistently-connected we are with God...through prayer...the more we will experience the “peace of God, which transcends all understanding” (Phil. 4:7).

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. In addition to being joyful in hope and patient in affliction, we are also to be _____ in prayer.

Question 2. What were the two main practices comprising the daily schedule followed by early Jewish converts?

Question 3. How often should we pray?

Question 4. What should we be praying about in our lives? (Hint: Answer is one word.)

Other Scriptures

1 Tim. 2:8—I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

Eph. 6:18a—And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

1 Tim. 2:1—I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.

Remember

As we grow in knowledge and wisdom, we will have greater propensity to pray. For now, we are citing our responsibility to be *devoted to prayer*.

B. What is Prayer?

Prayer is communication with God. It may be a *dialogue*, as in Acts 22:18, where God had a two-way conversation with Paul, while Paul was praying in the temple. But that was Paul. I am not sure

we can count on such a clear give-and-take exchange with God in the present day, and I believe there are far too many claims of God “speaking” to people, when they are actually hearing their own inner voices. God may whisper to us internally, because He has done it before. But the primary way God “speaks” to us today is through His Word, and until that truth is mastered, all other messages are suspect.

Prayer for us is likely to be a monologue...a time when we are talking to a lovingly attentive Father. Prayer is used to confess our sins, acknowledge God, and express our reverence for Him. We also unload our burdens through prayer; ask for spiritual strength and wisdom; and express love for God, family, friends, and even our “enemies”. We seek God’s provision through prayer. We give thanks through prayer. Sometimes, we agonize and cry in prayer. And we ask God questions in prayer, as we seek truth from His Word. Prayer is our link to God, and there are many components to, and types of, prayer...as we shall see.

We witness prayers of all kinds, and it is easy to diminish the power and importance of prayer, or to distort its role. Jesus was very specific in establishing guidelines for prayer, as we see in Matt. 6:5: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.” In the verse that follows, He goes on to say that prayer should be mostly a private, personal experience, when we “go into our rooms” to pray. Public prayer has its place, but—essentially—prayer is “nonpublic”.

More than anything else, prayer is a recognition of God. In verses 7 and 8 of Matthew 6, Jesus said, “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Here’s His point: Prayer is not a way to *acquaint* God with our needs, or to *get Him to meet them*, since he already knows them and wants to supply them all. In prayer, we bring *ourselves* to God *with our needs*, submitting everything to Him, trusting Him to handle things perfectly. In prayer, by bringing ourselves to God *with our needs*, we are submitting to Him, and recognizing the One to whom we pray. It is paying attention to God, being aware that He *knows* our needs, and that *proper attention to Him* will get those needs met. We will learn what “proper attention” means, and will see the finer distinctions in prayer as we move along.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. For us, prayer is likely to be a _____, rather than a dialogue.

Question 2. Name three things that we might do through prayer.

Question 3. Jesus said that prayers should mostly be “public”...or “private”?

Question 4. Why pray, if God already knows what we need?

Other Scriptures

Matt. 5:6—But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Dan. 6:10b—...he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Remember

Prayer is most often *talking to God* to tap into His provision for our spiritual and material needs. We bring our needs to His grace, and submit ourselves to Him, for our good and His glory.

C. To Whom Do We Pray?

We pray only to God, of course. In 1 Ki 18:26-29, we see the futility of praying to anything or anyone other than God. Prophets of Baal screamed prayers to their god from morning until noon. They danced around an altar, and continued screaming, until Elijah had heard enough. He cried out to them, “Shout louder!” Then he taunted them further with, “Surely he [Baal] is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” The prophets of Baal shrieked louder and louder, and cut themselves with swords and spears, until they bled. Here is what they received from Baal: “...there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.”

How empty it must feel to pray to a non-god. How desperate and hopeless. How excellent it is that we can pray to a living, caring God, Who is a whisper away!

When we pray to God, we usually address the Father, but we may also address the Son and the Holy Spirit. We see all three in the following:

- **Addressing God the Father.** In Matt. 6:9-13, in the prayer Jesus was teaching his disciples, Jesus began, “Our father in heaven...” He was addressing the Father. In John 16:23, Jesus said, “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” He was directing their future prayers to the Father, who would be hearing and responding to them after Jesus was no longer physically on earth. Many instances of praying to God the Father exist in Scripture.
- **Addressing God the Son.** When Jesus said that “you will no longer ask me anything”, He was letting the disciples know that the face-to-face requests they had become accustomed to giving, would no longer be accessible. They would have to direct their requests toward heaven...to the heavenly Father. But later, with Jesus at the Father’s right hand,

there were some prayers aimed directly at Jesus, as we see first in Acts 7:29, where Stephen spoke specifically to Jesus, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And then in 1 Cor. 16:22, Paul prayed that Jesus would return soon, saying, “Come, O Lord!” We are able to address Jesus directly in prayer.

- **Addressing God the Holy Spirit.** John 14:16-17 anticipates the Holy Spirit being given to us and living within us as believers. While He is there, as we see in John 14:26, He will be our “teacher” and “counselor”. It would seem to follow that we can directly address the *teacher/counselor* that has been given to us. The Holy Spirit also gives us gifts for service (1 Cor. 12:7-11), and communicates to our spirits the assurance that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:16). Surely, we can talk to this *gift-giver* and *giver-of-confidence* within us.

After all, all three members of the Godhead, or Trinity, are God. He is one, and we cannot pray to one without praying to all. As One, and as All, God loves us and attends to us. When we speak to Him, we have a devoted audience.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. It seems that most prayers should be addressed to God the _____.

Question 2. Why are our prayers effective, as opposed to those offered to idols?

Question 3. Do you think that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit can operate independently of one another?

Other Scriptures

John 14:16-17—And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

1 Cor. 12:11—All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Rom. 8:16—The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Remember

We pray to the living God. Prayers are usually addressed to God the Father, but may be directed to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The important thing to remember is that the God we pray to is alive!

D. What do we Pray For?

Scripture will help us determine what we should pray for. Here are a few passages that provide parameters for the things we should pray for:

- **We should pray for everyone.** Paul said, in 1 Tim. 2:1, to do the following:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone....

Paul is saying that all kinds of prayers should be offered for *everyone*. Sounds a little generic, perhaps, but it is not a big stretch for us to see that “everyone” includes people we know, and those we don’t. People we know, we can call by name, and those we don’t can be prayed for in groups, such as “lost people” or “everyone who reads these words”. The requirement is general, because it is universal. We are—indeed—to apply our prayers to everyone.

- **We should pray “in everything”.** We should pray in all conditions: “in trouble” and “in prosperity”. 1 Tim. 5:5 tells us that we should pray in difficult times, as in the case of widows who have no one to take care of them. This verse says, “The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.” We can fret and despair, and bury ourselves beneath the enormity of our circumstances, or we can pray continually...night and day...“casting our anxiety on Him” (1 Pet. 5:7). Paul also said in a passage we saw earlier, Phil. 4:6-7, that we are to let our requests be known to God “in everything”. That would include good times, as well as bad.
- **We should pray all the time.** We saw these earlier: 1) Rom. 12:12 admonishes us to be faithful and consistent in praying, and 2) 1 Thess. 5:17 tells us to pray non-stop. The time to pray...always...is *now*. Eph. 6:18 adds, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions”.
- **We should pray everywhere.** 1 Tim. 2:8 reflects Paul’s view on *where* we should pray: “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.” This, of course, refers to people from all over, but it also means that people from all over should pray *wherever they are*. Prayer should be going on in us and among us...*all the time...everywhere*.

The specific things that we should pray for (and about) include many things that will appear throughout our studies. Some of these can be seen here:

- Ourselves. Phil. 4:6b says, “...by prayer and petition, let your requests be made known to God.” It is not only *okay* for us to include our own concerns in our prayers...we are *commanded* to do so.
- Pray for leaders. 1 Tim. 2:2 says to pray for “kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

- Pray for the sick. James 5:14 says, “Is any one sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him....” This verse and the surrounding passage will be studied in more detail when we examine the “prayer of faith” later.
- Pray for messengers. Christ said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2). This is a prayer for evangelists and witnesses to be sent out to spread the gospel message.
- Pray for ministers. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him: “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel....”
- Pray for your enemies. Matt. 5:44b says, “...pray for those who persecute you.”
- Pray for mercy. Ps. 86:3 shows David’s cry for mercy, one of many in Scripture: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long.”
- There are many other things we should pray for, such as these:
 - ◊ For guidance and direction under pressure. Ps. 5:8—“Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make straight your way before me.”
 - ◊ For safety. Ps. 16:1—“Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.”
 - ◊ For wisdom. James 1:5-6a—“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all with out finding fault, and it will be given to him.”
 - ◊ For weapons to use against the enemies of Christ. 2 Cor. 10:3-5—“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”

There is no *place* where we should not pray, no *circumstance* that we should not pray about, no *person* we should not pray for—known and unknown—and no *time* when we should not be praying. Prayer is a blanket requirement for uniform and pervasive application within every aspect of our lives. We must pray for ourselves, and for others, in all seasons...and God will supply all our needs from His great riches through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What are the four sweeping parameters for prayer?

