

Bible Studies Recapitulated

Volume Two: Building our Faith

by Dick Gibbs

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Part Four

Living in the Power of God's Word

In This Part...

Chapter 12: *The Power of the Word*

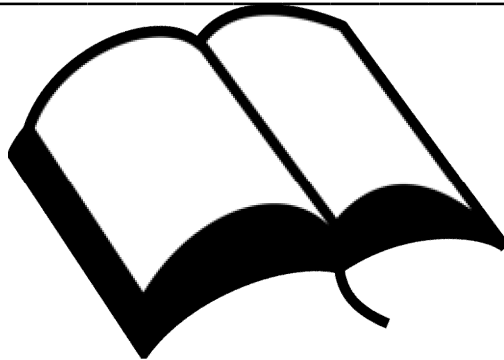
Chapter 13: *Wanting to Learn*

Chapter 14: *Gateway to Maturity*

Chapter 15: *Taking in the Truth*

Chapter 16: *Applying Scripture*

Chapter 17: *Opposition to the Truth*



2Tim. 3:16—*All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Chapter 12

The Power of the Word

In This Chapter...

- A. The Holy Spirit Gave God's Word*
- B. The Holy Spirit Teaches God's Word*
- C. The Power and Purpose of the Word*
- D. First Glimpse of the Effects of the Word*

A. The Holy Spirit Gave God's Word

We know only what the Holy Spirit has revealed. Deut. 29:29 sets this up for us, saying, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." This is a clear declaration of the source of God's Word, and shows the ownership that we have of God's truth. The things that have been revealed are ours, so that we may follow God's pathway for thinking and living.

The "revelation" of God is often misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misapplied, even by the most sincere believers and Bible scholars. Why? Remember the flesh? Remember Satan? Remember the world, with all its systems of knowledge and tradition? Prideful, egotistical, sinful natures, with plenty of deceivers all around us, bombard us with false ideas, and obfuscate the truth. Our prayer is that we will correctly interpret what has been revealed.

Our main objective as believers...as we shall see in more detail later in this "part"...is to mature. Maturity comes from learning, as understanding accumulates through study. And from the first grade (as students of the Word), we will learn more each day, so we can move up through the grades. Jn. 20:9 shows how the disciples themselves understood truth on a progressive scale. This verse says, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." There

are things that we will not understand at first, but as we grasp and absorb more truth, we will mature, and the clouds of confusion will dissipate. God's truth is in His Word, and that is where we look for clarity and understanding.

We want to establish early on that God's Word is "inspired". Peter described the inspiration process well in the following:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

"Carried along" is the state of the writers of Scripture as they penned the words of the Bible. The "truth" was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit, and then He guided their writing...down to the level of the "words" used...not through dictation, but by "divine supervision". This is how inspiration worked: the Holy Spirit *guided* the writers in the choice and sequence of the words, while the writers expressed the composition in their own style and vocabulary.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 confirms the inspiration of Scripture, saying, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Word is FROM GOD, and it is the place where we learn WHAT GOD THINKS AND WANTS.

1 Cor. 2:12-13 gives us more on the reliable inspiration of Scripture, saying the following:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Specific words matter, and we can study and learn the Word at the level of exact *word* definition and grammatical usage. These words frame God's truths, and give us a written document that is pure. Ps. 12:6 says, "And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times." The words of Scripture are God-originated and God-approved. We can learn precise truths from them, and confidently live by them.

The Word is also complete. We will see as we progress that nothing is to be taken away, and nothing is to be added. This is why any claims of those who offer "new" truths and prophecy must be weighed carefully, and any of them that do not *originate from* and *adhere to* the Scripture must be discarded. Modern "prophets" can only *clarify* the existing Word of God...they must never *add to it*.

The Word is a wonderful presentation of the person of God, giving us a clear way to learn His plan, His will, His requirements, His techniques, and His promises. This is the way we are taking.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. We only know what the Holy Spirit has _____ .

Question 2. What is the level of our understanding of Scripture at the time we are saved?

Question 3. The spiritual impulse of “inspiration” is provided by the Holy Spirit right down to the level of individual _____ .

Other Scriptures

2 Pet. 3:16b—His [Paul's] letters are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Rom. 11:33a—Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Ps. 119:140—Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.

1Cor. 2:10—But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

Remember

The Holy Spirit revealed His truth to the writers of Scripture, then He guided their writing so that it exactly reflected His revelation. The outcome is the Word of God, which provides the trustworthy means for our knowing God and growing as believers in Him.

B. The Holy Spirit Teaches God's Word

The Holy Spirit no longer reveals “new truth”, since the Bible is complete, but he does *teach* us the truths He has already revealed. He takes the truths written in His Word, and He “elucidates” them (makes them more lucid). For the believer who is seeking knowledge in the Word, who is also in fellowship and praying for wisdom “in faith”, that believer will be taught by the Holy Spirit. Remember this: All truths taught by the Holy Spirit come from His Word.

John 14:26 tells us, “...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” The Holy Spirit is our private tutor, and He will remind us of the truths given in Scripture. He is ready to impart His truths to us, if we are prepared to receive them. John 16:12-13 reiterates that the Holy Spirit is our teacher, saying, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”

The Holy Spirit is our primary source of understanding, and since the same Holy Spirit is the teacher of **all** believers, all believers should have the same understanding of the teachings of the Word. So why don't they? It is due to the varying levels of their spiritual connection with the Teacher. The difference rests with human teachers, and not with God...His truth is always the same, and it will be the same for everyone. We disagree with each other, because humanity crosses over into our spirituality, leaving us with uneven levels of insight and understanding. Spirituality precedes understanding. This is a pervasive maxim seen throughout the Word.

In an overview of the learning process, we see the overall steps that must occur for this teaching to

be effective, including these: 1) **praying** “in the Spirit” for wisdom, 2) **studying** by reading, listening to teachers, watching video lessons, etc., and 3) **prayerfully opening our hearts** to believe and receive the truths being given...so that they will process into our hearts. There is no way that we can learn truth apart from the Spirit...we must be spiritually aligned and engaged for the truth to process.

If we are ready to be taught, the Holy Spirit is ready to teach, as we see in the following passage:

1 Cor. 2:13-14—We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. The man without the Spirit does not understand the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Through spirituality, coupled with prayer, study, and trust, we will learn.

The Holy Spirit teaches us *His truth*. And His truth has *His power* behind it. God's Word is powerful, because God is powerful...truth and power are connected. Scripture confirms this in the following:

- 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.
- Rom. 2 Pet. 1:3-4—His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

The great power of the Word will be studied further in the next section. For now, we want to examine *what* the Spirit teaches. Looking at the *content* of the Spirit's teaching, we see three basic categories described in John 16:8-11. This passage gives us the heart of the Holy Spirit's curriculum, which includes instruction regarding *sin*, *righteousness*, and *judgment*. The Holy Spirit addresses these three areas, as follows:

- **Sin.** This area of “testimony” is given first to unbelievers, because they do not believe in Christ. They are given the true gospel that *faith in Christ* can bring salvation to them. For believers, the Holy Spirit confronts them with their sins—through the Word and possibly through a sensitized conscience—so they will confess their sins and return to fellowship.
- **Righteousness.** For unbelievers, the message concerning righteousness is that their righteousness is insufficient to save them, but faith in Christ will bring a “credited” righteousness to them. For believers, the message is that they *have* the righteousness of Christ *positionally*, or regarding their eternal state, but to have it *conditionally*, or regarding their status in time, they must have their sins *removed*, thus being cleansed from all unrighteousness. Then, as we shall see, *experiential* righteousness is also produced.
- **Judgment.** In reference to unbelievers, they get information from the Holy Spirit about

their facing eternal judgment, because they have not believed in Christ. Believers, on the other hand, are told that they do *not* face “eternal” judgment, but that they will be “judged” or evaluated on an ongoing basis...for sin in their hearts. If sin resides there, believers must exercise “self-judgment” (confession), so that they will not be judged by God, as this will result in discipline. Believers will be chastised for departures from God’s standards, but they will not receive “condemnation”, which is eternal in nature. 1 Cor. 11:31-32 says, “If we judged ourselves we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.”

Sin is a focal point for the ministry and teachings of the Holy Spirit. Sin gets a lot of attention, because it is a huge problem. Believing that sin is a minor force in the world and in our lives is Satan’s biggest lie, and we must not believe for one second that we cannot be fooled by him. We don’t have victory over sin, just because we are saved; victory will come when we are fully accessing the teaching and power of the Holy Spirit. At that time, He will be fighting our battles for us.

The Word is the Holy Spirit’s textbook, yes, but it is also His weapon. Eph. 6:17 calls the Word of God the “sword of the Spirit”. Heb. 4:12 tells us it is “sharper than any double-edged sword”. This weapon is held by the Spirit within us...and as we acquire the knowledge of God, this weapon becomes a formidable force against sin and failure, because divine instruction translates into spiritual power.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all _____ .

Question 2. Related to the name of the “Spirit”, what is the condition we must be in to learn Scripture?

Question 3. The Word of God is backed by God’s _____ .

Question 4: The teachings of the Holy Spirit address three crucial areas. What are these?

Other Scriptures

1 John 5:6b—And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

Eph. 6:17—Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Heb. 4:12a—For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...

Remember

The Holy Spirit indwells every believer. When the believer is operating in communion with the Holy Spirit, and is spending time with God's Word, he will be taught. When we learn God's Word, we will know how to access God's power, and will be equipped to deal with sin.

C. The Power and Purpose of the Word

When God speaks, the thing He commands is brought to pass. This is the result of His sovereignty (absolute authority) and omnipotence (unlimited power). These enable Him to create, destroy, or change any reality or condition He chooses. He surely speaks things we do not know about, but the things He has revealed about Himself in His Word...are ours.

When a king speaks, his words have power. This is stated in Eccl. 8:4, which says, "Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" His word is beyond dispute or remonstrance. It is final. So it is with God's Word...it carries with it all the force of the Almighty God. But notice this: *the words have no power independent of God*. The expression of power in words comes only through the power of the one who utters them.

The function of God's Word is tied to God Himself, and all its effectiveness is made possible by His divine qualities. There is no "mystical" or "magical" power within the "words" of the Bible. They are just language that God used to reveal Himself to us. The difference with these words is that they *disclose the power* behind them, which comes from the Holy Spirit...He gives *potency to truth* through His power. When we learn the Word, we are accessing the power of God. When we believe the Word, God's power is unleashed on our behalf.

The power of the Word gives life. At salvation, the power of the gospel, the same power that brought about the resurrection of Christ, brings eternal life to the one who believes the gospel message. Once we are saved, the doctrines of Scripture bring the life of Christ to us through a sustained relationship with the Holy Spirit. And whether it is at salvation, or in the life of a believer, the Word brings life through its content, because the Giver of Life stands behind it.

The words of the Bible are not insignificant, or incidental, or optional...to be flippantly taken or left...they are LIFE! Here we see the *general* purpose of the Word. ..to bring life. Deut. 32:45b, 47a, confirms this, saying, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day...They are not idle words for you—they are your life." If the words of God are "life"—our lives—then we must give the highest priority to accessing and acquiring them. "Taking God's Word to heart" will make all the difference in the quality of our lives, and in the worth of our service. The power of the Word to change us will be seen repeatedly throughout our studies, because it is the avenue to growth and effectiveness. This is why we must spend time with the Word every day.

Deut. 6:6-9 describes the place the Word should have in our lives, saying this:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Our schedules are busy—sometimes maniacal—but the words of truth must never be far from our active thoughts. We must remind ourselves by all means to refocus on God and His Word.

Because the Word has power, and because we want to embrace all it offers—for our service and for God's glory—we must look further at its purpose. Is. 55:10-11 says the following:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Rain water falls to the earth as precipitation, and then returns to the atmosphere as evaporation. But in the meantime, it performs life-sustaining tasks on earth. Similarly, as the Word is given from heaven and processes through the hearts of men, it imparts spiritual life to willing recipients, first at salvation, and then as spiritual “living”. The larger purpose of the Word is to give life.

The purpose of the Word is also seen in its specific *functions*, which give a more practical perspective of truth. The Word has *specific purposes*, requiring *specific responses* from us. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 describes some of these functions, as follows: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” In the following we present the functions of the Word cited in this passage, and designate the appropriate response to each:

1. **Teach.** The Word provides instruction, which—when accompanied by faith—brings understanding. Our role regarding this function is to *learn*.
2. **Rebuke.** The Word of God is used by the Holy Spirit to “convict” us of sin, to prompt us to give our transgressions to God so He can forgive us. If we hold on to our sins, “rebuke” becomes a precursor to discipline. Our response to rebuke is to *acknowledge the truth* of the “accusation” we receive from the Word.
3. **Correct.** The Word “sets us straight” and gives us an opportunity to respond to “rebuke” by correcting our thinking about our sins. The response to this function is *confession*. When we do not confess, “correction” becomes discipline.
4. **Train in Righteousness.** The training that the Word gives involves knowing and practicing the techniques of the grace system: confession, prayer, study, and so on. These increase our faith so we can walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and have His fruit of righteousness brought to bear in our lives. The correct response to training in the Word is *faith*.

When we apply the techniques of Scripture, we will be “thoroughly equipped for every good work.” This is what the Word does.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. True or false: The Word has magical powers. Explain your answer.

Question 2. According to this section, the *general* purpose of the Word is to give _____.

Question 3. Name at least two *specific* purposes that the Word has.

Other Scriptures

Prov. 4:20-22a—My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them.

Remember

The power of the Word is found in the One Who has spoken it. It is God's power that gives life and meaning to the Bible, and its greatest value is that it points to the One Who has produced it. The Word offers the power of God in the form of divine "life", and gives specific procedures and strategies for participation in this power.

D. First Glimpse of the Effects of Learning

We have seen before some of the ways that the Word affects our spiritual walk. In this section, we want to look deeper into these effects, anticipating a still-deeper exploration in an upcoming study.

We know this much: Knowledge of the Scripture *works* (translate this as "understanding is efficacious"). We present next several passages describing some of the effects of knowledge:

- Col. 3:10—...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.
- Phil. 1:9-11a—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.
- Rom. 15:14—I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.
- Is. 33:6—He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge.
- Pr. 3:13-14—Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.
- Col. 1:9-12—For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped

praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

God's Word prepares us, equips us, strengthens us, and makes us wise. It also does many other *specific* things; we offer two of them in this section: 1) avoiding sin, and 2) having our minds renewed.

First of all, the Word helps us *avoid* sin, as we see in the following verses:

- Ps. 119:9-11—How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
- Phil. 2:15-16a—...so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold on to the word of life....
- Ps. 119:165—Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.

The effects of the Word in helping us avoid sin are clearly described in these passages. And remember: The impetus and power for living according to the Word comes, not from self-effort, but from an ongoing cleanliness and faith that qualifies us for God's empowerment.