Question 2. Name three things that we should pray for.

Question 3. Name one thing that we should not pray for or about.

Other Scriptures

James 4:2-3—You want something, but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what

you get on your pleasures.

Eph. 6:18—And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

1 Pet. 5:7—Cast your anxiety on him, for he cares for you.

Remember

Pray about everything and everyone...everywhere and all the time. That about covers it.

E. Paul: Our Model for Intercessory Prayer

Paul provided some good examples and some excellent guidelines for prayer, especially in regard to praying for others (often called “intercessory” prayer). In 2 Thess. 1:11a, Paul said, “With this in mind, we constantly pray for you...” He said this many times in his epistles. In 1 Thess. 1:2-3, he said it again, “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.” He prayed for other believers faithfully, citing in his prayers the issues that believers then and now must deal with.

One of the things Paul prayed for was the growth of believers. An example of this is seen in Philemon 1:4-6. We quote here verses 4 and 6: “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers....I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith [meaning “knowledge” in this case], so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing.” He prayed that the believers addressed would teach one another, so they can get “full understanding”.

We see in Col. 4:12 another instance when Paul and his associates supported the growth of other believers through prayer. This verse says, “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” Much of our service to God involves using our gifts to mutually edify each other, or build each other up. It makes sense that a big part of our concern for others, as expressed in our prayers, would focus on their growth and maturity. In the “great prayer exchange”, we encourage and strengthen each other through our prayers...and everyone benefits from it.

The times that Paul prayed for others are countless. We offer examples in the following:

- 2 Cor. 13:7a—Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong.
- Phil. 1:4-5a—In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now....
- Eph. 3:16—I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being....
- 1 Thess. 5:23—May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
- Col. 1:9—For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual

wisdom and understanding.

- Eph. 1:16-17—I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

In Phil. 1:9-11, Paul prayed this:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Look at the things Paul wanted for these believers, and that he prayed would happen for them:

1. That their love would grow.
2. That knowledge and depth of insight would spur their growth.
3. That their discernment would increase.
4. That they would be pure and blameless.
5. That they would be filled with the fruit of Christ.
6. That all of this would accrue to the glory and praise of God.

These are the things that are worth praying for, as we pray for others. Clearly, Paul was a “prayer warrior”, and a great intercessor. We can only imagine how it would be to stand with him and hear him pray for us, because we know it would have power. But guess what? He does. The prayers we see Paul praying for others are also prayed for us, because they are part of God’s Word, which is for all of us. In Eph. 3:14-19, we see the content of a prayer Paul prayed, that had you specifically in mind:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This prayer is for you. Paul prayed that YOU would be empowered through fellowship and the control of the Holy Spirit, so the fruit of the Spirit would be borne in your life, while the love of Christ would always be increasingly understood in your heart. These are things that Paul sought for us in prayer...so long ago...and things we should address in our prayers for each other...today.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. How often did Paul pray for other believers? (Hint: Look at verses quoted in the first paragraph of this section.)

Question 2. Name two or three things that a prayer for others might be focused on.

Question 3. Do you think that Jesus' prayer in John 17, especially verses 20-25, applies to you?

Other Scriptures

1 Thess. 1:3—We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Phil. 1:19—I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

1 Cor. 1:11—...you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Rom. 15:30-31—I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Remember

We are in this precarious journey together. We need support from each other, and one of the handiest and most effective ways we can do this is to pray for each other. Prayers are our investments into each other, and they enrich us all.

Chapter 7

Planning our Prayers

In This Chapter...

- A. Model Prayers*
- B. A Regimen for Prayer*
- C. Giving Thanks in Prayer*

A. Model Prayers

In Acts 1:14, we see the prayer regimen that the disciples followed: “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” The power of intense prayer was helpful to the disciples after Jesus’ ascension. It is almost certain that their prayers followed roughly the model Jesus had given to them.

In Matt. 6:9-13, we see the model prayer Jesus gave to his disciples, as follows:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily
bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our
debtors.
And lead us not into
temptation,

but deliver us from the evil
one.
For yours is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever.
Amen.

This is a general outline for a prayer, with more substance than we might see at first glance, as we shall show. This is a good model prayer, but it is not intended to be comprehensive. Like many things that Jesus taught, clarity and completion would come after His ascension. Many things not included in this model were added along the way, and we will see these as we progress. As is, the model contains an excellent framework and several important components.

The model prayer in Matthew 6 incorporates the following:

1. Addressing God the Father.
2. Acknowledging His holiness.
3. Inviting His timing and administration of all future events.
4. Submitting to His will for now and for all eternity.
5. Petitioning Him for physical and spiritual provisions.
6. “Forgiving our debts” is a “blank” into which we insert our own known sins by confessing them.
7. “Forgiving our debtors” is an event that can take place after our sins are confessed, and fellowship has been restored, thus equipping us to forgive others for wrongs done against us.
8. Asking God to direct our pathways away from temptation.
9. Asking God to deliver us and protect us from the attacks of Satan (who is assisted by the world and our own sinful natures).
10. Recognizing God’s *holiness* early in the prayer, and ending the prayer with an acknowledgement of His *sovereignty*.

A comprehensive form of prayer can be seen in the following prayer-mosaic, which integrates elements we have learned, and one or two others that will be studied soon. Here is a model prayer, given in the sequence we recommend:

- Confess known sins.
- Acknowledge God...as God.
- Take time to clear your heart of any “unforgiveness”.
- Pray for people other than yourself...or for conditions outside your own.
- Make requests to God for provisions in your life.
- Thank God for everything.

This model is useful for “private” prayer. And remember: ANYTIME we pray, even within the “never-ceasing” variety, we should *confess our sins FIRST*...so our prayers will be effective. For public prayers, confession is not vocalized, as our sins are to be confessed only to the Father.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Is the model prayer Jesus gave us to be recounted to the letter?

Question 2. Which comes first...asking God for forgiveness, or forgiving others? Why did you select the one you did?

Question 3. What kind of prayer should not include vocalized, audible confession of sins?

Other Scriptures

Luke 18:1—Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

1 Thess. 5:18—...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

James 5:16b—The prayer of a righteous man [all sins confessed] is powerful and effective.

Remember

Prayers are not “formalized” events, but sincere occasions of drawing near to the throne of grace. Following a model, however, will aid in comprehensiveness and effectiveness.

B. A Regimen for Prayer

Prayer can take many forms, as we have begun to see. By the time we are through with all our studies, we will know that prayer serves many purposes: it is a way to show humility, an expression of love through intercession, an opportunity to give thanks, and a time of surrender to the wisdom and will of God. It can be simple, perhaps seen in a fleeting thought or acknowledgement, or it can be elaborate and intense, perhaps lasting for hours. It can take place anywhere, at any time, and it can be public or private. We indicated earlier that *some* kind of prayer should be going on at all times...because prayer is part of our ongoing communion with God.

We will continue to look at prayer in all its configurations, but in this section, we want to consider times of prayer that are set-apart and private. Such prayers are “scheduled” and somewhat “structured”, usually rendered in complete thoughts expressed in words and sentences. Generally, this kind of prayer is targeted toward specific purposes, and is prompted by current concerns

and/or items delineated on a “list”.

It is important to have a private prayer *schedule*, or “regimen”. The term “regimen” is used for exercise routines, such as “going to the gym at 6:00 a.m.” each day. By using a regimen in our prayer lives, we can achieve greater consistency in our prayers. If, on the other hand, we depend on our own drifting inclinations and energies, we may shirk our prayers. The point is simple: schedules promote faithfulness in prayer. Deviations from schedules will occur, of course, due to the vicissitudes of life, and at such times we can ask God for “special grace”, until we can resume the schedule again. It is always best to follow the regimen exactly.

There are many instances of believers following a prayer regimen in Scripture. It seems that all the “greats” had a regular prayer schedule. David, for example, knew the importance of a regimen for prayer, and he prayed at a specific time each day. In Ps. 5:3, David wrote, “In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.” David’s morning routine began his day with prayer, and then he followed with others throughout the day (perhaps not so structured), as seen in Ps. 119:164, which says, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.”

The prophet Daniel also had special times for praying. Dan. 6:10 reports his pattern for scheduled prayers, as we see here:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Daniel’s prayer regimen was so important to him that, when the king decreed against such prayers, Daniel was willing to face death to continue it. The consequence for his persistence in regular prayer was that he was thrown into a “den” with a group of hungry lions. The story is familiar...God saved Daniel from the lions. This story is well-established as a lesson in faith, but there is another principle to be gained from it, which is this: It is important to follow a prayer regimen, and displacement of it should be stringently avoided.

It is worth noting that good results come from focused, routine prayers. After Daniel was rescued from the lions, the same king who had decreed against prayer issued a new proclamation, as follows:

...in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he [God] is the living God and he endures forever...he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. (Dan. 6:26a, 27b)

Daniel’s prayer regimen was effective. We see this effect repeated throughout Scripture, as in Ps. 55:16-18, which gives the following:

But I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.