Secondly, the Word also has the effect of giving us a *mind "make-over"*. 1 Cor. 3:18 opens a discussion on this, saying, "And we, who with unveiled faces all contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." The change that the Word produces is called "transformation", a process by which our hearts are being supernaturally re-tooled so that we will look and act like Jesus Christ. (cf., Rom. 8:29).

The transformation begins on the inside by the "renewal of our minds", as we see in Rom. 12:2, which says the following:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The idea is to be changed...to become different...but we must not make the mistake of believing that we can achieve this *our way*, or in *our strength*. We must learn the techniques and assets whereby we allow *God* to do the work, so it will count...and so it will be effective. To become like Christ, we must know how to let Christ be Himself IN US! The renewing effects of the Word will bring about such a change, and such a life, if we make God's truth...our life.

As a result of being transformed, we will *function* differently, because we will be *thinking* differently. A renewed mind means changed behavior. New thoughts result in new patterns of action. The specific contents of a renewed mind are given in Phil. 4:8-9, which says the following:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure,

whatever, is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 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.

It seems foolish for us to attempt fashioning such noble minds in *our* shrimpy way, when God our eternal Father offers to empower us, so we can get it *His* way. Without him, our ways will be the old ways, but with Him we can find newness of life through the renewal of our minds.

The benefits of the Word are numerous, and we will see many more, but before we will ever go after God's knowledge, we must *want* it. Knowledge of the Word is something we have to crave passionately and desire deeply, before we will pursue it vigorously. The effects of “wanting to learn” is our topic in the next chapter.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Where is it that we hide God's words to keep from sinning?

Question 2. The command is not to “transform ourselves”. It is to _____.

Question 3. Name at least three conditions of a renewed mind?

Other Scriptures

Rom. 8:29a—And those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son....

2 Cor. 4:16—Therefore we do not lose heart. [Even] though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Remember

The things that the Word changes are outcomes that occur from following the guidelines, techniques, and instructions of Scripture. These effects come about through the power of God, and give us a new way of thinking and behaving. God gives us His Word, and His Word gives us life, which is the life of Christ. As we move through our studies, we will see this ever more clearly.

Chapter 13

Wanting to Learn

In This Chapter...

- A. Devote Yourselves to Study*
- B. Wanting to Learn*
- C. "Wanting to Learn" Expanded and Portrayed*
- D. Clearing the Slate for Learning*

A. Devote Yourselves to Study

We want to begin this discussion by quoting several scriptures that emphasize the value and importance of learning the truths of the Bible. Incidentally, if you are in a hurry, and do not take time to read the passages that we cite, it will be impossible for you to get full value from this book. Please take time to peruse the core truths that the Word presents, as in the following:

- Hosea 6:3—Oh that we might know the Lord. Let us press on to know Him.
- Rom. 15:4—For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope.
- Prov. 4:20-22—My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them.

As we progress through our studies, we will see other verses extolling the worth of “learned” truth.

We will establish that God's truths provide wisdom and understanding, which give us *His perspective*. When we have acquired wisdom and understanding, as we shall see, these can be applied in our lives as techniques and systems that allow grace to operate. This reflects the difference between functioning in God's program (recommended), and trying to create our own. The Word tells us all

about God's program.

We must be clear that the Word is our source for wisdom and understanding. Job asked the question in Job 38:36: "Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?" These obviously come from God, through His Word. Prov. 4:3-9 gives a strong case for learning the truth, as presented by Solomon to his sons in the following:

When I was a boy in my father's [David's] house, still tender, and an only child of my mother [Bathsheba], he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor." (Prov. 4:3-9)

We have an unprecedented privilege to access wisdom from the Word, and the commandment to "listen" to the Word is easier than ever to satisfy. We must first *hear* the Word, and then we must *believe* the Word. Heb. 3:7a and 3:12 give us the sequence, saying first of all, "Today if you hear his voice..." (v. 7a), and then, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (v. 12). We hear it...then we believe it, so it can process.

Deut. 18:15 looked forward into a future time, when there would be a need to hear the words of Christ (words which apply to us now), saying, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to him." In context, this is a clear reference to Christ's earthly teachings, and His message is for us...we must listen to Him...to His *words*.

Prov. 23:12 admonishes, "Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge." We are to focus our minds like a laser beam on the Word of God. Read, listen, watch, or whatever else....but *constantly learn*. Learn the Word. Understand it. Believe it. Apply it. It will protect you and sustain you.

Paul told the Ephesians that he was praying that God would give them a "spirit of wisdom and revelation", so that they could "know him [God] better". He also prayed that the "eyes of their heart" would be enlightened, so they would know the hope and confidence and empowerment that comes from God for those who believe His Word. (from Eph. 1:16-20)

Too many times we are spinning around like some whirling Dervish, exerting energy, but not going anywhere. Or we may head out in the dark, moving along, yes, but in the wrong direction. Without God's wisdom, we will be guessing our way through life, living by trial and error, and never understanding why it is that, even when things go well, somehow they don't seem quite right or complete. And what is worse...when we don't know the Bible, we can't possibly please God, which means we will stay on the hot seat...until we do.

We quoted before 2 Pet. 1:19a, which fits here. This verse says, "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a

dark place..." We should pay attention to Scripture *all the time*! Learning and growing in the Word is not an occasional or casual thing. If you are going to get serious about being a productive Christian, the Word of God must be your life, and you must be devoted to getting its truths and remembering them...living every minute of every day in close proximity to them. To get the maximum life, you must acquire the maximum truth...without stopping or slowing down.

If we stop learning, we will not stay close to God. Prov. 19:27 says, "Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge." We must continue to learn, as per Prov. 5:1-2, which says, "My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge." And what will the result be? James 1:25 answers, "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does." We will be blessed.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Everything that the prophets (and apostles) wrote in the past was written to _____ us.

Question 2. What is the estimated price we should be willing to pay to get wisdom?

Question 3. When should we stay close to the Scriptures?

Question 4. What will be the result if we learn and apply Scripture in our lives?

Other Scriptures

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

Eph. 1:17—I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.

Remember

When we learn the Word, we will be changed. These effects come about through the power of God, understood through His Word. God gives us His Word, and His Word gives us life, which is the life of Christ. As we move through our studies, we will see this ever more clearly.

B. Wanting to Learn

When we come to sit at the feet of a gifted teacher, or read various Bible studies, or watch/listen to electronically-generated lessons, or just sit alone with the Word...if our hearts are not prepared to receive the truth, our study time will not be productive. We have seen that we should *confess* our sins and *pray* for wisdom before we study, and we have indicated the importance of *believing* the Word (we will see more on the role of “believing” in the next section). But there is an attitude of acceptance that supersedes the act of believing that will facilitate our full reception of truth, and put what we learn on the launching pad for immediate dispatch as “application”. This is the function of *volition*...it is our “decider” and the root of our value system. Volition determines what we *want*. It is the topic of this section.

In the nucleus of our inner selves, there is a level of thirst and hunger for God that determines our attitude toward the Word. If we *want* God, we will *want to know Him and His ways*. Many psychologists and counselors believe that we can’t “help” who we are, and they will not like this, but our position is this: “Wanting” comes from a “decision to want”. Applied to Bible study and absorption of truth, this means that we must “choose” to *want to study*. Choice is our most cherished privilege, and we must “choose” God and His truth, or we will be “rejecting” Him.

If we do not WANT the truth...as believers...even if we spend time in “Bible class”...any truth we hear will not settle in the heart, because the destination for all learning—the heart—will not provide rich soil for truth to germinate and grow. We must have passion, zeal, craving, and awe as we approach our time of learning. It is not an “academic” exercise, something to yawn our way through. It is a time to WAKE UP so we can build our faith, renew our minds, and rejuvenate our spirits. Study requires a *readiness of heart*. “When the pupil is ready, the teacher will appear” (Buddhist proverb).

Enthusiasm for learning will be demonstrated by a *daily* pursuit of learning. In Acts 17:11, we see what the Bereans did every day. This verse says, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” It is likely that Paul *taught* every day, but one thing is certain: Bereans *learned* every day. And notice their attitude: “great eagerness”. This is the spirit of readiness that maximizes the impact of study-time. We have to *study* every day, but we also have to come to our studies with *eagerness*. And observe the result for the Bereans: They exhibited “noble character” (the outcome of “renewed minds”).

When we love the truth, **we will have peace and stability**. This is what we see in Ps. 119:165, which says, “Great peace have they who love your law [the Word], and nothing can make them stumble.” “Peace”, as we shall see in detail later, is often a symbol of fellowship. This means that those who love the Word will tend to learn it and apply the techniques it provides. This includes confession, which leads to fellowship and results in peace.

Paul told Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does

not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Paul was challenging Timothy to do his best to study assiduously and consistently, so that he can 1) avoid “being ashamed”, i.e., he will tend to stay in fellowship more of the time, and 2) correctly handle the Word of truth, or properly absorb the truth, so he can teach it accurately.

Prov. 23:12 says, “Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.” Listening, understanding, and applying Scripture are all in view in this passage. Heb. 3:8a continues this line of emphasis, saying, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...” Three conditions are noteworthy here: 1) the time reference for “hearing” is “today”, 2) “hearing” is what we do when we listen, believe, and understand truth, and 3) the heart must not be “hardened”, or resistant...it must be receptive to the truth. The time for study is *today*, the key to understanding is *preparation to study*, and the way to wisdom is *eagerness for the truth*. These will be clarified and amplified in the next section.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Where does our value system find its roots?

Question 2. How often did the Bereans study? What word best describes their attitude toward learning?

Question 3. If we love the truth, we can expect to have _____ and _____ .

Question 4. If we are not receptive to the truth, it is because our hearts have been _____ .

Other Scriptures

Ps. 42:1-2a—As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

2 Tim. 2:25—Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Remember

To want the Word, we must *decide* to want it. If we truly want the truth, we will pursue it with passion and enthusiasm. When we search for truth in the Word, we will find it, with the result that we will understand—and be motivated to use—the techniques of grace.

C. “*Wanting to Learn*” Expanded and Portrayed

Volition lies at the center of who we are, and determines what we really want. If we really want the truth, our hearts will be open. At the beginning of the learning process, preparation, hearing, and faith will cause knowledge to process into the heart as understanding. Deeper into the learning process, however, we learn that it is possible for a resistant heart to set up a roadblock. The “eyes of the heart” (from Eph. 1:17-18) may be closed to the truth. Matt. 13:15 declares this:

For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.

A calloused heart will not receive truth. (The function and operation of the *heart*, as it relates to the mind, soul, and spirit, must be clarified, and will be given full coverage in a later lesson.)

Truth can be lost anywhere along the way as it is headed to the heart. We must prepare for study, be attentive listeners, and believe the truth as we hear it...to the letter...for knowledge to become understanding. But even then we aren’t through. The process will not be finished until one final step is completed, and that is *welcoming* truth into the heart. This is a time when we passionately embrace the truths we are learning, signifying our actually “wanting” the Word.

Truth enters first as “knowledge”, and then, through faith, becomes “understanding”. If the heart is open, truth will then be *absorbed*, and “understanding” can become “wisdom”. An open heart is like a paper towel...absorbent. A resistant heart is like waxed paper...it absorbs nothing.

Wisdom must be distinguished from knowledge and understanding, even though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in translations of the Bible, and even by me. Wisdom in the heart is *understanding made ready for application*. The real test to determine if knowledge has reached the heart as understanding...and has been converted to wisdom...is whether what we learn is being *applied*. When truth reaches the level of wisdom, it will be applied...or used and followed. If no application is occurring, then truth obviously got held up somewhere along the trail.

Wisdom generates application. Without application in evidence, wisdom is assuredly absent. For example, when we learn about the technique of confession...acknowledging it, believing it, and understanding it...but not using it, or using it improperly, we can know that the process has not been completed, and wisdom is lacking.

For truth to reach the end point in the learning process, our hearts must be open. A “hardened” heart does not provide a receptive environment, and will not make God’s truths at home. To soften the heart, we must decide, over and over, that God is real, and that His Word is true, thus choosing Him, and inviting His truth and His influence into our hearts. This is not just getting the truth...this is engrafting it...and surrendering to its proscriptions. This is being a “doer of the Word”, as per James, with actions arising through the inducements of wisdom. To be effective, truth must be ap-

plied, as a result of the learning process being completed.

The “track of truth” is coming together, and follows this path:

- Confessing sins engages the Holy Spirit within us.
- Praying for wisdom invokes the Spirit's teaching.
- Hearing the Word in some format delivers knowledge.
- Believing the truth converts knowledge into understanding.
- Inviting truth into the heart elevates understanding to the level of wisdom.
- Wisdom enables application, which is the end goal for all learning.

If you want to learn, this is the path you will take.

Mark 4:3-29 presents a parable Jesus used to teach “sowing and reaping” that will illustrate our topic of “wanting to learn”. This passage tells us that “fully-processed” truth will bear fruit. Please read the verses referenced above, and then continue here. Here is what we see in this section of truth:

1. The seeds represent truths from the Word of God (the gospel for unbelievers...and “teachings” for believers).
2. Those who want the truth will receive it. Verse 9 says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”
3. When truth is heard and believed, it will become understanding. Verse 12a says, “...they may be ever seeing, but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding...” The hearer must be willing to learn, and believe what is heard, so that “information” can become “understanding”.
4. Verse 20 specifies the whole learning sequence, saying, “Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop.” In this verse we see the final step in the process, which is acceptance. “Accept” means *total acceptance*, including the preliminary step of believing the truth and the final step of welcoming it into the heart. Once again, it is this last step that converts understanding to wisdom. The whole sequence is seen in verse 20, quoted above, as follows: 1) hear the Word, 2) accept the Word (believe it and welcome it as a treasured friend), and 3) apply the Word to life.

The truth of God's Word must be carried all the way into our hearts, in order for it to become effective. No step can be left out...and there is no short cut. When truth is processed to the finish, wisdom will increase, application will occur, and a crop will be produced! We will be *fruitful*.

When we hear the truth and believe it, we must not stop there. We must go beyond to the level of full assimilation of the Word, asking that God will cause new understanding to become “wisdom”. After that, we must immediately take what we have learned and FOLLOW IT, by APPLYING IT.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. A calloused or hardened heart will not receive the _____ .

Question 2. What is the final thing we must do to ensure that truth processes completely into the heart?

Question 3. By believing truth, hearing becomes _____ .

Question 4. By absorbing truth, understanding becomes _____ in the heart.

Question 5. What is the test for determining whether wisdom has developed as a result of the learning process?

Other Scriptures

Eph. 1:17-18a—I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you....