Set a time. Make a list, if it helps. Follow a schedule. Certainly, we should pray without ceasing, but we should also allow a specific time for 100% concentration on praying to the Lord. He will honor such prayers.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the name we have given to regularly-scheduled “private” prayers?

Question 2. What other activities can we do while we are conducting our scheduled prayers?

Question 3. What is the time you have already set (or will set) for scheduled prayer?

Other Scriptures

Dan. 6:28—So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

1 Thess. 3:10a—Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again....

Remember

Prayers are not “formalized”, as we concluded earlier. They are not clinical or academic...but they can and should be *scheduled*, as well as being conducted in all the other forms we are discussing. During “dedicated” prayer-time, we can get completely focused on God, and very specific in our requests and acknowledgements.

C. Giving Thanks in Prayer

In planning our prayers, we must not omit an important part of praying that is embedded in almost every instruction to pray, and every description of “how” to pray. This important component is “thanksgiving”.

Giving thanks is something that is either *called for* or *done* throughout God’s Word. Thanksgiving is ubiquitous in all the books of the Bible, perhaps none more so than Psalms. David and other psalmists gave thanks, talked about giving thanks, and exhorted giving thanks throughout the book of Psalms. One example of this can be seen in Ps. 100:4, which says, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” God was expressing through David the importance of giving thanks.

In Eph. 5:4, thanksgiving is commanded as a spiritual activity, and distinguished from its opposite: profanity. This verse says, “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Thanksgiving has a flavor of recognizing blessing, while profanity connotes bitterness and a lack of acknowledgement for the goodness of God. Thanksgiving is

never out of place.

In the Old Testament, God preferred direct, personal thanksgiving over sacrifices, even those designated as “thanksgiving and praise” sacrifices. This is because God looks at the heart first, and thanksgiving is an occurrence of the heart. Ps. 69:30-31 discloses God’s preference, as follows:

I will praise God’s name in
 song
and glorify him with
 thanksgiving.
This will please the Lord more
 than an ox,
more than a bull....

More than anything, God likes a personal expression of thanks. This is why we are commanded so frequently to give thanks when we pray. Prayer is something we are to do all the time, and thanksgiving trails right along with it. This is what we see in Phil. 4:6, which says, “Do not be anxious in anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Thanksgiving is prayer’s traveling companion, and should be given ALL THE TIME.

The verse we just saw in Philippians deals with a prayer for “supplication”, or “supplies”. But we should also thank God as part of other kinds of prayer, as well, such as the one in 1 Tim. 2:1, which says, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone.” Thanksgiving is the important “tag-along” for all forms and types of prayer. It is the punctuation and epilogue for every prayer, and keeps the credit flowing where it is due...toward God.

Examples of thanksgiving for specific things are replete throughout the Bible, so—to see a cross-section of them—we will aggregate them into “occasions” for giving thanks. We see three main areas of opportunity for giving thanks, as follows:

- Give thanks in all that you DO. “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17).
- Give thanks in all that HAPPENS. “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:18).
- Give thanks for EVERYTHING. “Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20).

This set recaptures the standard that thanks are to be expressed to God all the time...on all occasions.

Sometimes, especially during discipline or training, thanksgiving may seem difficult, at first. We may ask this: When suffering or “misfortune” comes, must we *really* give thanks for it? The answer is “Yes!” In EVERYTHING give thanks! This is our command...and this is the proper perspective and attitude that we are to maintain. As we progress upward into greater knowledge of God’s Word, and learn to apply His techniques for living, our posture will reflect greater gratefulness toward

God. Giving thanks under all conditions is a mature response...one we grow into. As we get closer to God, any other response to God seems foreign and unfitting.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the opposite of thanksgiving?

Question 2. What is our proper response when adversity comes?

Other Scriptures

1 Tim. 1:12—I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

1 Cor. 11:24—The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it....

Rom. 14:6b—He who eats meat, eats to the Lord for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Ps. 30:12—O Lord My God, I will give you thanks forever.

Rev. 11:17—We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was....

Remember

Whatever our circumstances, we should give thanks to God. As we move deeper into the riches of His Word, and understand the marvels of His grace, we will understand that everything that happens is part of His plan, and that it all works together for our good.

Intercalation

This is neither an introduction nor a conclusion. This is an interjection that could be inserted anywhere among these studies. The point we want to make here is that “good” is an outcropping of our thirst for God. This thirst is expressed as prayer, thanksgiving, humility, faith, study, confession, surrender, acknowledgement, and acceptance of grace. All these are conditions of a heart that recognizes God, giving rise to a state of mind seen as “transformed”. The name of this new attitude is called “God-consciousness”. This is preoccupation with Christ, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, and reverence toward God. This is wanting God...every day...every minute...derived from *decisions* to want Him. Anything that is done with, by, and for God will grow out of this seed...we want only God.

Chapter 8

Warming up for Prayer

In This Chapter...

- A. The Prayer Life of Jesus*
- B. Praying in Jesus' Name*
- C. Praying in the Spirit*

A. The Prayer Life of Jesus

Our objective is to enrich our understanding of prayer, so to help with this, we will look briefly at our exemplar for prayer...our Savior, Jesus Christ. Words to describe Jesus' prayer life are hard to find. It was precious. It was perfect. And it was powerful. Jesus had a walk characterized by perpetual prayer and *complete reliance* on His Father. In this section, we will not discuss all aspects of His prayer life, but will focus on one particular feature of it that we should emulate: *His submission to His Father's will*.

Many of Jesus' prayers took place apart from the bustle of His ministry. An example of this is seen in Mark 6:46, which says, "After leaving [a crowd of five thousand] he went up on a mountainside to pray." On another occasion, where He had dealt with large crowds, he rose early to pray. This is described in Mark 1:35: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." Can you imagine the power in such prayers?

Jesus used concentrated prayers before and after important events, such as the choosing of the twelve disciples, which is described in the following:

One of these days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom

he also designated apostles.

Jesus also prayed in Gethsemane right before his capture. He asked the disciples to keep watch, but they were exhausted and fell asleep repeatedly. Jesus stayed awake, however, agonizing in the hours before He was seized, tried, and crucified. In this most crucial of all times in history, Jesus acknowledged His Father, addressing Him as “Abba, Father”, and surrendering to Him with the words, “Not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36). These words thrust us into the nucleus of all truth concerning prayer...which is this: Prayer, more than anything else, is *coming to God in a spirit of surrender to His will*. We make our requests, but—more importantly—we submit to His plan and will.

We must come to the Father the way Jesus did, with certainty that there is no risk in trusting Him, confident that His way is the best way. When we comprehend that prayer is a time of *submission*, we will be well on our way to a meaningful prayer life, and we will soon see the benefits of grace that effective prayer evokes.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. How long did Jesus pray in Gethsemane?

Question 2. The single word that best describes Jesus’ attitude in prayer is _____.

Question 3. What do you want that is more important to you than God’s will?

Other Scriptures

Matt. 6:10b—...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

James 4:15-16—Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that”. As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

1 John 5:14-15—This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything *according to his will*, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (emphasis mine)

Remember

The most central of all truths is that God is God, and we are not. When we approach God in prayer, we bring all our requests to Him, cast our anxiety on Him, and so on. But the paragon of all prayers is an expression of submission to God’s perfect will, because *He is God*.

B. Praying in Jesus' Name

As we learn to trust the Father the way Jesus trusted the Father, we will pray with the same attitude of surrender that Jesus did. To pray like Jesus, we must become God-dependent. To be God-dependent, we must be aligned with the Father, as Jesus was. Jesus was never out of fellowship, and He never stepped away from His Father. Jesus wants us to maintain fellowship with God, the same way He did, so our prayers can offer the same closeness with the Father that Jesus demonstrated throughout His life.

We have heard the command, “Pray in Jesus’ name”, and we usually close our prayers with, “And I pray these things in Jesus’ name”. There is nothing wrong with this, as Jesus’ name thunders within us when we hear it, but there is more to “praying in Jesus’ name” than just saying the phrase with our prayers.

It is interesting that none of the prayers recorded in Scripture end with the phrase, “in Jesus’ name”. Wayne Grudem said this about praying in Jesus’ name:

To come in the name of someone means that another person has authorized us to come on his authority, not on our own...Praying in Jesus’ name is therefore prayer made on his authorization on the basis of his mediatorial work for us. In a broader sense, the “name” of a person in the ancient world represented the person himself and therefore all of his character. (Endnote 7)

This gives us a new perspective of “praying in Jesus’ name”. According to this, we cannot just say “in Jesus’ name” at the end of a prayer, and expect this to qualify our prayers for answers. There is much more to learn about the “qualification” of our prayers, as we shall see.