Remember

In order to mature and be productive as believers, we must be sure that we are digesting the Word, so that we are getting the full benefit of its nutrients. Our attitude toward the Word affects our openness to it, without which we cannot learn the Word and use what we learn. We must invite learning into our hearts, so that it can become wisdom and be applied to our lives.

D. Clearing the Slate for Learning

The steps we take in preparing to learn include confessing our sins, praying for wisdom, and entering the learning process with faith and a thirst for divine input. As a last gasp before we begin discussions on other things, such as the process of maturing through study, the meaning of and methods for feeding on the Word, the strategies for applying what we learn, and the consequences for ignoring our studies...we must remind ourselves of the importance of having sins removed to clear our spiritual learning pathways so we can assimilate the truth.

The Word helps us see our sins, so we can deal with them through confession. Heb. 4:11-13 describes this for us. Heb. 4:11 says, "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." The "rest" is the place of peace we find when our faith is strong, while "disobedience" is unbelief (see Heb. 3:19). (We will have more to say about this in Part Five: "Walking by Faith".)

The “failure” in verse 11 is the absence of faith, which is, itself, a sin that must be dealt with. Then verse 12 and 13 are interjected to contemplate our failure. ..and suggest a solution for it. Verse 12 sets it up: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” The Word is alive and powerful, slicing through our spiritual parts and our fleshly parts, evaluating the contents of the *heart*. The Word EXPOSES our failures.

In verse 13, we see where this is headed. This verse says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” The Word exposes our sins, God sees them, and we must account for them (an obvious reference to confession). When we *see* the sins exposed by the Word, then we can admit them to God and move forward.

In a verse we saw earlier (2 Tim. 2:25), Timothy was instructed to “gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them [Timothy’s opponents] repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” This process begins and ends with the Word. “Instructions” are given, so that “repentance” will take place (meaning salvation-faith for unbelievers and confession for believers). This instruction creates an *awareness* of sin, and awareness leads to repentance. And notice then the outcome: “leading them to a knowledge of the truth”. This means returning to our studies of the Word...not just spending “time” with it, but “learning time”, which means we are processing truth, because we are prepared to learn.

Verse 26 (2 Tim.) expresses Paul’s hope that these “opponents” will “come to their senses, and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them to do his will”. When these carnal believers repent, and return to fellowship, they can acquire a “knowledge of the truth”. But as long as they are carnal, the teaching of the Holy Spirit will be absent, and truth for living will not be available. **The Bible can only be understood by believers in fellowship!!**

In a verse we have seen before, we see corroboration for this truth. 1 Cor. 2:14 says, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” In James 1:21a, we see this again: “Put aside all filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you....” Notice the sequence: 1) Put aside filth and evil (through confession), and then you will be equipped to 2) humbly accept the Word.

In this same vein, Ps. 32:5 and 8, quoted together, say the following:

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. [and what was God’s response?] I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Confessing our sins opens the instructional links so we can learn. Sin gets in the way of learning; confession clears it up. Eccl. 2:26 says, “To the man who pleases him [i.e., who is in fellowship], God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness.” To please God, we must be free of sin...which is ac-

complished by confession. This is not an abstract, ethereal event...it is real. When we confess, radical change is taking place. The Holy Spirit takes over and produces His fruit in us, for as long as we do not sin. Sin is nearby, however...and spring-loaded—ever-ready to engage and put the sinful nature back in charge. This is why the need to confess continually is so pressing.

When we return to fellowship, we become receptive to God's Word...the lenses through which we view truth are cleaned. We confess to enable the Holy spirit to teach us, which He can do as long as we are in fellowship. And the more we learn, the longer and more productive our times in fellowship become. The circle continues, in that extending our times in fellowship increases our opportunities to learn. The cycle is recursive, building us up for greater service and greater blessing.

To recapitulate, the application we seek is this: 1) to apply the Word in life, and 2) to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. To achieve these we must know and process the truths, techniques, and promises in the Word. And to do this we must *meet certain conditions*, as we have seen. These conditions are restated in the following:

1. Sins confessed.
2. Prayer offered for wisdom and understanding.
3. Faith intact.
4. Eagerness to learn (a volition of thirst and hunger for the Word).
5. Control of the Holy Spirit to enable Him to teach us. (True, if 1 through 4 are true).

When these conditions are fulfilled, we will be ready to learn Scripture.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Why is it important that our sins be exposed...or highlighted...by God?

Question 2. The Word will only be understood by believers _____.

Question 3. Why can't just *anybody* study the Word and understand it?

Other Scriptures

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

1 Cor. 3:1—Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ.

1 Pet. 2:1-2—Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

John 3:21—But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light [fellowship], so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

1 Kings 8:36a—...then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live....

Remember

Before we go to God's table to feed on His Word, we must "wash our hands". Confession of our sins cleanses us and qualifies us to learn God's truths.

Chapter 14

Gateway to Maturity

In This Chapter...

- A. Our Goal is Maturity*
- B. Wanting to Grow*
- C. God Provides Teachers*
- D. Study Brings Growth*
- E. Learning from Experience*
- F. Things that Diminish with Maturity*
- G. Things that Increase with Maturity*

A. Our Goal is Maturity

Our biggest problem is that we think small, and reduce God to a nice little companion that hangs around in the background each day...there, perhaps, for emergencies, but otherwise pretty much left alone. Instead, we should see Him as the infinite Creator and Sustainer of everything, with absolute power and total involvement in every event in our lives. Our God is infinite. He has no limits or dimensions, as we know them, even though we constantly discount His sovereignty and power. Being mature means coming to recognize God as God, and realizing that—without Him—we are nothing. Maturity means giving God credit for being Who He is, and knowing what that means to us.

Maturity is not, as some think, an achievement of great strength in ourselves, but is found in our participation in *God's strength*. Maturity is recognizing that we can achieve nothing apart from God, but that He can do great things through us...He can produce in us the qualities that are His, but that

become ours, when we follow His instructions.

Maturity, perfection, completeness...these are repeatedly called for in Scripture. They all mean one thing: *maturity*. With maturity we get closer to God and trust Him more to be Himself...in us. Matt. 5:48 tells us, "You must be complete, as your heavenly Father is complete." Jesus is pushing for spiritual "godlikeness". We must be like Him! This is something we assuredly *cannot* do by ourselves. Ultimate completeness, of course, will happen when Christ returns or when we are called to heaven. Until then, our job is to grow toward maturity to allow God to complete us.

In the meantime, the current against which we swim is sin, coming at us like a tidal wave. Sin tries to pull us under, but God has given us life boats in the form of *techniques*. Among these is *learning His truths*, so that we know where safety and rescue are, and so we can know which way to paddle. This technique leads to maturity. Another crucial technique is confession, whereby we deal with the undertow of sin. Maturity and fellowship interact in a way that strengthens both. We will explain.

Immature believers can confess their sins and get into fellowship. The problem is, they don't stay there for long, because they cannot resist the evil forces that come against them. They do not have the wisdom and maturity to keep their balance when they are attacked, so sin occurs frequently, meaning fellowship is constantly interrupted. Maturity, on the other hand, brings spiritual intensity, because maturity brings greater faith in God, thus providing greater access to His assets. With stronger faith comes greater resistance to sin and quicker turn-around in the fellowship cycle. The result: Fellowship is maintained for longer periods of time. The value of this is that—*with more-consistent fellowship*—additional prayer and learning can go on inside the sphere of faith, and maturity will be accelerated.

When our learning equipment is "switched on" due to fellowship, and we follow the procedures for learning, we will acquire truths that will increase our access to God's grace and power, and give us lives that are meaningful and productive. The objective of this chapter is to see the importance of maturity, the ways God provides to achieve it, and the things to be gained by having it. Maturity is our main goal, because it incorporates all the techniques and promises. This will come into sharper focus as we go through these studies.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Without God, we are _____ .

Question 2. True or false: As we mature, we begin to realize that *we* can do anything. (Hint: If you answer "true", please go back to page 1 and start over.)

Question 3. What is the greatest drag on the process of maturity?

Question 4: Why is maturity our main goal?

Other Scriptures

1 Cor. 2:6-7a—We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not

the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom....

Eph. 4:13—...until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining in the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Col. 4:12a—He [Epaphras] is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Remember

Maturity is not about our *personal* growth, but about greater access to God's techniques, which we get by learning and following His truths. These lead to *His* power and grace, which will enable us to live in His strength. This is why we study: to learn how to acquire His power...to live in His holiness.

B. Wanting to Grow

There are many believers who do not grow, and remain babies all their (Christian) lives. Not learning and maturing is a matter of choice...the outcropping of a negative volition toward God and His Word. If you are a Christian, you must decide if you are going to sit on the sidelines, or make a commitment to study the Word and grow. The biggest mistake you can make is to think that you have it made, just because you are saved. This is true with reference to eternity, but not for Christian living. Getting saved is only the beginning...after that, another prospect looms, projecting an urgent need: We must become mature, or we will struggle endlessly...and feel the cramp of emptiness all of our lives.

As long as we are alive, we have the opportunity to choose the path of growth into the fullness of Christ...into the life God wants us to have. To be stronger *in God* we must take time to learn *about God*. We must gather at God's table to feed; then rise to put a new height-marker on the wall...because growth is taking place.

There is no excuse for not studying God's Word. (We will refine our definition of "study" as we go along, since it is many things not always associated with the word "study". After all, there are many learning styles, and many ways to learn.) It is a matter of "wanting" the truth. If we want God's truths, we will get them. The Word of God is available to every believer. It is not limited to brilliant or gifted or scholarly people, or to those "born to privilege". No matter one's ability or heritage, he can learn the techniques of the Word. The question for you is this: Do you WANT to learn?

Prov. 1:5 says, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning..." "Wise" does not mean having the cognitive acuity of a "Rhodes Scholar"...it means *wanting to know God better*, realizing that not even the most brilliant can learn God's truths apart from thirsting for them. As we learn the Word,

we become wise in a new sense, in that knowledge-becoming-understanding-becoming-wisdom accumulates, causing us to mature, thus making us “wise”. Eph. 5:15 says, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise.” We can *choose* the wisdom that will enable us to “live as wise”.

This truth is echoed in Pr. 18:15, which says, “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.” If you *want* it, you will *seek* it. And when you *seek* it, you will *find* it. Scripture is our spiritual bread and butter, our entrée, our vitamins, our Omega-3, and all else that we need to be sustained in our Christian walk. We must want it. We must learn it. It’s our spiritual heart-beat.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the urgent need we face after we are saved?

Question 2. What is a legitimate reason for not studying?

Question 3. We should be very careful how we live, not as unwise, but as _____ .

Other Scriptures

Rom. 11:33a—Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God....

Ps. 119:125—I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.

Remember

When we choose to learn, we are—in effect—choosing to grow. When we choose to grow, we will make many choices along the way to learn, as we prepare for and participate in God’s gracious tutelage.

C. God Provides Teachers

God provides pastor-teachers to help us learn scripture and mature as believers. Eph. 4:11 says the following:

It was he [God] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

God gives gifts to enable believers to bolster and strengthen each other. All mature believers have at least one “gift”, and these are used mostly to prepare other believers for service. We will discuss

“gifts” more generally in a future lesson, but our interest at this point is in the gift of pastor-teacher, because this is the gift of “instruction”. There are other “communications” gifts, but the one that seems most-useful for the growth and advancement of believers and the church is that of pastor-teacher. The gifts of “apostle” and “prophet” are thought by some to be temporary gifts, used to establish the early church and complete the inspired Word of God, but—if they are, indeed, in operation today—their usefulness is surely diminished, because we have the entire revelation of God to man...in His Word. This is where the pastor-teacher comes in...he must TEACH the completed Word.

The object of learning the Word is not just so we can be “knowledgeable” and have something to say in Christian circles...it is to *prepare us for works of service*! We are preparing to bear fruit, to love, to do good works, and to become wise and mature in every way. These will culminate in a “walk in the Spirit” (to be covered thoroughly in Part Six), which will enable us to *see* that it is God Who works, and not us. Yet we will observe ourselves working harder than we ever imagined, to the point of fatigue, because God’s work is using our bodies and minds to complete the work.

The process that prepares us for such service comes largely from the function of the pastor-teacher. He is gifted to teach and repeat, repeat, repeat. Peter knew the discipline of teaching and repeating, as he indicated in the following:

I will always remind you of these things [truths], even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body. (2 Pet. 1:12-13)

We should hear over and over the principles of godly living. *Teachers* must be mobilized, and they must teach...so that believers under their watch will learn. But—I remind you—knowing is not an end in itself...it is a means to an end...and that end is loving, serving, and reflecting Christ’s light to the world. So find a Bible class in some form, where a pastor-teacher (or just a *teacher*) is correctly handling and disseminating the Word. This should be going on every day.

As for pastor-teachers, this is no time for them to occupy their time with counseling, weddings, funerals, and hospital visitations...give those gifts to believers with other gifts...this is the time for **teaching the Word**! (See Acts 6:2-4 below for convincing confirmation of study, prayer, and teaching as pastoral priorities.) And as teachers are teaching, the rest of us should gather (in some fashion) to hear the Word taught. Christ must be the center of our lives, and we should devote ourselves to learning about His truths. This is no time to pull back and shrivel up. This is a time to get underway. So ring the bell! Sound the trumpet! Strike the tents! Rally the troops! It’s time to train.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. The job of the pastor-teacher is to _____ .

Question 2. At the risk of boring his audience, the pastor-teacher must be willing to relentlessly _____ his teachings.

Question 3: What should be done with administrative and caretaking tasks in the church,

so the pastor-teacher can study and pray and teach?

Other Scriptures

Acts 6:1-4—In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Remember

Pastor-teachers should be teaching above all else. Believers who want to grow must find teachers they trust, and these teachers must be mature and well-studied, so they can teach effectively.

D. Study Brings Growth

The story of God is rich and deep, and does not come without our giving attention to the task of studying. By feeding on the spiritual nutrients the Bible provides, we grow into maturity, which equips us for service. Paul understood the importance of maturity, and knew the place of study in bringing it about. It was his goal to “present everyone mature”. In Col. 1:25b-26 and 28, Paul stated that his commission was to teach the Word of God to believers, to feed their growth. Here is what this passage says:

...to present to you the word of God in its fullness...the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints....We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present every one perfect [mature] in Christ.

Paul is teaching them with “all wisdom”, so they can “mature in Christ”. He follows in Col. 2:6 with further instructions for growth, saying, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” We received Christ at salvation, and now we must “live in him”, or “walk by His Spirit”. And how is this done? By being “rooted and built up in Him”, and by being “strengthened in the faith” (here, faith is the set of knowledge which we believe, or the “Word”). By maturing and getting stronger in our understanding of the Word, we will be able to “live” in Christ...or in His power.