We will interject here some phrases directly related to “praying in Jesus’ name”. These will be given thorough treatment later, but we can acknowledge right now that the effectiveness of prayer depends on specific conditions, such as these: *praying in the Spirit, praying in faith, and praying according to God’s will*. These carry the same effect as “praying in Jesus’ name”, and ALL OF THESE are contingent on our using the techniques we are learning. We’ll cover all of these thoroughly before we are through.

The phrase “pray in Jesus’ name” must be broken down, word by word. We know what the word “pray” means, as we have defined it already. The word “in” is central...it means “within”, or “inside of”. We are to pray “inside of” something. That something is disclosed in the term, “Jesus’ name”, which is actually *Jesus Christ*...His person and His character.

If we are operating “within Jesus”, or inside the perimeter of His character and His power, this means we are “in fellowship”, and walking in Him. If our sins are confessed, we will be in fellowship, and we will be functioning under the influence of His Spirit. THEN we can “pray in Jesus’ name”, or pray within the influence and in the power of Jesus’ Holy Spirit. The lesson is this: confess before you pray, so you will be praying within the sphere of Jesus’ character and power.

In John 16:23-24, Jesus told His disciples the following:

In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.

Praying in Jesus' name, as described above, enables us to receive what we ask for. There are other reasons behind this, as we shall see.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. When we say “in Jesus’ name” at the end of a prayer, does that make it effective?

Question 2. What does the term “Jesus’ name” signify?

Question 3. To pray “in Jesus’ name”, we should _____ before we pray.

Other Scriptures

John 14:13-14—And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Is. 42:8—I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

2 Chron. 7:14a—...if my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin....

1 Tim. 2:5—For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Remember

Praying in Jesus' name is praying within His power and authority. If we are not in fellowship, we cannot pray in Jesus' name, no matter what words we include in our prayers. The condition of the heart is more important than words from the mouth.

C. Praying in the Spirit

Eph. 6:18 says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” When we are “in the Spirit”, this does not mean that we are “trance-like”, or transported into the mists, or carried off to some tran-

scendental state, and it does not usually imply emotional or physical gyration. It simply means that we are under the control of the Holy Spirit, rather than our sinful natures. If we are NOT controlled by the Holy Spirit, we cannot *pray in the Spirit*.

Preparation for praying in the Spirit begins by “living in the Spirit”. Rom. 8:3b-4 describes it this way:

And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

By living in the Spirit we fulfill the requirements of the law, which means that, under the control of the Holy Spirit, we will not sin. We will have our minds focused on spiritual things, as we see in Rom. 8:5:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

When our minds are set on the things which God wants, we will be living in fellowship with Him, and our thoughts and prayers will match God’s will. The Holy Spirit is inside of us...and when He controls us, our minds will be attuned to Him, and our prayers will line up with *what God wants us to have*. (There’s more to this, as we shall see.)

When we are in fellowship...or controlled by the Holy Spirit...we can pray effectively. And if we do not know what to pray, the Holy Spirit will help us...and even pray in our place. Rom. 8:26-27 says the following:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.

The Holy Spirit knows God’s will...He is God, after all. 1 Cor. 2:11b says, “...in the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” So He knows what to pray for...and only He can pray “by the book” of God’s will. When we pray with Him in control, our prayers will tend to match God’s will. And if we pray according to God’s will, we will get what we ask for. On the other hand, there is NO power in prayers rendered outside the control of the Holy Spirit. Prayers prayed “in the Spirit” are effective.

The concept of fellowship and the filling of the Spirit will be strengthened as we proceed through these studies. It is alarming that so few Christians have mastered a “walk in the Spirit”. The problem is not with this “grace” system, but in the failure of believers to learn it and follow it. As we learn God’s Word, get closer to Him, walk in fellowship, and mature, we will see the full fruit of God’s presence and work in us.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. How can self-hypnosis be used to enhance “praying in the Spirit”?

Question 2. When we are living according to the Spirit, our minds will be focused on the things that the _____ desires.

Question 3. How do we get our prayers to match God’s will, so we can get what we ask for?

Other Scriptures

1 Pet. 3:12—For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

James 5:16b—The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Gal. 5:25 (NET)—If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit.

Remember

To pray in the Spirit, we must be in fellowship. This means our sins must be confessed. Technique 1 (Confession) opens up Technique 2 (Prayer). Thus we begin to build the superstructure known as “maturity”, which will be the outcome of applying the techniques God gives us.

Chapter 9

Conditions for Prayer

In This Chapter...

- A. Conditions Do Affect Prayer*
- B. Confession Awakens Prayer*
- C. Unconfessed Sin Halts Prayer*
- D. Study Enhances Prayer*
- E. Ignoring the Word Nullifies Prayer*
- F. Not Forgiving Others Impacts Prayer*
- G. Humility Aids Prayer*

A. Conditions Do Affect Prayer

When we “ask” in Jesus’ name, we are operating in the power of His Messianic divinity and authority. This requires fellowship, as we have seen, but complete efficacy in prayer also requires the following: *understanding* (of techniques and promises in the Word) and *faith*. By the time you finish all the studies offered in this course, you will master the skills needed to live and pray in all the fullness of God.

Quality and effectiveness in prayer, like so many other things we will study, depend on the *spiritual condition of the believer*. Powerful prayers will be generated only when they are under-girded by strong spiritual preparation. We want to be *prepared* to pray, knowing already that the power of prayer is provisional. Conditions must be right for prayers to have impact, but that’s not all: The roadblocks to prayer are shockingly impenetrable, unless we are equipped to break through them.

Enablement to meet the conditions for meaningful prayer are made available by grace through God’s love. These include forgiveness through confession, growth through study, trusting God un-

der all conditions, and consistency in prayer. (Yes, “prayer” is a condition for “effective praying”...because prayers practiced become prayers polished.)You will understand all of these conditions soon. If you find, along the way, that you are not getting answers to your prayers, you must check to see if you are meeting the conditions.

This section is introductory, so there will be no questions or additional verses.

Remember

To pray, prepare. Without fulfilling all conditions for prayer, your prayers will be hampered. Prayer requires spiritual readiness, and God has provided techniques for achieving this. We are now ready to see the conditions for prayer.

B. Confession Awakens Prayer

Confession of our sins puts us back in fellowship. We want to quickly review this technique, and show its significance in our prayer life. We recall that 1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Confession brings forgiveness. We see this again in Ps. 32:3-5, where David said the following:

When I kept silent [did not confess], my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

In 2 Tim. 1:3, Paul told young pastor Timothy, “I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.” Paul can pray for Timothy effectively because Paul’s conscience is clear, meaning all his sins have been confessed and forgiven.

We see this principle again in Is. 6:1-8, where Isaiah’s prayer of confession results in forgiveness, restoration, and return to service. We quote verses 5-7 from this passage, as follows:

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Once again, confession brings forgiveness, and forgiveness restores fellowship. Fellowship, in turn, is a condition for praying effectively. 1 Sam. 12:10 shows the correct sequence: 1) confession, and 2) prayer. This verse says, “They cried out to the Lord and said, ‘We have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.’” Confess and then pray...that is the winning combination. It gets results, as we see in verse 11: “...he delivered you from the hands of your enemies on every side, so that you

lived securely.”

The sinful nature and the Holy Spirit cannot control the same space, and if we are not in fellowship, that means we are controlled, not by the Holy Spirit, but by the “flesh”. If we are controlled by the flesh, there is no way our prayers are going to be heard, and we can’t possibly pray “in faith”, or “according to God’s will”. On the other hand, if the Holy Spirit is in charge, our prayers will be heard and answered. We see this illustrated in Ps. 91:14-16, as follows:

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

“Loving God” is an outcome of fellowship. When we love Him, He will answer us...and He will take us out of the place of “trouble” and put us in a place of “honor”. Honor, of course, has spiritual implications, but can be rendered in any form of God’s choosing.

When we walk away from God to sin, and forget or refuse to confess, our prayers will evaporate before they reach the ceiling. Occasions for this can be seen in a number of places in Scripture. One example emerges from Is. 1:15-16, where God speaks to Isaiah concerning the Israelites, saying this:

When you [Israelites] spread your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean.

We will see more on this in the next section, but we must be clear: To be *heard*, we must be *clean*, or have all sins forgiven. Jesus said this about being clean:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (Matt. 23:25-26)

When we confess, our hearts are cleansed, the control of the Holy Spirit resumes, and our prayers are heard. “Righteousness” comes from being clean, and is an outcome of fellowship. This is why “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16b; see also 1 Pet. 3:12). If we are going to be effective in prayer, we must be “righteous”, which is the result of forgiveness. As for “experiential” righteousness, it can happen, too...as we shall see in an upcoming study.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Confession brings _____ .

Question 2. Why was Paul’s conscience clear when he prayed for Timothy?

Question 3. If God “hides His eyes” from us, and “will not listen” to us, what do we need to do to change this?

Other Scriptures

1 Ki. 8:33-34—When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and confess your name, praying and making supplication to you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to their fathers.

1 Pet. 3:12—For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

Eph. 5:14—Arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Remember

If we are out of fellowship, our prayers will not be heard. The solution for this...the way to open up the prayer lines...is confession of our sins. To “pray without ceasing”, we must also “confess without ceasing”.