The object of instruction is for us to be “built up”. This is re-emphasized in Eph. 4:7-12, which de-

scribes how gifts are obtained. These verses also cite some of the gifts and tell us the purpose for the gifts. This purpose has to do with maturity, as we see in verse 12b of this passage: "...so that the body of Christ may be built up". This is echoed in verse 13, which uses the phrase "until we...become mature". In verses 14-15, The outcome of gifted service is primarily the input of truth, which builds us up and causes growth. This is what these verses say:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth [Scripture] in love we will in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, that is Christ.

When we grow up spiritually, and leave the infant stage, it can be said of us, "You heard about him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). When we are taught...or more correctly, when we "learn"...we will mature, so that we can "live a life worthy of the calling we have received" (Eph. 4:1).

If we are not taught, and do not grow, we will remain infants. Heb. 5:12-14 makes this very clear, as follows:

In fact, though by the time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness [fellowship]. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Time logged as a Christian does not make a believer mature. You may have been a believer for forty years, and still be a pre-schooler, if you have not been growing in the Word during that time. Heb. 6:1 urges us, "Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation...." You must get into the Word, and then go *deeper*. If you don't, you will stay in kindergarten, with the result that your sinful nature and Satan and the world will feast on you and destroy you. Or you can go on, move up through the grades, know the whole truth, and live in the strength and wisdom of Christ.

We mature by learning and believing the doctrines of Scripture that teach us how to please God and advance in our faith. We repeat the learning cycle over and over. We "understand" truth by hearing and believing it; then we can gain "wisdom" by accepting what we learn. With wisdom, we can apply truth to experience, and the process is complete. We will move toward maturity, from which everything good comes. Maturity will be the ultimate consequence of all our studies, and will facilitate all the techniques God has designed for enabling us to participate in His life.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What was Paul's commission?

Question 2. The way to mature and be "built up" is to _____ .

Question 3. A person who has been a believer for an extended period of time is probably mature. Is this true? Why or why not?

Other Scriptures

Col. 1:10—And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

Ps. 119:2-3—Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

Remember

STUDY OF THE WORD is clearly the way we grow into maturity, where all the bounties of grace will overflow. But we will never understand and use the techniques God has given us, if we do not examine God's description of them. And if we never understand, we will never be effective as believers...we will just remain infants, bewildered by the world and carried along by forces that do not intend our "good".

E. Learning from Experience

There are two basic components in God's training program for us. The first takes place in the classroom; the second is on the practice field. Whether it occurs in the military, in athletics, or within a corporation, time must be spent in "skull practice", which is a time of mental preparation, an opportunity for learning and planning. And then there is time for "field training", which is when the things learned in the classroom can be applied.

Just like a good coach, God will establish the concepts and procedures in the classroom, and then He will introduce situations in life outside the classroom so we can practice what we have learned. Training in the world provides experiences that have an "external" application. But God's teaching (classroom) *and* God's training (field), are aimed at improving our "internal" states, referring to the heart. Christian living comes from a Christ-occupied and God-dependent heart. The "performance" of the skills being developed are completely reliant on our internal condition, which must be characterized by our being *in fellowship* and *mature*. Training is structured to bring these about.

We have stated in writings outside this book that "experience" cannot be relied upon as a *criterion* for truth. But that statement must be qualified. This does not mean that experience cannot teach us. Experience can *never* trump the truth of God's Word, but it *can* be instructive...*if we have learned sufficient Scripture to see God's hand in what is happening*. When we learn more about the way God works, we will understand that events in our lives all interplay within a phenomenal plan that God put into place in eternity past. He controls everything according to this plan, but He still allows us free choice. Without violating our free will, He brings events into our lives that are designed to train us.

These “experiences” are interjected to help us grow into maturity.

Mark 6:52 reports that the disciples learned (and sometimes *failed* to learn) from experience. This verse says, “...they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.” In context, when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were “terrified” (verse 50), because they thought He was a ghost. They did not exercise faith and apply Scripture in this situation, because they had not learned from the earlier event of the “feeding of the five thousand”. They had not learned, because their hearts were “hardened”...their hearts had been resistant to the truth.

Do you see the implication? The disciples did not get the lesson they were taught, because they did not want it, or did not prepare to receive it. They *missed* it! The same thing will happen to us, if we do not stay prepared to learn from life's lessons, or if we just don't want to know. This is our current topic: What is the place of “experiential learning” in our training program?

Events are meaningful. They have spiritual implications, and truths can be found in them. They reflect God's dealing with us in ways that promote our growth and increase our faith. In 2 Cor. 1:9, Paul was facing an experience in which death was imminent. Paul said of this circumstance, “Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.” Paul assumed he was going to die, and there is no faith-challenge greater than that of facing death. God was teaching Paul to trust his God, and not himself. This was the lesson Paul was being taught...in the field.

The things that happen to us, as they did to Paul, are to TEACH US TO RELY ON GOD! Events are designed to instruct us in ways that increase our confidence in God's grace. We CAN learn from experience, if we are prepared for it, and if we want it. The desire to do this is expressed very well in a song from John Denver, “I Want to Live”. Here are the words:

I want to live,
I want to grow,
I want to see,
I want to know.

You can see readily why this fits: I *want* to live (live in the Spirit); I *want* to grow (mature); I *want* to see (open the eyes of my heart); I *want* to know (learn Scripture). When I do the second two, I will do the first two. That desire takes us into the classroom, and then into the field, where the battle rages, and for which we must be prepared.

We must get the point that *events* in our lives cannot be understood until we have *mastered* the truths in God's Word. Until we have a sufficient grasp of Scripture, we will not “see” the truths in the events, and will misinterpret them. And when we misunderstand, our faith will founder. Understanding truth precedes understanding events. Put another way, seeing truth in experience is for mature believers.

We will discuss suffering more thoroughly in a later lesson, but we touch on this now to see how God's training works through “tests and trials”. Many of the experiences God brings fall into this category...tests and trials. These are designed to strengthen our faith, and can be considered a

“technique”, though—unlike the other techniques—this is not one we execute, but one we “endure”. Technique 5 is “Enduring Tests and Trials”. Tests and trials take place while we are in fellowship, and must be distinguished from discipline, which takes place during (and because of) carnality. The first is “strengthening”; the second is “correcting”.

We offer next several passages which emphasize and clarify God's training through tests and trials. We will quote each passage, and post comments for each one, as follows:

- James 1:2-4—“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Perseverance is a product of faith, an expression of our trust in God's goodness and will and plan. Trials of many kinds come so that we can develop faith, expressed as perseverance, and thereby become “mature”, completed by God
- Rom. 5:3-4—“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance [faith]; perseverance, character; character, hope.” We are to “rejoice” in our tests and trials, because we see the outcome...stronger faith and a life closer to God.
- 1 Pet. 1:6-7—In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater value than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” The “proving” of our faith is *testing*, which exercises it (in a spiritual sense) and makes it stronger.

So we understand that tests and trials make us stronger. But these are also opportunities to understand truths about God, especially that He is *good*. To see God in action on the playing field, we must prepare ourselves in the classroom. We must “prepare our minds for action” (see 1 Pet. 1:13a). When we are prepared, and when we want to know, we can learn from experience.

We also want to interject that “blessings” are part of the experience God brings to us, and we can learn from these, as well. These will be explored completely in Part Seven, which deals with our drawing near to God, and claiming the prizes of grace.

Finally, I believe it is possible to reach a level of maturity that will enable us to be so in tune with the essence of God that we know instantly what is going on, as something happens. I think we can reach a level of understanding and faith that will give us eyes to see God's plan and will in every event. This is what we seek...to be close enough to God and familiar enough with Him to gain clear insight into His Way, so that we can walk in it with each step.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What are the two components of God's training program for us?

Question 2. For experience to be meaningful to us, we must first learn sufficient

_____ .
Question 3. What are “events” designed to do.

Question 4. Faith and perseverance are built through _____ and _____ .

Other Scriptures

1 Tim. 4:7b—...have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

1 Tim. 4:16—Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them....

Rom. 8:28—And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Remember

We can learn from experience, but it is conditional. We must first learn Scripture, and—of course—we must be in fellowship. Then we can tune in to lessons around us. When we are spiritual and mature, experience will provide volumes of meaningful teachings for us.

F. Things that Diminish with Maturity

There are things that should, and do, *diminish* as we grow into maturity. We will cite these, and then in the next section, we will see the things that *increase* with maturity. Here are some things that *diminish* with maturity:

- **Sin.** Sin, in general, is our Nemesis. God hates it, it separates us from Him, and it is so serious that His Son had to die for it. It is the biggest problem we have. Maturity helps control sin. A mature life is a *moral* life, not because we discipline ourselves to play by the rules, but because we have found the strength that comes from knowing and applying the techniques of the Word. We also honor God more as we mature, because we know Him better, and our value systems change to reflect greater morality and faithfulness. Maturity causes the reduction of all forms of sin, such as self-dependency, reliance on the Law (rule-keeping), insufficient faith, lack of love, and so on. Maturity causes these to *diminish*.
- **Anger.** Anger is tricky, ambushing us at the most inopportune times, and destroying opportunities and relationships and stability in ways that can be permanently devastating. Col. 3:8 says, “Get rid of anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language....” James 1:19b-20 says, “Everyone should be slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” The secret for assuaging

an anger problem is found later in James 1, at verse 21b, which says, “humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” In context, “save” means “deliver”. When the Word is “planted”, it leads to maturity, which brings about *deliverance* from anger and other sins.

- **Sins of the Tongue.** The things we say can be devastating. The tongue of an immature believer, who spends most of his time out of fellowship, is a weapon of mass destruction. Prov. 11:9a says, “With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor....” But then notice the rest of the verse: “...through knowledge the righteous escape.” Fellowship and maturity. That is how we escape sins of the tongue. Overcoming this sin takes the full arsenal of Scripture. It will take advanced maturity to conquer this sin, which often occurs faster than a speeding thought. Look at Jude 1:15-16. There we will probably find ourselves in some form, as this passage cites these: grumblers, fault-finders, boasters, and insincere flatters. For most people, these are old patterns of speech that roll easily off the tongue. They are direct outputs of the heart, and will change only with maturity.
- **Pride.** Pride is sneaky. It promises to be our life boat in the rough seas of our own psychology, where we swirl around in whirlpools of neediness and self-doubt. We boast and brag and peacock up and down to get recognition, until we start to believe our own projections of ourselves and begin to see ourselves as we wish we were...competent, stable, intelligent, commanding, and productive. This may work at times in the world, but believers cannot get by with this. Pride will not promote us, or give us power, and is guaranteed to eventually destroy us. The problem with pride is that it makes us believe in our own ability to elevate ourselves and live our lives. This is the kind of arrogance that prompted Satan, and now, too often, drives us. Ps. 10:4 encapsulates it: “In his pride the wicked [one] does not seek him [God]; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.” Pride shoves God out. The only way to deal with our pride is to get the perspective of maturity, in which we see the frailness of ourselves, in juxtaposition with the infinite power of God. The better we understand God, the more we know pride has no quarter.
- **Greed and Envy.** Prov. 27:20 says, “Death and destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the [greedy] eyes of man.” Greed is insatiable. The more that is acquired, the greater the desire for even more. The greedy person wants all he sees and imagines, which feeds greed, but does not fill it. Money, things, and experience are like a bog, pulling one ever deeper into the muck of greed. But nothing will bring homeostasis to the frantic frenzy of greed. Part of the frenzy is hyper-vigilance toward the possessions of others, because the partner of greed is envy. Envy always measures what others have, as compared with what one sees in his own inventories. When this sin owns us, we will destroy ourselves. As Prov. 14:30 says, “...envy rots the bones.” As we mature, our passion will be redirected from the things of the world to the things of God. We will find peace and contentment when we discover that it is better to have “one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind” (Eccl. 4:6).

- **Sexual Immorality.** We have covered this topic, already, and know its ravages. We recall Prov. 6:32, which says, “But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself.” The *problem* is that sexual sin is overwhelming; the *relief* is that maturity can overpower it. The viewpoint, fellowship, knowledge, and spiritual empowerment that come with maturity give us the tools to fill our minds and lives with God, thus crowding out sexual immorality. MATURITY IS THE ONLY WAY THIS SIN-PATTERN WILL EVER BE CORRECTED!
- **Punishment.** God punishes sin. For unbelievers, the implications are eternal. For believers, this outcome is local and temporal. Jer. 2:19 says, “Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me, declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.” We have explored the discipline that is given to believers to persuade them to confess their sins and return to fellowship. As a believer matures, he will—as we have seen—make better, more-consistent use of grace assets, and will spend more time in fellowship. More fellowship means less discipline.

Maturity reduces the effects of forces around us that oppose God, and enables us to resist the efforts of these forces to persuade us to join them.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the nemesis of believers?

Question 2. What is the secret for curtailing an anger problem?

Question 3. As we mature, our passions will be redirected from the things of the world to _____.

Question 4. Maturity reduces occasions of discipline. How does this work?

Other Scriptures

2 Pet. 2:19—...a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

2 Pet. 1:3—His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Eccl. 7:9—Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

Phil. 2:14-16—Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold on to the word of life.

Lev. 26:18—If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride....

Remember

To get rid of dead weight in our lives, and energize ourselves for happy communion with our heavenly Father, we must mature. Maturity will equip us for dealing with sin, and will qualify us for fellowship and blessings. Maturity gives us God-consciousness, Spirit-awareness, and preoccupation with Christ.

G. Things that Increase with Maturity

- **Confession.** Confession of sins is something we will do more faithfully as we mature. As per the last section, sin will decrease with maturity, but when sin does happen, a mature believer will dispatch it quickly to God, Who sends it an infinity away (as far as the east is from the west...Ps. 103:12). The mature believer acknowledges his weakness before God, gives God His rightful place as the Forgiver of the penitent, and expresses an awe toward God. This is humility, which is actually a form of confession. With maturity we 1) become more sophisticated in identifying our sins, 2) develop keener consciences, and 3) move closer to God, where strength and holiness are. We learn how to use the tool of confession, so we can stay in fellowship and keep sin in check. Is. 55:6-7 expresses this concept nicely, as follows: "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn [confess] to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." For the mature believer, confession has staying power, because he will keep short accounts with God, and keep Him "near".
- **Wisdom.** As we mature, we actually acquire the "mind of Christ", as described in a must-read passage in 2 Cor. 2:6-16. This passage tells us Paul spoke a "message of wisdom among the mature" (v. 6), a message given "in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (v. 13), which Paul says is the "mind of Christ" (v. 16). The mind of Christ is spiritual wisdom. As we mature, and wisdom increases, our desire for even more truth intensifies. We want more and more grace, more and more understanding, and more of God Himself, to enable us to do more and bring more glory to God. We never stop, never look back or from side to side. We move straight forward, seeking His will, doing what He says, and taking what He gives. This is the wisdom of the mature believer at work.
- **Bible Study and Learning.** As we mature, and the value of Scripture increases, we are more committed to learning about God and getting ever closer to Him. As we assimilate the Bible through study and faith, we grow in our possession and use of the divine prerogatives he offers, including all the techniques and promises. The Word moves us toward maturity, and as we mature, the Word becomes a main-stay, and not just an option. We know we cannot live without it, and we do not stray from daily intake and

contemplation of the truth. The more mature we become, the more precious and beloved the words of Scripture become. The more we feed on God's Word, the sweeter it tastes. And we must stay there, as per Heb. 2:1, which says, "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."