C. Unconfessed Sin Halts our Prayers

We have suggested this already, but this must be established: Any time we have unconfessed *known* sins in our hearts, we can be sure that we will **not** get what we ask for in our prayers. James 4:1-6 tells us why we do not get what we ask for. We quote here verses 3-5 of that passage:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask for wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Carnality prevents productive prayer. Sin is the problem, as we just saw in James 4: killing, coveting, quarreling, fighting, lusting, and pride. Our prayers are not answered because our motives are not spiritual and our requests do not represent faith and understanding. We are weak, disobedient, and unbelieving. To repair this, we've got to get cleaned up.

Jer. 17:10 tells us that God “searches the heart and examines the mind”, and if He finds sin there, the plug is pulled on our prayer. This is suggested in Prov. 15:29, which says, “The Lord is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous.” In this same chapter, Prov. 15, in verse 8, we see this: “The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.” When we confess, we are not “sacrificing”, but accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which makes us “upright”, thus making our prayers pleasing to Him. But if we are “wicked”, God will seem far away.

Repeating: God will not hear our prayers if sin exists in our hearts. Ps. 66:18 says it outright, “If I

had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened...” When we have trash in our souls, we must have it removed by pointing it out to God, so He can burn it up. We must get this right...we must take confession seriously. If we miss this point or do not use this technique properly, our prayers will not matter, and our lives will not fulfill their purpose.

Is. 59:1-3 drives this point home as well, as we see in the following:

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

Sin separates us from fellowship and cuts off our prayers from His hearing. The solution is in this same passage, Is. 59:12, where confession brings cleansing, as follows: “For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: rebellion, treachery [etc.]” Verse 20 completes the process, saying, “The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,’ declares the Lord.” This illustrates confession, even though the primary application is to the Second Coming of Christ. The point for us is that cleanliness opens the prayer lines, while unconfessed sin closes them.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the reason James gives in this section for our not getting what we ask for?

Question 2. What happens when the Lord searches our hearts and finds sin there?

Question 3. When sin blocks our prayers, how can we get them removed?

Other Scriptures

Prov. 21:2—All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart.

Matt. 15:18-19—But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man “unclean”. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

James 4:4, 8—You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Remember

We see clearly that there are conditions under which our prayers will not be heard. The condition we saw in this section is one of “unconfessed sin”. This condition can change to “confessed sin” instantly, when we confess...or when we “wash our hands”.

D. Study Enhances Prayer

It is obvious that prayers will be better if we examine God’s Word to learn *how* to pray. But there is an aspect to studying the Word and its impact on prayer that is not as obvious, but just as true. This is it: Study builds faith, and faith is the backbone of prayer. So, for us to see how study enhances prayer, we need to see first how study and faith interact to bring about greater maturity and thus more-effective prayer. Faith is built in tiny increments, each brick or stone being laid down on another in the form of scriptures and teachings. These are the building bricks for construction of our faith edifice. As faith builds, maturity grows, and our use of all the techniques becomes more consistent and consequential.

The technique of “study” underpins the technique of faith, and feeds it. As we understand more of God’s truths through examination of the Bible, especially all the techniques and promises, our faith in the kingdom, person, and plan of God will flourish. Study causes learning, and learning causes understanding...maybe. We say “maybe”, because it is possible to accumulate encyclopedic volumes of Bible knowledge and still be spiritually ignorant.

Here’s the difference: It is possible to have a “head knowledge” of Scripture without it ever reaching the heart. If Bible knowledge does not reach the heart, it will just stay in human memory, and cannot be applied spiritually. The most important component in *transferring* (or processing) “academic Bible knowledge”, so that it becomes “spiritual understanding”, is *believing* the truths we hear. (Later, we will help with the “truth-sifting” process, inasmuch as not *everything* we hear *should* be believed. We will also see that “understanding” is not the pinnacle of spiritual knowledge. That distinction is reserved for “wisdom”.) Repeat: *Believing truths* triggers the transfer of Bible “knowledge” into the heart as “understanding”, so it can be put into place for application. The step of believing the truth cannot be omitted, as maturity and use of the techniques can never get underway on head knowledge alone.

We will study faith and learning in detail later. The important point to glean in this section is that Bible study, correctly-done, will result in *true* (processed) learning, and true learning will cause faith to grow, which will equip us to pray more effectively. As we study and grow, our prayers will improve, both in content and in strength. We will *pray more consistently, about the right things, with a growing faith*.

So Bible study increases our capacity to pray, because 1) our prayer-faith is getting stronger, and 2) understanding is improving the content of our prayers. We study to grow, and one of the benefits

that come with growth is that our prayers improve.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. _____ helps faith to grow.

Question 2. What causes “knowledge” to be transferred to the heart, so that it can be applied?

Question 3. When knowledge reaches the heart, and becomes understanding, it can then be _____ .

Other Scriptures

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

Eph. 4:15—Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

1 Tim. 4:16—Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save [deliver] both yourself and your hearers.

Remember

When we study, faith and understanding increase, adding potency to our prayers. The best way to learn *how* to pray is to learn what God says about prayer in His Word.

E. Ignoring the Word Nullifies Prayer

We have established that carnality, or being out of fellowship...i.e., being controlled by the sinful nature...will prevent our prayers from being heard. In addition, we have mentioned that an absence of study will hamper our prayers. In this section we want to emphasize the effects of not studying.

Here is how it works: When we vacate or neglect or ignore the Word, divine influence will diminish in our lives, and a worldly point of view will increase. With this mindset, we will not remember to confess our sins, so our prayers will do us no good. But with study we will remember to confess, which—in turn—will make our study more meaningful (interaction at work). And prayers will count.

To keep God’s ears open to our prayers, we must pay attention to His Word. Prov. 28:9 says, “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law [Scripture], even his prayers are detestable.” God has no regard for the prayers of a believer who is refusing to study the Word. We must make a choice to study, because—if we do not study, just as when we do not eat—we will get weaker. This is anti-growth, or

guaranteed retrogression into baby-hood, at which point effective prayers will not happen.

Zech. 7:11-13 illustrates what we are saying:

But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets, so the Lord Almighty was very angry. “When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,” says the Lord Almighty.

If we will not hear His Word, He will not hear our prayers. When we refuse to study, we can expect nothing from our prayers, because *He will not answer*.

We see this again in Prov. 1:27-29, which says the following:

When calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. They will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord....

Not seeking the truths in God’s Word is the same as not seeking **God**...not trusting Him, not showing reverence for Him. As we will see later, there are many undesirable outcomes from ignoring Scripture, but the one we are most concerned with in this section is the effect it has on our prayers. One of the conditions for effective praying is that we must be using Technique 3...”Studying the Word” (upcoming).

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. One serious outcome of not studying is that we will tend not remember to _____ .

Question 2. What is the effect of not studying on our growth pattern?

Question 3. What happens when we pray, but are not faithfully studying His Word?

Other Scriptures

Eph. 4:11c-13—...and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Eph. 4:14—Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Col. 1:25—I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the

word of God in its fullness....

Phil. 4:9—Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Remember

Studying God’s Word, every day if possible, will improve our prayers. Spiritual nutrition and growth depend on intake of spiritual nutrients...which are the truths of the Word. As we grow, our prayers will improve, which is reason enough, all by itself, to study the Word.

F. Not Forgiving Others Impacts Prayer

Jesus instructed His disciples, “If he sins against you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” In Matt. 18:22, He told them to repeat this process “seventy-seven times”, or *endlessly*. We are to keep on forgiving. Jesus also used “forgiveness of others” in the prayer He taught His disciples, as seen in Matt. 6:12. Forgiveness is an important prescription.

We must shortcut any distortion of forgiveness that might include overlooking criminal activity...any criminal behavior should bring on the full force and penalty of the law. But, otherwise, we are to forgive.

Forgiveness is one of those things we are told to do that is very difficult, as illustrated by the “revenge motif” of ancient Greek drama and literature. Vendetta is prominent in human history, and in our DNA. Forgiveness is not a natural thing to do, but *not* forgiving is a “sin”, a violation of God’s standards, so we must do it.

The question of “how” to perform this difficult, unnatural thing is something we will address additionally in future studies. Suffice it to say, for now: We must depend on divine resources (techniques) to accomplish this. Forgiveness, like love, is an outcropping of our spiritual state, or a “fruit of the Holy Spirit”, so we *cannot* do this without being in fellowship. And since not forgiving is a sin, we must confess any lack of forgiveness in order to remove culpability for it.

Since Jesus placed so much emphasis on forgiveness, and linked it to prayer, it follows that we should make forgiveness part of our prayers. We confess, so we are praying “in the Spirit”, and then we search our own hearts for any unforgiveness. When we see that there are people and incidents that we have not forgiven, we can utter a prayer, saying, “Father, I forgive _____ for _____.” If the forgiveness is not sincere, we have more to do in the areas of confession, growth, and prayer to bring it about.

In Matt. 6:14-15, Jesus said, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Here is the assumption behind Jesus’ statement: If we forgive those who have wronged us, this

is made possible by fellowship, and the forgiveness we give is based on our communion and connection with the Holy Spirit. Because we have shown forgiveness, evidence then exists that we have already “gotten” forgiveness. Otherwise, we would not have “given” it. And if we refuse to forgive others, it is because of our own carnality, in which case God’s forgiveness will not be given to us...that is, until we confess.

Jesus was not teaching the *sequence* and *methods* for spirituality...He was giving a principle and standard for living, and linking it with prayer effectiveness. It would fall to Paul and John and the other apostles later to clarify the “how” of this edict from Jesus. We will have more on this later, but—just so you know—I include forgiveness in my own prayer regimen, right after confession and acknowledgement of God (along with an expression of humility)...and right before intercessory prayer.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. According to the standard that Jesus gave, what is the limit for the number of times we should forgive a wrong?

Question 2. Which comes first, confession or forgiveness of others? Why?

Question 3. Our forgiveness is made possible by a connection with the _____ .

Other Scriptures

Matt. 6:12—Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matt. 18:35—This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

Lk. 17:3b—If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

Remember

Forgiveness of others is a requirement, and it is linked with prayer because “not forgiving” is a sin. Sin truncates prayer, as always, and this condition will not change until sins are confessed. Once sins are confessed, we can pray a prayer specifically forgiving those who have wronged us.

G. Humility Aids Prayer

In 2 Ki. 22:15-20, we see the words of a prophetess, repeating a divine message for the king of Judah regarding God's anger against the nation. She said the following in verse 19, quoted in part:

Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people...I have heard you, declares the Lord.

The key attitude God looks for when He looks at us is humility. Humility recognizes the bigness of God and the smallness of man. From the beginning, when we came to God in search of salvation, we recognized that we could not be sufficient in ourselves to qualify us for connection with the life of God. And even though we are now believers, living the Christian life, we are not free to exercise self-sufficiency or self-dependency, any more than we did at salvation.

To have the right outlook, we must humbly acknowledge God's infinite power and our great weakness. We are dependent on God. Humility is knowing God's all-sufficiency...and our subordinate place before Him.

The point of this section is that humility affects our prayers. This was suggested in the passage above from 2 Kings, and is seen in other places in Scripture. In 2 Chron. 7:13-15, we see a clear statement of this truth:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

This perfectly depicts God's mercy, which is elicited by humility...especially when we are recognizing our moral and spiritual inadequacy through confession. It also shows that humility opens God's eyes and ears to our prayers.

Pride, on the other hand, brings no favorable response, even when it is attached to prayer. In an earlier section, we cited Matt. 6:6, which cautions against an attitude of pride in relation to our prayers. This passage says this:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

Their reward is the admiration of onlookers. That is all they get. They will not get answers for their prayers. Pride pays itself from an empty account, but God pays humility with grace and favor. James 4:6b says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." When we pray, we approach the throne of grace to "receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16b). If we are humble, we will find grace. If not, we will get no audience with the King.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. How do self-dependency and self-sufficiency help us *after* we are saved?

Question 2. Why is humility appropriate as we stand before God?

Question 3. What is the reward for humility?

Other Scriptures

Eph. 4:2—Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Col. 3:12—Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Prov. 15:33—The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

Remember

Humility is proper recognition of ourselves in comparison with God. It is coated with acknowledgement of God, fear of the Lord, God-consciousness, and thanksgiving, and it is an on-switch for prayer.

Chapter 10

Faith and Prayer

In This Chapter...

- A. Holy Faith and Spiritual Prayer*
- B. The Prayer of Faith*
- C. Believe and Receive*

A. Holy Faith and Spiritual Prayer

Jude 1:20 says, “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” There are two steps presented here: 1) build up your “holy faith”, and 2) pray in the Spirit. These are linked. “Holy” faith is faith that operates when all sins are confessed, so that we are controlled by the Spirit. If we are out of fellowship, faith goes dark. (We will study this in detail later on.)

Fellowship brings the filling of the Spirit, and enables “holy faith”...or “cleansed” faith. Spirituality and faith, then, are directly connected. With the Holy Spirit engaged, faith is active and prayer can take place “in the Spirit”. If the sinful nature is in charge, faith will not function, and prayer is just vocal or mental “noise”. The first requirement of praying with holy faith, then, is praying “in the Spirit”. The second requirement, as we are about to see, is strengthening our faith.

We want to emphasize the phrase “build up”. Jude 1:20 says, “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith, and pray in the Holy Spirit.” Build up means to “increase”. We are to increase our faith, and we have suggested already that growth of faith hinges primarily on our knowledge of God’s truths for living. After faith get stronger, prayers become more dynamic. So the way to increase faith is to learn, and increased faith, in turn, empowers prayer.

There is another prayer-benefit from “increasing knowledge” to strengthen faith: By gaining greater understanding of the Word, we expand our awareness of what God wants and how He works. When

we *know* what God wants *from* us, and what He wants to give *to* us, we will be able to *ask for* the thing He already wants us to have, and we can have confidence we will get it. Such understanding does not come automatically...it comes as a result of learning truth, building our faith, and praying in the Spirit. Notice once more the interactivity of the techniques.

As a born-again believer, you cannot just *decide* all-at-once to have strong faith. Faith will only get stronger through a sustained regimen of growth, which requires *many* decisions along the way. Here is the problem that must be overcome: You can *believe* as long as you are in fellowship, even with a weaker faith, but that “trust” will quickly disappear when sin comes on the scene (and it certainly will). The assertion of the power of evil forces not only disrupts fellowship, it dissipates faith. The solution: If you build a *strong spiritual foundation*, you will recover quickly any time you sin, and your faith will stay strong...and will keep growing. But such a foundation comes only through a process of being “built up”.

Spirituality activates faith, but then faith must be built up with all due haste, in order to sustain spirituality. It is one thing to *confess and pray*; it is another to *confess and build up faith and pray*. When faith is built up, prayer will be strong. The problem with simply confessing and praying...without building-up faith...is that it has no staying power. But when faith is strengthened, consistent spirituality and effective prayer keep divine power operating into perpetuity.

To strengthen faith in order to amplify the impact of our prayers...is crucial.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is “holy faith”?

Question 2. What two requirements do we get from Jude 1:20?

Question 3. For prayers to be strong, faith must be _____ .

Other Scriptures

This section is based entirely on Jude 1:20.

Remember

If we are not in fellowship, prayers will not be effective. And if our faith is not strong...or at least growing...neither our prayers nor their effects will have potency.

B. The Prayer of Faith

James 1:5 tells us we can ask for “wisdom”, but verses 6-8 go on to tell us we must “believe and not doubt” in order to receive it. This means that faith must be present when we pray for greater wis-

dom...or for anything else...in order to receive it. Verses 6-8 say this:

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

When we pray without faith, we get nothing. We should start praying immediately upon being saved, but—also at that time—we have to begin tending the garden of our faith, to make sure it grows and bears fruit.

Strong faith means we are ready to pray effectively. All conditions for praying have been met, and we can pray a “prayer of faith”. Pay close attention to this point: The prayer of faith will match God’s will, and will be answered in the affirmative, not because God is a genie, but because the prayer will be offered in alignment with God’s plan and purpose. The prayer of faith is a “super-prayer”.

James 5:14-16 is a doctrine-rich passage that gives a framework for understanding the power of faith in prayer. Here is what this passage says:

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

We offer next a point-by-point presentation of the structure and meaning of this passage:

1. If someone is sick, he should call the elders (leaders) together.
2. These leaders should pray for the sick person.
3. These same leaders should anoint the sick person with oil in the power of the Lord.
4. The “prayer offered in faith”, or the “prayer of faith” (NET) will deliver the sick person, subject, of course, to God’s will.
5. What is a “prayer offered in faith”? It is one done in fellowship...and with strong faith. Such faith connotes surrender to God’s will (more on this later).
6. The assumption is that the elders are in fellowship and are mature believers.
7. If the believer who is ill has committed sins, he will have already been forgiven if the prayer is one “of faith”, because such a faith assumes prior confession and restoration to fellowship, which in turn enables such a prayer.
8. Confession of our sins to each other is not a call for public sharing of our sins with other believers. This is, rather, a call for us to admit it when we have offended or harmed another believer. Go to that believer and admit the transgression to him.
9. Once fellowship is restored for the sick person, the prayer of the elders and the one who is ill will not be hampered by the presence of sin.
10. The results of the “prayer of faith” are significant: “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

Healing takes place, *subject to God’s will and plan*, when righteousness exists on the part of the person

(or people) praying. This means sins have been confessed...accompanied by growing faith.

The prayer of faith is effective, but we must understand the full meaning of the term “effective”. The most effective prayer does not necessarily bring the *outcome we pray for*. The *best outcome* is *God’s will being done*. We want our prayers to match God’s will, so the outcome we seek will *match* His will. That kind of prayer will come as we acquire greater understanding, faith, and maturity.