- **Love.** The things that emerge with maturity...that grow stronger as we draw increasingly on God's strength...closely correspond with the "fruit of the Spirit" in Gal. 5, which we have seen. Love is at the heart of these fruits...indeed...at the heart of the Ten Commandments, and Jesus' Core Commandments (love man; love God). We are commanded, in Eph. 5:2a, to *love*: "And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us..." We are called upon to love as Christ loved. This can be done only with maturity and fellowship. Negative feelings and behavior patterns will diminish with maturity, and love will grow, as we spend additional time in fellowship and have the divine perspective and power to guide us and impel us.
- **God's Power and Strength.** God's power does not actually increase as a result of *our* maturity, but our *participation* in that power does. Col. 10b-11a shows us the kind of production maturity can bring, and gives us the Source of strength and power for bringing fruit to bear. This passage says, "...that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might..." Heb. 13:20 adds this, quoted in part: "May the God of Peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him..." He preps us, not for *our* doing, but for *His* doing. As we mature, we come to see "his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength..." (Eph. 1:19)
- **Joy.** Joy is an attitude of stability and confidence. For the mature believer, it is sustained through all circumstances. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and a consequence of fellowship and maturity. Joy will increase as maturity advances. Eccl. 2:26 tells us what happens to the mature believer in fellowship: "To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the [unrepentant] sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God." Our joy comes from God and not from the world or ourselves. Attempts to find pleasure and "happiness" apart from God will be disappointing. Phil. 4:4 tells us to find joy *in God*, as follows: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" We will rejoice more, as we mature.
- **Humility.** As we grow, we will see God more clearly, and increasingly perceive the difference between ourselves and Him. Col. 3:12 tells us that we are to be "clothed" with humility, because—as James 4:6 says—"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The "better" we become at "being Christians", the more we will see our value as coming from God, and not from ourselves. Being better at something usually connotes greater self-confidence, but in this case, being better brings greater God-confidence.

With greater humility, we will see greater grace and clearer pathways. Ps. 25:9 confirms this, saying, "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."

- **Operation of our Gifts.** We will study gifts in more detail in a later study, but we want to see here the enhancement of our specific function in the body of Christ through progressive maturity. Gifts are mostly about edification, or the mutual strengthening of believers. Gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to enable us to assist each other in many ways, especially in faith and fellowship. With greater maturity, we are better able to help others mature. Eph. 4:12*b* states it clearly, telling us that gifts "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ [the extended church, but applied locally] may be built up." There are many verses calling for this kind of exchange among believers, as we see in 1 Thess. 5:11, which says, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." The effectiveness of our gifts will be governed by our level of maturity.
- **Faith.** Faith increases with maturity. As we get stronger, we believe more. We believe God. We trust His Word. We expect God's promises to be fulfilled in our lives. We have greater confidence in Him. And we increasingly rely on His provision. We fulfill Prov. 3:5, which says, "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 straight your pathways." Greater faith means greater guidance. It also means greater victory over fear and evil, as in this from John: "This is the victory that has overcome world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4*b*). With greater maturity, we sense the victory that is ours through Christ Jesus. This kind of perspective does not come easily, and requires great devotion to God and to His Word. Devotion leads to study, study to learning, and learning to greater faith...and victory.
- **Prayer.** As we mature, the privileges and productivity of prayer will increase, and God will be pleased as He works His will through us. Prayer is the central mechanic for communicating with God, and accompanies or enables all the techniques. When we reach spiritual adulthood, we will be able to fulfill Eph. 6:18*a*, which says, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Maturity is evident when we pray on "all occasions". Until we mature, however, let's face it: prayer will be spotty and infrequent.
- **Contentment.** In Phil. 4:11*b* Paul said, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Notice that Paul was not content by nature...he "learned" to be content. This means that being "content" depends on taking in the "content" of Scripture. Two verses later, Paul presented his secret for being content, which he wrote from a prison floor: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." It is the indwelling Spirit of Christ that gave Paul the strength to endure hardships, and to stay content. We can "learn" the same thing Paul did, by growing in the Word and learning to draw on the grace of God. Even if we have no idea what God is doing, or what He wants us to do, we

will accept His plan along the way as we mature, and we will wait for Him. His provision will be there, even if it is not what we had in mind. What we will eventually come to understand is that God is meeting our needs from a list of supplies that is superior to our own. His provision comes from “glorious riches” (as seen in Phil. 4:19), and our contentment will increase as we come to understand and experience these.

- **Fruit of the Spirit.** The “fruit of the Spirit” is what the Holy Spirit produces through us. These are neatly packaged for us in Gal. 5:22a, which has been quoted before, but will be repeated here to refresh our memories. This verse says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.” Detailed studies on most of these topics is offered in this book, because they are the output of the Holy Spirit through mature believers, and they represent our goal and purpose for living. The growing season for the “fruit of the Spirit” is anytime we are filled with the Spirit, due to fellowship. Until we mature, these growing seasons will be short, and often fruitless. To see fruit in our lives, we must grow up. To grow up, we must stay on our current path of learning, and keep moving along God’s highway toward the light.

This list of things—things that increase with maturity—is not exhaustive, but it is convincing. It reminds us of why we must remain committed to our assignment to learn and grow.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Name the three things that increase with maturity that are most important to you personally.

Question 2. What is the “way to maturity” that is most talked-about in this section?

Question 3. Here is a question that answers itself, but many ministers and scholars miss it: Who produces the fruit of the Spirit?

Other Scriptures

James 3:17—The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

1 Pet. 2:2—Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Remember

When we mature, many wonderful things happen, and we are enabled to produce fruit and truly fulfill our purpose for being kept here. We have presented here some things that will increase with maturity. Any *one* of them seems sufficient to keep us on the path of growth.

Chapter 15

Taking in the Truth

In This Chapter...

A. Getting the Truth

B. Acquiring Wisdom

C. Digesting the Word

A. Getting the Truth

Getting knowledge is important, and provides the seeds for great understanding and wisdom...IF it is the *right* knowledge. For knowledge to be “right”, it must be the “truth”. Knowledge of man’s rules and understanding of man’s traditions are of little value spiritually. Even knowledge of the Law in the Bible is valuable only as it illustrates truths for living, and as it helps us know God’s standards (which are impossible to meet...more on this in Part Six). Paul said the following about those who used the Law as their basis for truth:

I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge [truth]. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:2-4).

Enthusiasm for anything other than the whole truth will turn up empty. The Pharisees knew a lot, but their knowledge was incomplete and incorrect. And knowing partial truths can be just as bad as knowing nothing, or even knowing the wrong things.

We need CORRECT INFORMATION and COMPLETE INFORMATION. We need the *right* story, and *all* the story, to have the *real* story. This is why it is important to learn and see all the techniques and promises, and their *interaction* and *benefits*, before assuming that we have completed our studies.

So the *content* of our studies must be correct...but there is a second consideration in learning, which is this: the *procedures* must be correct. We have seen the steps in learning, and know that certain conditions are essential, such as fellowship and faith. Fellowship provides the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and, once this is going on, faith will serve as a conveyor of knowledge from the brain to the heart. Faith must be present at each stage of the process for digesting and using the learning. It must be there 1) *before* teaching goes on, 2) *during* instruction, and 3) *after* the teaching when we *apply* what we have learned. And we must constantly *refresh* what we learn, so that it stays current and strong. The time for faith is *all the time*, but *especially when we are learning*.

Beginning with fellowship and faith...and a prayer for wisdom...we can begin to seek the truth. It is important to do what the Bereans did, and that is to challenge what is taught, by doing a personal search of the Word to “test” the veracity of the teaching. Here is what you can do, as one possibility:

Identify the topic you want to test or know more about. Locate as many scriptures pertaining to that topic as you can handle. (Internet sites can help, such as “biblos.com”.) Take the verses you find, stack them up, compare them, do word and context analyses, and let the truth coalesce around the ideas that emerge. You can actually use scissors to separate the passages you have printed or hand-copied on a topic, and then group and sort them into sub-topics to build individual concepts. The truth will emerge, if you will do comparisons among individual verses, passages, and sub-topics that *deal with the same topic*. To get even more, compare these with other topics, and get a larger view of the truth. (There are also many study helps available.) This will help you determine what the Bible says about a specific topic, or topics.

As we build a foundation of knowledge and faith, we must continue to “dine often”. Prov. 9:1-6 invites us to the table, as follows:

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. “Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to those who lack judgment. “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.”

We must leave our simple ways, and seek His way, to walk in the “way of understanding”. Prov. 8:17 lets us know that—if we seek God “in the Spirit”—we will find Him. This verse says, “I love those who love me [those in fellowship], and those who seek me find me.” When we are in fellowship and seek God, we will find Him, if we look for Him in the right place: His Word! But this is no casual saunter through the park. This requires an Everest-climbing level of determination, based on a passion for finding the truth. This demands unrelenting, undaunted, laser-beam focus on finding out **what we need to know** to become **who we’re supposed to be**. If we *want* it, we will *search* for it.

2 Chron. 15:2b confirms that God, with all His truth, is available to us, if we seek Him, as follows: “The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him he will be found by you, but if you

forsake him, he will forsake you.” When we search for truth, God will give it to us. We see this again in Jer. 33:3, which shows His promise, saying, “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” When we are open to Him, and looking for Him, and calling out for His truth, He will “teach us things we do not know”.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. For knowledge to be valuable, it must be the _____ knowledge.

Question 2. What technique transports knowledge from the head to the heart?

Question 3. If we seek the truth while we are in fellowship, what will happen?

Other Scriptures

Prov. 19:2a—It is not good to have zeal without knowledge.

Prov. 8:10-11—Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Prov. 4:7—Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

Remember

Searching for the truth is a great and exciting quest for life, an adventure that never ends. God has promised that we will find it, as long as we are prepared to receive it, and as long as we keep looking.

B. Acquiring Wisdom

Wisdom is the product of many choices, and the result of applying several techniques. Wisdom is available, but we must know the combination to the safe to get to it. This is what we will examine in this section, even though much of what we say here has been stated before. Watch for new twists in this story, and otherwise give thanks for the repetition. We are reminded that wisdom appears at the end of the learning cycle, and that, for it to reach this point, we must first *want* it.

Prov. 1:5 says, “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning...” Hearing comes from a *willingness* to hear. “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out” (Prov. 18:15). When we want it, we will go after it. And when we go after it, we will begin our pursuit with a prayer, asking for understanding and wisdom. And even that has a precedent, which is confession. Once again, we see the necessity of getting prepared. We must confess, pray, believe, and really want wisdom before it will materialize at the end of the learning trail. In Ps. 119:26-27,

David followed this same pattern, as follows:

I recounted [confessed] my ways [my sins] and you answered me [with forgiveness]; teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

If we are not prepared to receive it, do not want it, and do not ask for it, then we will not get wisdom. In 2 Chron. 1:10-12, a lesson from Solomon's life shows what can happen when we value wisdom over anything else, as follows:

Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches, or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you, and I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.

Have you heard of the wisdom of Solomon? Wisdom is worth wanting...and worth asking for. Do you want it? Do you want to know the full story? Or do you depart from the way of Solomon by being preoccupied with wealth or honors or beating the competition...or whatever? Will you ask for wisdom? What is your heart's desire?

Earlier, we looked at the condition of our heart which can enable or prevent understanding from being converted into wisdom. The final step for wisdom nestling into the heart is the expression of a genuine passion for the Word. We must "love God's knowledge" to avoid being cut off from the infusion of wisdom. Prov. 1:28-29 says, "Then they will call to me [for wisdom] but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord." If we hate it, we will miss it, even if we ask for it, but—if we love it—we will find it.

Prov. 2:1-11 is loaded with important truths about acquiring wisdom. We will take this passage up in two segments: Verses 1-6...and verses 7-11. In verses 1-6, we see the learning process completed, as follows:

Verses 1-6: My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

The whole drill for finding truth is found in verses 1-6, just quoted, as follows:

- "Accept my words"—receptive to teaching.
- "Store up my commands within you"—processing what you learn by faith.
- "Turn your ear to wisdom"—getting prepared to receive wisdom.
- "Apply your hearts to understanding"—wanting to learn.
- "Call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding"—praying for wisdom.

- “Look for learning as for silver”—searching for the truth.
- “Then you will understand and find knowledge—completing the learning process.

In verses 7-11, we see what happens for those who complete the learning process, as follows:

Verses 7-11: He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

Those who finish will see *instruction* do the following:

- Give victory for the upright (for those in fellowship).
- Provide a shield for the blameless (for those who walk in the Spirit).
- Guard the course of the just (for those who have confessed and been forgiven).
- Protect the pathway of the “faithful ones” (for those who study and trust).
- Offer further protection through discretion, or clear thinking (for those who apply truth).
- Guard by means of understanding (for those who believe the truth).

Wisdom will not be acquired without the steps we have specified: confess, ask for it, study it, believe it, and “welcome” it. These steps cannot be bypassed for knowledge to go all the way from the mind to the heart, so that it can be applied as wisdom in the real world of our daily experience.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Before knowledge-become-understanding can process all the way to the end of the learning cycle as wisdom, we must first _____ it.

Question 2. Which of the steps for acquiring wisdom can occasionally be omitted?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 119:169—May my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word.

Ps. 32:8—I will instruct you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Remember

Acquiring wisdom requires commitment and desire. The most important condition for having our understanding metamorphose into “wisdom” is our wanting it with fervent passion.

C. *Digesting the Word*

The idea of feeding on the Word, or ingesting the thoughts of God as expressed in Scripture, has a corollary in the function of digestion in our bodies. We intake food, which must be absorbed into our metabolism, or else it will be useless and offer no life-giving benefits. By the same token, the messages of Scripture, after they are heard, must undergo manipulation by the Holy Spirit to give *power* to them, by changing them from “knowledge” into “understanding”, and then into “wisdom”, to make them useful for spiritual operations. For knowledge of the Bible to be given “spiritual” meaning, it must be transformed, which is done by the Holy Spirit, based on our spiritual condition being conducive to His teaching.