As we pray, our job is to grow to trust in God’s perfect wisdom and to pray for grace to bear whatever condition He brings to us. (Once again, we will have more to say about growth through trials and training in a later study.) Paul prayed a “prayer of faith” to have a certain “thorn in the flesh” removed, but God chose not to remove it (2 Cor. 12:7-9). All was not lost; God comforted Paul, telling Him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (verse 9).

The important thing for us to know and believe when we “pray the prayer of faith”, is that God knows best, that His will is working, and that all things “work together for good”. The asked-for outcome of a prayer is not the main test for its effectiveness. The greatest value for a prayer of faith is found in its accommodation of God’s will, and the expression and fulfillment of that will.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What can we get by praying without faith?

Question 2. A prayer that is powerful and effective comes from a _____ man.

Question 3. What are the two main prerequisites for a “prayer of faith”?

Question 4. What is the best outcome of our prayers?

Other Scriptures

1 Cor. 12:7-9—To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three time I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

Matt. 5:23-24—Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and then remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Remember

Prayer is effective to the degree that it is based on faith. Faith is effective to the degree that it is based on an understanding of God's Word and God's will. Effective prayer is ultimately an expression of surrender to God's will.

C. Believe and Receive

We have seen that a prayer of faith is one in which all conditions for prayer have been met. Believing God and His Word ("Faith") is Technique 4, which we will take up in some detail later on. We saw in the previous section that the *prayer of faith* is effective, which means that it invites God's will to be done in our lives. We demonstrated that the thing that the mature and spiritual believer prays for fits what God wants to give...it matches His will. We want to cap this concept off with an emphasis on what it means to "believe" and "receive".

Matt. 21:22 says, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." We must note that this promise is conditional, assuming fellowship and advanced maturity, so that what is "believed" and what is "asked for" will be what is "given". All parts have to line up. We have to be in fellowship, have a mature or growing faith, and *know God's will* (or at least have the maturity to *surrender* to God's will, whatever it is)...these all have to be in place for us to get what we ask for.

Immature believers cannot believe "enough" to make their prayers work, even if they subject themselves to many wishes, chants, trances, incantations, meditations, and self-hypnosis. No believer can build faith through human, worldly, or fleshly systems. Faith can only be built God's way...by learning His truths for living and by going through God's training program (a topic for future study).

The prayers of *carnal* believers have *no* effect, while the prayers of *immature* believers are not consistent...and not effective. Therefore, priority must be given to *fellowship* and *growth*; hence, these two techniques will continue to loom large throughout our studies.

J. Hampton Keathley, III, gives us an example of a prayer prayed in faith, and its results:

In the final decades of the life of George McCluskey he became extremely burdened for his children and each day spent the hour from 11 to 12 praying for them. He prayed not only for them, but also for his grandchildren and great grandchildren, as yet unborn. He asked that they would come to the true God through His Son, and dedicate their lives to His service. Of the following four generations, every child has either become a minister or married a minister, with one exception. That exception is a name familiar to most of us today, Dr. James Dobson. Few will ever hear of George McCluskey, but because of him lives of future generations were undeniably blessed. (Endnote 8)

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is Technique 4?

Question 2. What three things have to be “lined up” for us to get what we ask for?

Question 3. What is the importance of self-hypnosis as an aid to prayer?

Other Scriptures

Jer. 32:27—I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?

Jer. 17:5-6—This is what the Lord says: Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

Jer. 17:7-8a—Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

Remember

When we are in fellowship, mature (or at least growing vigorously), and knowledgeable of God’s will, we will get what we ask for when we pray, because our prayer is being prayed in agreement with what God wants to give.

Chapter 11

God's Will and Prayer

In This Chapter...

- A. Drawing Near to God*
- B. Offering Ourselves for God's Service*
- C. Praying According to God's Will*

A. Drawing Near to God

Ps. 73:25-28 gives a moving tribute to God, and expresses a desire to be closer to Him, as follows:

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

These words express a “vertical” vision, a kind of God-consciousness, and an acknowledgement of the joy that comes from being close to God. This is, moreover, an expression of hunger to be even closer to the One Who is “our portion”. This is a hunger God wants to feed.

Jesus told us that God's blessings are extended to those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6b). The righteousness that will fill us is that which comes from God, not from ourselves. The blessing is not for those who fill themselves with their own goodness or plans; it is for those who want *God's* righteousness. These are the ones who will be filled. They don't just want it...they are famished for it, dehydrated without it. They *crave* God's power and goodness within them. This is wanting God, and crying out inside for a way to get closer to Him.

In Ps. 42:1-2 the psalmist describes his desire to get closer to God, saying, “As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?" The believer who wants to be close to God, to drink the waters of His divine nature, will search for this encounter tirelessly. Nothing else will be more important.

We draw near to God when we pray according to His truth. Ps. 145:18 says, "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." This tells us that prayer that follows Scripture will line up with God's will, and anytime we are praying according to His will (because all conditions have been met), we will be *close to God*.

The Bible illustrates our drawing near to God. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, as per 1 Cor. 3:16, which says, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" At the heart of this temple, like the temple completed by Solomon, is a place called the "Most Holy Place". Heb. 10:19 tells us we can be confident about entering this place, because of the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ.

There are conditions, however, for going into this spiritual "inner chamber". Ps. 24:3b-4a asks and answers a question about the condition that must be met before we can enter the Most Holy Place. This passage says: "Who can stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart..." We can stand in the Most Holy Place only when we are "clean", or have confessed all the sins we can remember. Entering the Most Holy Place is the same as being restored to fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

By being clean, we qualify to enter the Most Holy Place. The process for this is described in Heb. 4:14-16, which tells us what we can do...and why, as follows:

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

When we "approach" the throne of grace (the Most Holy Place), we do so with our sins on display, so we can "receive mercy", or get forgiveness for them, based on the perfection and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Then we can "enter", and the privileges of grace will open to us...as we "find grace to help us in our time of need". Mercy comes through confession, and then the supplies of grace come through prayer...praying is what we do when we are "close to God". The result: We experience the bounty of being in the "Most Holy Place"...in the very presence of God.

Heb. 10:22 continues this picture, saying, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." Basically, this is saying that we can draw near to God if our consciences are clear and our hearts are pure, which makes our faith operational. Then, having received mercy, we can find grace for living. (See our book, *Studies on Maturing as a Christian*, pp. 15-23, for important details on this concept. Also, we will revisit this topic in Part Seven.)

Eph. 3:12 says, "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confi-

dence.” When we are “in Him”, we are in fellowship, and faith can function, giving us the confidence to approach Him. When we come before the throne, we can then pray. We open with confession, followed by these: acknowledging God, forgiving others, offering intercession, submitting requests, and giving thanks. When you go before the throne of grace, take a bag, because you will not come away empty-handed.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What comes to those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness”?

Question 2. Where is God’s temple?

Question 3. What is the condition for entering the Most Holy Place?

Question 4: When we approach the throne of grace and receive mercy, what can we then expect to find?

Other Scriptures

James 4:8—Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Heb. 10:19-20—Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body....

Remember

Drawing near to God will not be possible if we are *not* “cleansed” through confession. Following confession, which *gets us close*, grace techniques enable us to *stay close*. This is where we long to be. Confession is the primary gateway to getting close, and the prayer of faith is the pathway.

B. Offering Ourselves for God’s Service

Rom. 6:13b says, “...offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” This follows an edict (verse 13a) not to “offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness...” So we are to offer ourselves for God’s service, and not for sin. In verse 16, we see, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves you are slaves to the one whom you obey...?” When we offer ourselves, we move under the control of the one we obey. Then verse 17 tells us what we *should* be obeying: “...you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.”

We are to offer the parts of our bodies to God’s service by obeying the teachings we get from His Word...or by using the “grace techniques”. Too often, pastors and believers interpret this passage to

mean that we should “keep rules” or “live by the Law”, and gin up some “service”. But this actually means that we should be using the assets of grace that make us *available to God*...TO BE USED AS HIS INSTRUMENTS...for His service.

Rom. 12:1 urges, “...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship [service].” We offer our bodies only when they are “holy and pleasing”, meaning we have been cleansed through forgiveness. But then there is another step, a process that we will study later, called “surrender”. This is “offering” ourselves, or turning ourselves over to Him so He can do His work *through us*...using us as His tools.

The impression that must be eradicated is that WE do the work. This is the biggest trap set by Satan to get us to operate in our own power, rather than God's. The main purpose of this book is for us to learn how to allow God to do God's work. Satan himself proclaimed over and over, “I will...” And that is what he wants us to do...to say “I will”. We tend to say, “I am”, as Satan wanted to say, discounting the great “I AM”. In essence, our tendency, and Satan's invitation, is for us to attempt to be equal with God. It is in OUR NAME that we aspire to march out to “serve God”, when we are actually serving ourselves. It is only in HIS NAME, or in His power and authority, that we can truly serve.

Phil. 2:5-9 gives us the posture we should have, as we see in the following:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name....