In the same way that digested food gives the body energy, processed truth connects our hearts with all the life-giving assets of God's *grace systems*, and enables us to perform His assignments...in His energy. This requires frequent “feeding” on His truth, without which we will weaken and faint. We can do nothing without consistent, frequent nourishment from the Word...which sustains our spiritual well-being by keeping us engaged with the techniques, which—in turn—tap into God's power and grace.

Notice the role of the Holy Spirit in every part of our “feeding”:

1. He selects our “food”, which is His Word.
2. He “washes our hands before we eat”, meaning He prepares us by cleansing us (while He also recognizes our faith and responds to our prayer for wisdom).
3. He “feeds” us, using the gifts of fellow believers.
4. He “digests” for us the words we accept, by clarifying their meaning through His teaching ministry within us, and by converting knowledge to understanding to wisdom.
5. He “energizes” us by His power to apply accumulated wisdom.

As we have said, the process of digesting the Word is performed by the Holy Spirit, when we have prepared ourselves to receive His ministry. But there is, as they say, still more. When we are learning, there is an event going on that amounts to feeding on God's nature. 2 Pet. 1:3-4, seen before in earlier studies, says the following:

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

What we need for life and godliness comes through “knowledge”. Through “processed” knowledge, we are able to deal with evil (“corruption”) and produce divine righteousness (“godliness”). Defeat of evil and production of righteousness are outcomes of “knowing” Scripture, which shows us how to become and stay “spiritual”.

As we see above in the NIV translation of 2 Pet. 1:3-4, the word “participate” is used to depict what we do with God's “divine nature”. But this word actually means “partake”, as offered in the NET

version of the Bible. This would mean that the “truth” (seen here as “promises”) is given so that we may “partake” of, or feed on, God’s divinity. Partake means to “eat” or “drink”. When we take in “knowledge”, which will become “wisdom”, if everything goes right, we are thereby *feeding on God’s very nature*. Here’s the explanation for this: God’s nature is expressed in His Word...the Word represents the “mind of Christ”. This shows that the words and concepts of truth that we assimilate are an expression of God’s thoughts. When we learn truth, we are taking in His viewpoint, which—by degrees—is becoming ours. By learning the Word, we are feeding on God’s nature, as encapsulated in His *words*. (Perhaps not made clear in previous books.)

We should mention that—when we are saved—we receive all of the Holy Spirit we will ever have, so our partaking of God’s nature is not our feeding on the *person* of God, as though we take possession of more of Him, but we feed on His “mind”. When we use the phrase “more of God”, we are speaking of His truth, which has the distinction of being called the “divine nature”.

The Bible as a “book” means little in our hands, even though we love to rifle through its chapters and hear the crinkle of its pages. The power of the Word comes in learning and applying what the Book says, which is performed under the direction of, and with energy provided by, the Holy Spirit.

If we do not regularly feed on the Word, we will weaken spiritually, and will not be effective. If getting closer to God means anything to us (and it better!), then we cannot bypass the crucial step of *learning about Him through His Word*.

Ezek.2:8 illustrates the process of feeding on the Word, saying, “But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.” We see this again in Ezek. 3:1-3, which gives us the following:

And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

The nutritional value of the Word becomes valuable only when it is “swallowed and digested”, meaning “learned and processed”. We cannot go a day without eating and not feel the effects. And we cannot go a day without feeding on the Word and not be affected. We must study every day.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. The messages of Scripture must undergo transformation by the _____.

Question 2. What is the “divine nature”?

Question 3. What does it mean to “partake” of the divine nature?

Other Scriptures

Jer. 15:16—When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.

Matt. 4:4—It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Ps. 81:13, 16—If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways...you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.

Remember

Feeding on the word is a process through which we take in the truths of God's Word, at which time—if our hearts are right—the Holy Spirit changes what we learn into a form that can be applied to situations in our lives.

Chapter 16

Applying Scripture

In This Chapter...

A. Being Doers of the Word

B. Following the Word

A. Being Doers of the Word

The end goal for “learning” Scripture is “applying” it. The Bible is full of truth, but it must be “used” to have value. James was adamant about this, as we see in James 1:22-24, which says the following:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word, but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

James tells us not to merely listen to the Word, but to “do what it says”. But he prefaces this instruction with a command in verse 21: “humbly accept the word planted in you...” Accepting the Word is a prerequisite for becoming a doer of the Word. To “accept” is to believe the truth and receive it into our hearts. From there the truth can be applied. Acceptance of the truth precedes application of the truth.

James charged us to apply Scripture, and then gave us an example of “application”. He said above that the Bible is a *mirror* that shows us our sins, so we can deal with them by confessing them. When we do not study or have not believed the instructions of the Bible, we *forget what we look like*, thinking we’re okay, and do not need to confess. But by applying the standards of God’s Word, we will know that we are NOT okay, and we will confess, then pray, and then learn more, which will be applied more...and so on. Applying the technique of confession leads to learning, which leads to additional application. Application is the point of learning.

We cannot do this alone, however. The Holy Spirit is the Force which enables us to apply what we learn. We cannot apply truth without His energizing power. The Spirit teaches us to *apply what we know*, so He can *do the work of application*. The truth becomes ours, but is useful only insofar as it opens the way to His strength, so He can apply His truth *through us*. This may sound a little confusing, but it is really quite simple: Everything in our Christian lives is about learning to see and say, with Paul, “No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” It is not *we* who do the work...it is the grace of God. The Holy Spirit applies what *we* know, so He can do His work through us, which will produce *His* fruit. The whole process is directed by the Holy Spirit within a willing heart.

Phil. 4:9 says, “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.” Putting the Word into “practice” means “learning and using techniques for spiritual living”. The Word is explicit about our need for cleanliness, prayer, knowledge of the Word, and a growing faith, and gives us specific guidelines for using them. By USING the techniques, we are APPLYING Scripture. It is pointless to give mere mental assent to these procedures if we do not follow them. And notice what happens when we apply Scripture: “...the God of peace will be with you.” In a nutshell, applying truth brings us closer to God.

We must elaborate a point mentioned above, which has to do with forgetting. As human learners, we are also human “forgetters”. New learning tends to crowd out old learning, and it is common knowledge that “forgetting is an active process”. Forgetting is part of our intellectual functioning, and applies to spiritual knowledge, as it does to human learning. Even scriptural understanding and wisdom can fade, over time, especially when our minds are pre-occupied with things other than God and His Word. The things we focus on tend to grow, and if we do not maintain a focus on the Word, its value and importance will diminish.

Mark 4:25-26 tells us what the accumulation of knowledge, or its absence, will mean to us:

“Consider carefully what you hear”, he [Jesus] continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

“Consider” tells us to focus and think about what we learn, because when we “use” what we learn, we will be building the basis for even more learning (“...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.”). When we apply what we have learned, we will be given *more to apply*. The more we have, and the more we apply it, the more understanding and wisdom we will get, and we can march onward and upward! Learning increases capacity for more learning. But the believer who has little understanding and just sits on it, and does not continue to *update, believe, and use what he has*, will lose it.

Mark 4:15 tells us how we lose it. “As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.” If we are not in fellowship, Satan will snatch knowledge away before it reaches the heart. If we are not studying, Satan will take what we have and start to erode it within us, until we have dropped back to spiritual infancy...and helplessness. If we refuse to study, or re-

ject what we learn, WE WILL LOSE THE KNOWLEDGE WE HAVE ACQUIRED. God will allow us to recover this knowledge quickly if we will return to Him, but—in the meantime—we will be unsophisticated, uninformed, and unequipped. We must turn...and learn...to discern.

If we will stay in the Word, and apply all the techniques we are learning, a beautiful thing will happen, which is this: The Holy Spirit will produce His fruit through us. Ps. 1:1-3 says it this way:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law [the Word] of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

“Water” is frequently used to refer to the Holy Spirit in Scripture, and that is the source for “fruit” in this passage, for those who are “planted” near Him. When we “delight in the Word”, and “meditate on it day and night”, we will learn and understand the principles of spirituality that enable us to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, so He can produce His fruit. This will not only please God...it will cause us to “prosper”.

When we learn and apply the truth, fruit will come from us, because God will be producing it. It is at this time that faith will start to show, and that we can be categorized as “doers” of the Word.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What is the end goal of learning Scripture, as seen in this section?

Question 2. What is a “doer” of the Word.

Question 3. Who really applies Scripture, after all?

Question 4. What happens to our knowledge if it is not refreshed?

Question 5. What is the ultimate output of application?

Other Scriptures

2 Pet. 1:12-13—I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh you memory as long as I live in the tent of this body.

Is. 55:11—...so is my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Eph. 5:8b-9—Live as children of light (for the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth).

Remember

Applying the Word is a subset of the technique of “living in the power of the Word”. It is the end purpose for learning...the fulfillment of all we have understood. Application is a call for God to go to work in us, as we are called to be available to Him, so He can.

B. Following the Word

We will see below that blessings come when we follow the Word. We are beginning to understand what it takes to learn the Word well enough that we can *follow* it. The amount of knowledge and obedience that is required for us to become “followers of the Word” is huge, and requires *intense enthusiasm* for the truth. Following the Word means being committed to mastering the truths in the Bible, and faithfully applying them in our lives.

We saw in an earlier study, a quote from Deut. 6...verses 6 through 8...telling us that the Word is to be at the front of our minds all the time, and that we should do whatever it takes to remind ourselves of its contents. Verse 6 of that passage says, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.” Followers of the Word have a relentless focus that keeps the words of Scripture close to them. To them the Word is an in-your-face, before-your-eyes, and on-your-mind proposition. The believers who have this are those being blessed, because the Word is their life.

We must be cautious that we do not see “knowledge” as “stored intellectual facts”. Keep in mind that **following the Word is a spiritual exercise, and not an intellectual one!** Understanding and enthusiasm are based on spiritual conditions, not on mental acuity...not even on the contents of a lesson. *Any* believer can “know” the contents of the Bible, but the believer who *wants truth*, and is prepared for it, is the one who will gain *understanding* and *wisdom* from the Word.

There is some confusion about the value of “knowledge”. Some see it as a possession, and possibly as a source of pride. It is possible to know much, and understand little. It is even possible for church dignitaries or seminary professors to pontificate a myriad of recondite liturgical observances or hermeneutical verities, and not have a clue about accessing the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Such “knowledge” is better off in the mind of a child, who will believe the simple truth that **God** is the point of knowing, and not knowing itself. Such a child will see little value in knowledge for its own sake.

Those who are preoccupied with knowledge alone are like those Paul described: “...having a form of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5a). We can know the whole Book, but if we do not *understand* the techniques for living, what we know will be of little value to us in our walk as believers. But, ah, the blessings...these await those who study and learn and apply truth. Reiterating, James 1:25 says, “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” One more time: The believer who “looks intently into” the Word, and keeps on doing this,

and then *follows* what he has learned...“will be blessed in what he does.”

We see such blessings in other places in Scripture. An example is Rev. 22:7, which says, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” If we *understand* the Word, and—of course—*apply* it, we will be blessed. Whatever God’s plan for us, whatever else He has in mind for us, if we learn and apply God’s Word, **we will be blessed!**

Ps. 119:1-2 gives another example, saying, “Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.” If we are in fellowship (“blameless”), follow the truth, and continually seek God, we will be blessed. This is what God promises. The meaning and application of the word “blessing” is probably individual and personal, but it will always include spiritual strength, stability, provision, getting our needs met, and having everything work together for good. (The whole panoply of God’s promises and the subject of blessings will be a major topic in Part Seven.)

There are yet other benefits that can be derived by following the Word. Please read Prov. 6:20-24. Here is what you will find there...benefits from learning and applying the Word:

1. The Word will guide us.
2. It will watch over us.
3. It will speak to us.
4. It will provide a lamp and a light.
5. It will give us correction.
6. It will keep us from immorality.

Building on this list, we see that learning the Word will do the following: It will acquaint us with what God wants us to do...even at the level of personal decision-making. It will protect us from evil and will whisper assurances to encourage us. It will light the way for us, so we can see the way God wants us to go. It will give us correction when we stray, so we can confess and return to fellowship. And it will give us power over all the evil forces that come at us like a train. These are the things we will get when we follow the Word.

By the time we finish our studies, we will see the full power and provision of the Word, imbued within the life of a believer, because he is—as we shall see—walking by faith (Part Five), living in the Spirit (Part Six), and walking in the truth (our current topic).

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Following the Word means being _____ to mastering truth.

Question 2. When we follow the Word, we can expect to be _____.

Question 3. Name three benefits of following the Word (*beyond* the answer to Question 2).

Other Scriptures

Prov. 4:13—Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.

1 Tim. 1:8b-9—...so that by following them [prophecies] you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.

Acts 20:32—Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up.

Remember

Following the Word means making a firm and repeated commitment to learning, followed by applying what is learned to life. If we don't *apply* what we learn, we are not "following the Word".

Chapter 17

Opposition to the Truth

In This Chapter...

- A. False Ideas Corrupt Truth*
- B. The War Against the Truth*
- C. Removing Roadblocks to Learning*
- D. Perils of Losing to the Opposition*

A. False Ideas Corrupt Truth

If we are not prepared to process what we hear, Satan will snatch the learning from us before it reaches our hearts (Matt. 13:18; Mark 4:15). This prevents us from acquiring wisdom. Another way that Satan and his demonic and human minions prevent learning is to corrupt the message, as, or before, it is delivered. This is a big reason why more truth is not being learned. How many pastors and other teachers are giving incorrect messages? Some of these messages are centuries old, and have become traditions. Others are new inventions designed to distract from the truth. Anything that corrupts or distorts the truth is considered a “false idea”, and this is what we must eliminate to keep our learning from being spoiled.

One source of “false ideas” is tradition. In Mark 7:6-7, Jesus told the Pharisees what He thought of their traditions, as we see in the following:

He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

Holding on to the traditions of men is a common error made by individual believers, and by many of the churches where they go to be fed. Given all the traditions that we inherit, and the inventive illusions that our imaginations create, the truth is easily upstaged by false ideas. And with the inundation of the media, and the fast-paced, highly-materialistic, information-packed world in which we live, truth has plenty of competition (or opposition). It is no wonder that so many believers, and their leaders, veer so easily and so far from the truth. They pursue and espouse ideas that lead *away* from the truth, and do much more harm than good.

If false ideas dominate, grace-techniques will be obscured and never used. This will leave us weak and useless, which is exactly what Satan wants. False ideas must be “demolished”, as per 2 Cor. 10:5, but this requires knowing “how” to cast them down. So we must first of all know sufficient “basic” truth to give us enough rudimentary equipment to move us forward. Based on our having “choice”, it can only be assumed that those who don’t get it...don’t want it. God honors our volition, both in our search for Him before we are saved, and in our search for fellowship with Him—and knowledge about Him—after we are saved. If we want the truth, we will get it, rampant false ideas notwithstanding.

A central key to avoiding false ideas is being prepared to receive the truth. *Confusion* is a product of an unwilling or carnal *condition*. When we have no volition (hunger) for God, and are not in fellowship, false ideas will be invited in. Mark 7:13 adds to the quote given above (verses 6-7) that cited traditions as a problem. Verse 13 indicates how devastating false ideas can be, as follows: “Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.” False ideas *nullify* the truth...make it *nothing*. And—to be sure—false ideas are not altogether false; they are often laced with truth to disguise them! These can bring down individual believers, and whole churches.

Col. 2:8 identifies a source of false ideas that seems harmless at first glance, but must be identified as a source of human and demonic viewpoint, rather than divine viewpoint. This verse says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” Once “deceptive philosophy” is well-established, it becomes the “norm”, and the prejudice (bias) that evolves will “harden the heart”, causing truth to be deflected and denied. Any of the ideas from the “world” that deal with the hearts of men (including the mind, the soul, and the spirit), are suspect, and must not be embraced as the final truth.

But when you are prepared, YOU CAN LEARN NEW TRUTHS—things you did not know before. Real truth comes from God, and not from man...traditions and ideas that come from man are “man-made” and not “God-made”. Man’s ideas do NOT produce divine truth. We must reject false ideas, and embrace the truth.

False ideas can creep into our hearts like seepage into an underground cave, and—like a cave—they can leave us hollow and empty. We have suggested the reason for this, which is carnality. Col. 2:18b gives corroboration for this, saying, “...his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle [false] notions.” False ideas will corrupt not only the truth, but the believers who accept them, resulting in sin,

which we have studied well...or in “legalism”, which is actually a kind of sin, but is often seen as “human effort” or “good works”. Col. 2:20-23 shows us how false ideas can mislead us into embracing systems invented by man, as we see in the following:

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

How many churches have invented a long string of rules for their members, isolating privately-manufactured “principles” and claiming that these reflect God’s truth and will? And how many have returned to systems and requirements from the Law, by superimposing its standards on church-age believers, thus ignoring *grace*, and its systems. Grace is the new standard and guide for living. Departures from grace principles are based on the pride of the flesh and the propaganda of Satan. But whether false ideas come from man or from Satan, they will undermine and squelch the truth, without which we will never be effective.

The solution is the renewal of our minds, which is the cleansing of false ideas by true ones. Eph. 5:26 says, “...to make her [the church] holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” Truth can remove false ideas, and install true teachings into our hearts to give us lives full of faith...characterized by correct living.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. One source of false ideas is human _____. (Hint: There may be more than one answer to this question, as seen in this section.)

Question 2. If false ideas dominate, what will be obscured?

Question 3. What is the best counter to false ideas?

Other Scriptures

2 Cor. 10:5a—We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God....

Rom. 12:2—Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Remember

False ideas are everywhere, and they have brilliant and convincing champions. These ideas are anti-God and they will undermine or destroy your faith. The only way to discern and resist the lure of false teachings is to get true teachings. Only truth will displace false ideas.

B. The War Against the Truth

There is opposition against the truth of God's Word, and it is seen in the form of false teaching and deception. Spies frequently take on the appearance and demeanor of the people they are spying against, and Satan uses this tactic effectively. His spies look like us and act like us, but they are not one of us. 2 Cor. 11:14-15 has this in view when it says the following:

And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

False teachers, both human and demonic, move about under the radar...in churches, on television, at the office, in places of leadership and authority, and over the back fence. They are tricky and their message is often appealing, but their teachings are dangerous and destructive. We must be fortified against attacks of WRONG INFORMATION, and challenge every unproven source that claims to have answers. If a claim matches the Word, we can accept it. If not, we must turn a deaf ear to it and walk away. 1 John 4:1 substantiates this, saying, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."

In the Bible, efforts against the truth are described as "waging war". 2 Cor. 10:3 says, "We do not wage war as the world does." We wage war differently. Our opponents are powerful and require us to have special equipment to fight them. Verse 4 says, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." The battle we are in cannot be won with the strength and resources that humans possess...victory requires "divine power". Arguments against the Bible have demonic backing, and we will lose an argument that resists them, unless we are armed with truth and the power of the Holy Spirit Himself.

The main weapon used to destroy the truth is "non-truth": wrong information, distortion, deception, and even "truth" mixed in with lies. Our greatest weapon against these is truth. Truth enables us to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against God" (2 Cor. 10:5a), and it lets us "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5b).

Satan influences us from the inside and the outside. The messages of all kinds that we get from the "outside" bombard us with views that contradict the Bible. Bible-believing Christians are often marginalized as fringe extremists, and as people with deficient reasoning powers. So attacks are coming from the "outside". But Satan can also influence us on the inside, since he has access to our minds. This is debated by some, but we see this in 2 Cor. 11:3 which says, "But I am afraid that just as Eve

was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." We have seen already that Satan can "snatch away" the truth as it is being learned. To do this, he must have access to our minds.

It is this access to our innermost parts, mostly by his emissaries, or demons, that gives him his greatest influence over us. The "inside" is the place where he injects us with lies, and tempts us, not only with sin, but with non-truth. If we believe a lie, and our faith goes dark, we will fall into sin very quickly, and this will make us the servant of Satan and an enemy of God. And the easiest prey for Satan are those who are arrogant enough to believe they are tougher than Satan. Satan against man is no contest. Satan against God is another story.

Satan's demons and servants do not look "demonic", but are dressed up and sparkly, attractive and appealing, brilliant and persuasive. The battle of ideas against such forces is a war, not to protect our turf, but to guard our hearts. The heart is the front line for the battle. Externals matter very little to Satan, because—if he can control our hearts—the events on the outside will assuredly go the way he wants. He also has a strong ally on the inside: our sinful nature, which resides in the heart. This is Satan's contact on the inside, and the place where he stages a *coup d'état* to overthrow our hearts.

I am reminded of a dramatic device which portrays a character in a play as a "nobleman"...an exemplary citizen and charming individual...when he is really a charlatan. The audience knows he is bad, but the characters in the play do not know, so they are cheerfully falling into his trap. Satan is like this. He will use any means available to get what he wants. He treads softly, like a lion. He doesn't roar, and won't show himself until he is ready to pounce and kill. Satan seems friendly, but he is vicious, ruthless, and deadly dangerous, and he is out to get you.

2 Tim. 2:24-26 proves that Satan wants to overpower us and make us his slaves, as follows:

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

The strategy is to take us captive, which means conquering our *minds*. 1 Tim. 4:1 says, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." The lies of Satan are *cleverly taught*. They are often clearly explained in terms that can only be described as logical and sensible, but they are lies, and we must be trained to recognize them as such, or our minds will be filled with wrong assumptions. To resist having our minds captured, we must have something to screen incoming ideas with, and TRUTH is the only thing that will do this.

To understand just how tricky this is, we want to look at a passage that tells us how easy it is to fall prey to Satan. Eph. 4:26-27 says, "In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." The point is that anger puts us in a place of

weakness, just like *many other things* we do every day, and these can give Satan a crack in the door. Anger is the example given. When we are angry, we are spiritually weak, and when we are weak, Satan can slip in and whisper suggestions to our sinful natures. They often seem harmless enough, but if we follow them, the door will be opened to Satan...and all he needs is a crack.

There are many things that we do every day that are innocuous and harmless, but sometimes things that seem innocent enough can lead to trouble. For example, shopping is a normal routine. But shopping may be an activity that touches on some area of weakness within you. It is easy for shopping to become something else, like the expression of greed, or envy, or even stealing, if you have a tendency to do these things. The activity of shopping has become an opportunity for sin. Does this mean you should not shop? No. It just means you have to ALWAYS be prepared spiritually for the attacks of the evil one. He will try to get to us *at our weakest points* when we are *in our weakest moments*. Our only defense is God and His truth. 2 Thess. 3:3 promises this: "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."

It is the nature of the one who opposes us and opposes God to take away the truth by introducing lies. His lies are believable, and his wiles are irresistible. This is why we must grow with all urgency and full acceleration. We are surrounded by the enemy, and we must quickly prepare for the battles to come.

And this is why we must yearn to learn...to know and grow...to slip the grip.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Our greatest weapon against "non-truth" is _____ .

Question 2. Does Satan have access to our minds?

Question 3. Satan will attack us at our _____ points in our _____ moments.

Other Scriptures

James 4:4—You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

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

John 8:44—You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Prov. 21:31—The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord.

Remember

Once again, we are confronted with our inability to overcome the forces that oppose us. We must rely on constantly increasing our understanding of the Word, so we can increasingly rely on God's power to strengthen us for the battle that is raging.

C. Removing Roadblocks to Learning

There are two types of people: saved and unsaved. People who are saved have an eternal position "in Christ". Those who are not saved have an eternal position of condemnation and separation from God...until or unless they believe in Christ. Position brings privilege. For believers, the privilege is the potential for understanding the Word of God. But unbelievers do not have any privileges, and they have no apparatus for understanding truth. There is a barrier between unbelievers and the truth, except the message of salvation, which will come to them if they desire it.

2 Cor. 4:3-4 describes this barrier, as follows:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing [unbelievers]. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Unbelievers cannot understand Scripture. They can "know" the concepts intellectually, but they cannot "understand" them spiritually. Eph. 4:17-18 says this about the inability of unbelievers to learn truth:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

When an unbeliever changes his mind about Christ, and believes in Him, the barrier between him and the truth is removed, and the capability to learn God's Word is activated. John said this about those who accept Christ: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you do know it..." (1 John 2:20-21a). We receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit at salvation. This is an "appointment to holiness", which occurs at the time the Holy Spirit comes to live within us. This anointing gives us the ability to learn.

Once we are believers, learning becomes a matter of fellowship, which has to do with our *condition*, as we have discussed previously. Lack of fellowship is a *roadblock* to learning. Unconfessed sin results in carnality, or control of the sinful nature. This places us "out of fellowship", and leaves us without the teaching of the Holy Spirit, which means we are stripped of the spiritual capacity to learn truth. But we won't know how to recover and maintain fellowship, until we have "learned" it. So where do we start?

When we are first saved, the highest priority for us is to *learn some basic operational techniques*, so we can begin to apply God's grace mechanics, learn the truth, and start to grow. We should begin with the most fundamental concepts of the Christian walk, such as confession, prayer, study, faith, and God's training program. From there, we can branch into such topics as walking in the Spirit, gifts, God's will, God's plan, relying on the promises, surrender, suffering, and many more.

When we do not learn, we do not grow. If we do not grow, we will spend most of our time out of fellowship, which means we will be serving Satan, and will resemble an enemy of God. It is important for us to grow. Paul chastised the Corinthians for remaining in spiritual infancy, as follows:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly [literally, “fleshly”, or controlled by the flesh]. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men [unbelievers]?

These believers are refusing to confess and stay “spiritual”, and/or they are refusing to learn and grow. This assures that they will not be effective. Like a tennis racquet with no strings, they will have no impact.

When we are in fellowship and are learning, all roadblocks will be removed and we can move forward. This is God's will for us. 1 Tim. 2:4 tells us what happens after the roadblocks are removed: “...who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” These are separate occurrences. Being “saved” opens us to the truth; coming to a “knowledge of the truth” prepares us for living as “saved” people. But we cannot tarry, once we have accepted Christ. We must take the enthusiasm we feel for our new-found life in Christ and move quickly into finding out what this life means.

1 Pet. 2:2 says, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” Peter's advice to newborns: Crave God's formula. Cry for it! Pound the highchair tray for it! You must be taught! *Your spiritual life depends on it!* Such devotion to the Word is exemplified by Jewish believers in the early church, as described in Acts 2:42, which says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Notice that the *first* thing they did was to “devote themselves to the apostles' teaching”. First things first. This is our model and our motto.

The roadblocks are inside of us. If we are not learning and growing, it is because we do not want to, and/or because we are not taking the steps to prepare for it. These are conditions of the heart, which are the result of our choices. Use the techniques you are learning. By doing this, you will grow.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What are the two types of people in the human race?

Question 2. The roadblock for believers is being out of fellowship, a reflection of their *condition*. The roadblock preventing unbelievers from learning is a reflection of their _____.

Question 3. What is the first thing a new believer must do?

Other Scriptures

John 8:42-43—Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.

John 8:47 —He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

Heb. 5:11-14—We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Remember

There are basically two roadblocks to learning. One deals with a *position* of not being saved. Once we are saved, another roadblock appears, which is a *condition* of having unconfessed sin in the heart, or being out of fellowship.

D. Perils of Losing to the Opposition

Whenever opponents of the Word win out, and we refuse to study, there will be consequences. These consequences are known as *discipline*. We have studied the place of discipline regarding sin, and have mentioned discipline for not studying...it is the second of these two that we want to explore further. When we reject or ignore the Word, consequences can be expected. The entire sequence of carnality and drifting from the Word is seen in one passage, Ps 119:6-7, which says, “Teach me your knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands. Before I was afflicted [disciplined] I went astray, but now I obey your word.” Notice the pattern and sequence: 1) straying from the truth, 2) being disciplined, 3) returning to the Word (and/or fellowship), 4) being taught, 5) “believing” what is heard, and 6) applying truth to practice. Discipline prompts return and restoration.

Jer. 31:18-19 shows this process also, saying the following:

I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: "You have disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God. After I strayed, I repented; after **I came to understand**, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth." (Emphasis mine.)

Discipline prompted the return to fellowship and a re-focus on learning. Jer. 22:21-22 continues this line of truth, as follows:

I warned you when you felt secure, but you said, "I will not listen!" This has been your way from your youth, you have not obeyed me. The wind will drive all your shepherds away, and your allies will go into exile. Then you will be ashamed and disgraced because of all your wickedness."

Notice the condition that started this downward spiral: **Not listening!** And yet once more, we see in Jeremiah a warning that applies to us in principle:

If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth. (Jer. 26:4-6)

If we will not listen to God's words...if we will not study...we will suffer consequences, until we wise up and resume our learning. Lack of learning will destroy us! Remember a verse we quoted in a previous study: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). Lack of knowledge will always lead to bad behavior, which will inevitably lead to God's displeasure and the need for Him to rattle us to get our attention and convince us to get back on the right track. No good thing can come from ignoring our responsibility to study God's Word every day.

Once more in Jeremiah, we see the solution for straying from the Word:

Tell them everything I command you. Do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. (Jer. 26:2b-3)

"Perhaps" we will listen. This is the contingency, and the choice is ours. And if we don't...if we refuse to learn and apply His grace system, we will be disciplined. The benefits, blessings, and boosts we are intended to get from study will be negated. Our focus must be on the principles, techniques, and promises of Scripture...these are the contents of truth that will help us to grow and to serve. And these are the ways to God's blessings.