Speaking in regard to His humanity, Jesus Christ Himself did not consider “equality with God” something to be grasped, or something to be chased after. Offering ourselves is not “taking up the reins”, or “taking charge over sin”, etc.,...it is “relinquishing our efforts and initiative to God”. It is allowing God to teach us, prepare us, motivate us, energize us, and direct us the same way He did His Son. We cannot produce the righteousness of God...so we must figure out how to let Him produce it, with us as instruments.

Our job is not to DO, but to OFFER OURSELVES, so God can DO. When Paul said, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21), he was giving an *outcome* of his own fellowship and relationship with God, and acknowledging that the life that was being lived through him was not *his life*, but *the life of Christ*! Phil. 2:13 says, “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

God does the working; we do the “offering”. Offering is about surrendering to God, and working is “God working”. Before we can ever hope to pray correctly, we must get the pecking order straight.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. When we “offer ourselves”, we move under the control of the one whom we _____ .

Question 2. True or false: The main point of this book is to teach us how to do God's work.

Question 3. According to this section, our job is not to _____ , but to _____ .

Question 4: Who is going to get the work done?

Other Scriptures

Phil. 3:3b—...put no confidence in the flesh.

Gal. 3:3—Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Phil. 4:13 (NET)—I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me.

Remember

Getting the Christian life backwards is so easy. WE do not live the Christian life; the Christian life can only be lived by Christ. Our greatest need is to humble ourselves, acknowledge God, and surrender to His plan and power and purpose, so He can live His life through us. Prayer takes on a whole new meaning when we understand that God is God...and we are not.

C. Praying According to God's Will

1 John 5:14-15 tells us what happens when we approach God in the right way, as follows:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

We can observe in this passage that we get what we ask for, IF we ask it “according to His will”. This would mean that, if we are asking for something that is NOT according to His will, we will not get it. It is all about our prayer being on the same wave-length as God's will. It probably goes without saying that our objective is not tied to *what we want*, or the “best that we can imagine”, but *what God wants*, which is the “best that He can imagine”. I wonder which is better?

So our prayer is to get “God's best”, which will be “what He wants”, which is “best for us”. By pray-

ing according to God's will, we are not resigning ourselves to loss, but recognizing our gain. Once again, we must meet the condition of "asking according to His will" for us to get what we ask for. And we must keep asking. We keep praying because we are commanded to, and because it is our connection with grace. But God also wants us to *look at our prayers*, so we can reflect on ways to improve their content...and to see where we need to strengthen our knowledge and faith.

Here's what we mean, and what we can gain, by "looking at ourselves pray": God wants us to ASK. He repeatedly invites us to do this. Then, by our observation of the things we ASK FOR, we can evaluate whether they coincide with God's will. By looking at ourselves praying, and by sufficiently mastering the teachings in His Word, we can come to know the will of God well enough to reshape the things we ask for, so that they will increasingly match His will. It is then that we get what we request, because what we pray for will be what God has the "will" to give.

Prayers have to be honed and polished. As we mature, and learn God's Word, and understand His will, our prayers will be shaped to correspond with His plan and purpose. Until then, our prayers may miss the mark. There may also be delays in answers to our prayers, as a result of our not praying the right prayer. We see an example of this in Luke 18:38-41 (please read). Jesus healed a blind man on the road to Jericho. In verse 41, Jesus had asked the man, "what do you want me to do for you?" He had answered, "Lord, I want to see." Jesus healed him and that was that. God was glorified and Jesus' ministry was validated. But there is a meaning in this passage not showing on the surface, which we will feature here.

Look back at verses 38-39. This man prayed for mercy in both of these verses. No healing took place at that time. He had prayed...twice...and nothing had happened. Notice this, however: These were not the prayers Jesus was looking for. Jesus invited him to pray the right prayer, asking him, "What do you want...?" And finally he prayed it, "I want to see."

As we pray and repeatedly return to God's Word, our prayers will finally be the right ones...the ones He wants us to pray...and the ones He wants to honor with an affirmative answer. But we will not get what we ask for until we ask for the right things. Then our wills will be aligned with God's will, and we will get what God wants us to have. Moreover, His will is perfect, so what we get is always appropriate. The "right" prayer is the one that lines up with what God wants to give.

There are many examples of prayers offered according to God's will. We will see a couple of them in the following:

- Take time to read 1 Ki. 8:25-26, which tells us about Solomon praying that God would keep His promise to keep a king on the throne of Israel. Solomon knew this was God's will, because God had promised it. Solomon knew his prayer would be approved. And the outcome? God answered with a "yes", as all those concerned knew He would.
- In 2 Ki. 19:14-37 (please read), we are told of God's response to a prayer based on His will. King Hezekiah had received threatening propaganda from an enemy that Hezekiah's "god" (actually "God") would not be sufficient to prevent the destruction of Judah. Hezekiah prayed intently for protection, saying, "Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his

hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God” (verse 19). Hezekiah prayed in agreement with God’s will. We know his prayer matched God’s will, because of God’s reply: “Have you not heard? Long ago I [God] ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass” (verse 25). God told Hezekiah, “He [king of Assyria] will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here” (verse 32). That night 185,000 of the enemy were killed while they slept in their beds.

When we pray according to God’s will, the results will be astounding.

We pray because it makes us part of God’s plan in a way that enables our participation in His power and purpose. Prayer conveys submission to the will and plan of God, and honors Him as the Planner...and the Overseer of the Plan. God plans to honor our faith and to have the events of our lives constantly evolve and unfold for *our good* and for *His glory*. We must remember—and claim—God’s *promise* for what He has planned, as we see in the following:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you...” (Jer. 29:11-14a).

God plans good things for us, and praying according to His will puts us in the middle of these “good things”.

When our prayers align with God’s will, our prayers will be answered. When we pray in submission to Him, we are relinquishing the outcome of our lives, and the events in them, to Him. We are acknowledging that the best thing that can *be* or *become* in our lives is the thing that He wants. All of our outlooks and prospects will be determined by the degree to which our will corresponds with His. We want His will to overlay ours, so that we can surrender every part of our hearts and minds and bodies to Him. And we want to stand fast in the Most Holy Place. (We will learn much more about God’s will in future studies, especially in Part 7, “Drawing Near to God”.)

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the condition specified in this section for getting what we ask for?

Question 2. Sometimes, delayed answers to prayers may be the result of not praying the _____ prayer.

Question 3. Prayer enables us to participate in God’s _____ .

Question 4: What does God have planned for those who seek Him with all their heart?

Other Scriptures

Acts 8:21-22a—You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord....

Ps. 37:4—Delight yourselves in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

James 4:2a, 3a—You do not have because you do not ask. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives....

Remember

Praying according to God's will result in our receiving what we ask for. This hinges on our prayers matching what God wants to give. If they do not, we will not receive what we ask for, because it differs from God's will. We must learn God's will as we get closer to Him, so we can adjust our prayers to match His will...and get what we ask for.

Key Points: Part Three

- We are told to pray without ceasing.
- We are also told to pray privately and in-focus on a regular basis.
- Preparations for prayer include confessing our sins, regular study of the Word, forgiving others, and acknowledging God.
- Maturity enables us to pray in faith, by the Spirit, and according to God's will.
- When we are in a "righteous" condition, and are praying in alignment with God's will, we get what we ask for.

Endnotes

1. *Behind the Glittering Mask*, by Mark Rutland, p. 158. Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI, 1996.
2. *Behind the Glittering Mask*, p. 159.
3. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 678. Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2003.
4. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 1318.
5. *Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, by William Edwyn Vine, p. 65. Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN, 1999.
6. *The Interlinear Bible*, edited and translated by Jay P. Green, Sr., p. 945. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Lafayette, Indiana, 1985.
7. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, by Wayne Grudem, pp. 160-161. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999.
8. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 56. Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2002. This book is available at www.bible.org.

About the Author

Dick Gibbs spent 25 years in public service as an educator and curriculum designer. He served as teacher, principal, superintendent, and curriculum developer in the public school systems of Texas. He has now taken his skills in the area of learning-program development and is channeling them into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much of his career in education was spent developing programs for at-risk students. This book is designed for at-risk Christians (or new ones). The same way that he built systems for filling in gaps and establishing solid foundations for student learning, he has built on the foundation of the Word to provide understandable lessons that facilitate Christian living and accelerate the growth and effectiveness of believers.

Gibbs began an intensive study of the Word in 2010, and initiated a practice at that time of recording his findings in writing. He has written ten books since then...now more than that. *Bible Studies Recapitulated: A Three Volume Set* is the culmination of all his previous books...coupled with his experiences in life and his professional career...incorporating what he has learned into a turn-key, easy-to-read, step-wise study book. He has been surprised to discover what the Bible REALLY says about living, and is sure that you will be surprised, as well, when you work through the lessons he presents.

It must be said that the central player and point in this “work” is not the author, but God. If—and only if—God is in this writing, it will be helpful and beneficial to believers who read it, and God will be glorified by its dissemination.