We see what discipline can look like in Deut. 28:15-68, a passage which begins with this (verse 15): "However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands, and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you." We see an example of these "curses" in verse 27, which says, "The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured." Discipline can reach levels that may be considered "harsh", up to and including physical death, so it is of GREAT

IMPORTANCE that we address this major condition that brings discipline about...and that condition is *neglecting the Word*.

Neglecting the Word is the same as turning our backs on God, as we see in 1 Thess. 4:8, which says, "Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit." And when we reject God, we can expect to get a wake-up call, as we see in this stirring passage from Job:

He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever. But if men are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, he tells them what they have done—that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge. (Job. 36:7-12)

Punishment or prosperity...the choice is ours. Come to the table. Or go to your room. Rom. 2:8 concludes it for us: "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Discipline is used to correct what two conditions?

Question 2. True or false: Learning is a matter of personal choice.

Question 3. When we turn our backs on the Word, we are turning our backs on _____.

Other Scriptures

James 5:19—My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Rev. 3:3 (NET) —Therefore, remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come against you [bringing discipline].

Prov. 4:4—Lay hold of my words with all your hearts; keep my commands and you will live.

2Tim. 4:4—They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

2 Tim. 3:8—Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.

Remember

When we do not study the Word, discipline can be expected. Focus on the Word is tantamount to focus on God, Who will not be a “side-show” in our lives. He is the main event, and we must pay attention to Him and His truth, or He will firmly and sharply *remind* us.

Key Points: Part Four

- To learn the Word, we must first *want* it.
- Assimilating techniques and promises from the Word promotes our growth.
- Learning truths for living is done by hearing, believing, and welcoming the truth.
- The end goal of learning is *application*, or walking by the truth.
- Preparation for study includes confession of our sins, a prayer for wisdom, and a hunger for divine knowledge.
- When we are right, the Holy Spirit assists us at all levels of learning and application.
- There are many opponents to truth, which requires spiritual conditioning and alertness for us to distinguish false information from truth.
- We will be disciplined, if we do not regularly absorb the truth.

Segue to Part Five

We have seen the meaning of living in the power of God's Word in Part Four. When we live in the Word, and walk by the truth, our faith grows, which is the whole point of all Christian exercises, because maturity is the place of maximum production, and the time of maximum peace. We want to know more about faith, and how it serves God and us. Faith is a technique affected by all previous techniques: confession of sins, prayer, and learning the Word. All these contribute to the building of our faith, which will provide surprising results, as we shall see next in Part Five.

Part Five

Walking by Faith

In This Part...

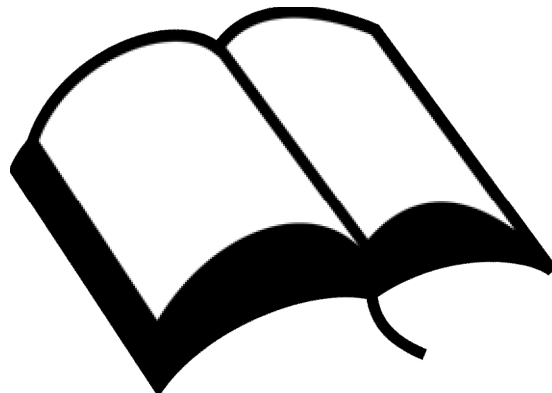
Chapter 18: *What is Faith?*

Chapter 19: *What Faith Isn't*

Chapter 20: *Strengthening our Faith*

Chapter 21: *Results of Faith*

Chapter 22: *Faith in the Promises*



Gal. 2:20—*I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.*

Chapter 18

What is Faith?

In This Chapter...

- A. Defining Faith*
- B. Hope is Faith*
- C. The Object of Faith*

A. Defining Faith

We have studied several techniques: confession of sins, prayer, and studying the Word. We have mentioned the technique of “trusting God”, or faith...but now we want to examine it more deeply to see exactly what it is and how it is applied. And we want to introduce “Faith” as Technique 4. The thing we have recognized already is how all the techniques work together; they are inter-dependent and symbiotic (they give life to each other). The techniques are *not* God, but they *point* to Him, and *give access* to Him...to His power and grace...and that is what we are searching for.

The question is this: What is faith? Heb. 11:1 says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Faith is, most of all, *being sure* of something, even if we cannot see it. We cannot see God, but we are *sure* He exists, and we know that His existence is far beyond anything we can find in our “experience”. Having faith in God means that we have been totally convinced of His existence and essence, without experiencing Him through our senses. We believe, because we choose to believe, and our choosing to believe comes from our wanting God.

All conduits for interaction and interplay with God are based on faith. We are saved through faith, and—as believers—we walk by faith. The Christian life begins and ends with faith (Rom. 1:17).

Faith is believing. Faith is trust. Faith is accepting something as *true*, even if others don’t. When we speak of faith in Jesus Christ, that faith is expressed toward the *message* about Jesus. When we speak

of faith in God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, that faith is expressed in His Word, which teaches us *truth* about Him. We *relate* to God because we *believe in His Son*, and we *know* Him, because *we believe what He tells us* about Himself.

Faith is not a *constant* for those who have been saved, because it fluctuates from one day to the next within each believer. Faith is dependent on the amount of wisdom that is being acquired, which can be more...or less. And it varies from one believer to the next, based on comparative growth and maturity. Faith can get stronger, or it can get weaker; it will not stay as it is. Faith will grow, or it will fade. We are all at various levels of completion, and all of us are headed up or down on the faith scale.

Faith has connections with all parts of our Christian lives...it connects with confession, prayer, and study, and with many other “sub-techniques” that we will study later, such as “gifts” and “surrender”. To use any technique in the absence of faith will negate its effectiveness, which makes faith *central*, but—after all—every one of the techniques is central, and will not work without the others. For example, we cannot learn without confessing and praying for wisdom...and believing what we hear. And we cannot pray unless we have confessed and are following the methods for conducting our prayers. In addition, we cannot build our trust without confessing and studying. And—of course—we cannot confess without knowing we need to. Any technique we learn will be interwoven with the others to make *each* of them operational through the interaction of *all* of them.

Faith is a mark of God’s genius. The problem God solved in eternity past was this: His *created* being (man) decided to follow a “fallen” Satan, which caused man to fall as well. Man was then no longer qualified for communion with God, so something had to be done to make man acceptable. God wanted to restore His fellowship with man, but His own perfection could not accept the imperfection of man. Therefore, God designed a way for His own justice and righteousness to be satisfied by reversing man’s fallen condition. He decided to send His Son to perform an act of self-sacrifice to take on man’s penalty for being “fallen”, thus allowing man to be “forgiven”...and thus coating him with righteousness to make him acceptable to God.

This forgiveness is not automatic for mankind, though it is *available* to everyone. God knew that His plan could not depend on any act or quality of merit that man might produce...so the design to correct man’s “fallenness” had to exclude any “work” or effort generated by imperfect man. Here’s the ingenious part: God presented faith as the means for man’s participation in God’s recovery program; faith is not “effort”, and draws no merit to the participant. By choosing to *believe* in God’s Son, man can access the benefits of Christ’s work on the cross, without *being* anything or *doing* anything himself. His only condition is to *believe*, in order to be saved.

We must be clear on this: Faith is *not* effort. Faith has no intrinsic value, requires no action, and exhibits no skill. Faith is worth nothing by itself. Faith draws attention to its object, and the value of faith is vested entirely in that object. By faith, we accept the work of Christ, and then God accepts us. This is true at salvation, and it is also true in our Christian lives. “Works” play no greater part in our daily lives, than they did in our salvation. We bring nothing to the table that God needs. We need Him; He does not need us. Every day is an opportunity to trust Him...to walk each step along

the way with an awareness that God is with us and that the work He does is trustworthy.

God solved the problem of eternal condemnation for us. How much more can He solve the day-to-day problems that we face. He will do it, if we will trust Him.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. True or false: Faith is only valid when it can be verified by scientific observation.

Question 2. Faith is being sure of something that we cannot experience through our _____.

Question 3. What did God *exclude* as a way for us to become acceptable to Him?

Other Scriptures

Gal. 5:6—The only thing that counts is faith, expressing itself in love.

Ps. 111:10 —The fear of the Lord [reverent faith] is the beginning of wisdom.

1 Pet. 1:21—Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Remember

Faith is knowing something is true, without actually seeing it. Faith is a crucial and vital technique, which will grow through the use of all the other techniques...coupled with faith itself. Faith is the key to everything we need to be “fruitful” and effective, and the thing God most wants to see developing in us. Our whole Christian experience is riding on the condition of our faith. Faith invites God’s grace, which excludes human “works”. Faith and works represent cause and effect, progressing in a linear fashion. And they do not overlap.

B. Hope is Faith

Faith for the future is called “hope”. We have “hope” for our salvation, because, either we “expect” to be lifted into the sky to be with God forever, or we expect to be “resurrected” in the future. We have “assurance” that we have eternal life, as we see in 1 Pet. 1:3-4, which says the following:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade—kept in heaven for you.

We have God’s Word that we have an inheritance that is *eternal*, and we believe it. That is our

hope...our faith. This is an example of hope as a *firm expectation* of the future.

The same hope that we have for our eternal lives, we can have for the empowerment of God for our temporal lives. Rom. 8:23b-26a states this clearly in the following:

...we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

Our hope related to salvation began when we were saved. This hope continues now as patience (also a kind of faith) as we wait for our *final* salvation, when Jesus comes for us. Until then, we have “help” from the Holy Spirit. This is the “grace to help in time of need” that we saw in an earlier study (Heb. 4:16). This grace gives us faith for now and hope for the future.

Hope is not seen as something expressed toward a contingency...or a possibility. Hope, like faith, is *certainty* that things are—and will be—exactly as God says they are, even though we cannot see them in front of us. Hope that is weak is not hope at all, but some kind of stiff upper lip about things we fear or wish for...a kind of lilted “hanging-on”, believing that “maybe” things will turn out good. Hope related to God can be *strong*, if we KNOW God and His Word, UNDERSTAND His power and control, and BELIEVE that He is moving and acting in *our best interests*...for our good.

Here are some additional comments on hope, and verses that support them:

- Our faith, hope, and expectations are directed toward God, Who raised Christ from the dead. 1 Pet. 1:21 says, “Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”
- Endurance and the encouragement of Scripture give us hope. Rom. 14:4 declares, “For everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”
- Suffering (to be studied later) produces perseverance, character, and hope, as per Rom. 5:3-4, which says, “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”
- Hope does not disappoint, which means we can *count on it*, as we see in Rom. 5:5, which follows: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

We have faith to endure and grow, but it is our hope that gives us joy, as we look forward not only to God’s provision in this life, but to our life with God. This is where we get relief from the trials of life...looking forward. As we get closer to God, joy increases because hope gets stronger; we anticipate the change from these bodies of death into perfect bodies that cannot decay or suffer. And we give thanks for the hope we have in God’s grace now for living. It will work for us...and through us...when we believe it.

Hope is faith, with a forward-leaning momentum.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Hope is _____ for the future.

Question 2. True or false: Related to God, hope is based on certainty.

Question 3. According to Rom. 14:4, what two things give us hope?

Other Scriptures

1 Pet. 1:13—Therefore prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 John 3:2-3 —Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Remember

Hope is often seen as “soft” faith for things to come. But hope is seen in Scripture almost as much as faith, and is virtually identical to faith, with a different slant...it relates to the future. Hope is every bit as powerful as faith, and should be seen as something built on God’s eternal existence and power.

C. The Object of Faith

The object of our faith is God. Our God is rock-solid. He is caring and faithful and reliable. His love for us never changes...though what we envision as “love” may not be the same as what He has in mind. We may be thinking in terms of “body comfort”, while God is more concerned with spiritual conditions. God created living *souls*, and the bodies we occupy are more like hotels than homes...they are temporary. God is focused on the heart. His provisions are more clustered around spiritual qualities, than material ones. Our faith in Him is for *spiritual* supplies, but do not despair...He also promises to meet our physical needs (to be discussed thoroughly in Part Seven). His care ultimately extends to all aspects of our lives, and He is there to support us.

The object of our faith...our God...is deserving of our trust, for the following reasons:

- **God is our refuge.** Ps. 18:2 says, “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn [strength] of my salvation, my stronghold.” We are outmanned, outgunned, and outnumbered in the world, where Satan is loose and on the prowl...and our sinful natures are rubbing their

hands together, ready to get us into the sin game. We need God's strength to withstand the evils that surround us. It is good to know that we have a helper, a refuge, a place of safety and provision. We can say with the Psalmist: "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. Salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." (Ps. 62:5-8)

- **God is our helper.** "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:2). He is our only "help". Ps. 121:5-8 paints a moving picture of God's protective care, as follows: "The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." God helps us now, and certainly in eternity. In Ps. 86:2a, David says, "Guard my life, for I am devoted to you," which is similar to Rom. 8:28, which assures us that "all things work together for good for those who love God." God is there to help us and protect us.
- **God Cares for Us.** God is watching us...wanting to provide, waiting to empower, and willing to help. But we have to be *with* Him...*near* Him...to be within range to receive what He offers every day. When we are in the *place of provision*, feeding on His Word, praying, and staying in fellowship, we will see His help. And we will know that we are safe. But without the perspective that wisdom, prayer and spirituality offer, we will not be able to recognize—and express faith in—God's care. When our condition is right, we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid." (Heb. 13:6b) God helps us, because He cares for us, but for His care to be engaged, we must be in a condition to receive it.

Because of God's love for us, and His promised care, we can have confidence that He is going to watch over us. We can count on it! We have to do our part, of course, but why wouldn't we? He has told us exactly what we need to do to have the greatest protection possible. All we have to do is trust Him. If we do this, we will know that we are safe, wanting nothing. If we move away from Him, however, we will have needs that will not be met; we will ask but not get answers; we will hunger, and not be fed. God helps those who move constantly toward Him, and those whose eyes are on Him.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. God's primary concerns for us are _____ .

Question 2. Name three reasons why we should trust God. (Hint: Begin each reason with, "Because He....")

Question 3. Is God's love unconditional? What about God's provision?

Other Scriptures

Ps. 91:9-10—If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.

Ps. 91:14—Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.”

Remember

The reason we can trust God is that He is God, and the more we learn about Him, the better we understand His plan and His character...and the more clearly we see that He can do nothing more or less than love us with infinite love. And because He loves us, He always watches over us, waiting to bless us from His bountiful grace.

Chapter 19

What Faith Isn't

In This Chapter...

A. Faith Isn't "Self-trust"

B. Faith Isn't "Works"

A. Faith Isn't "Self-trust"

In speaking to the Corinthians about his persecutions, Paul reported in 2 Cor 1:8-9 that he had been close to death at the hands of his persecutors. He felt that the death sentence has been pronounced, and the moment of his death was now at hand. He was comforted by his belief that God could raise him from the dead, but resurrection was not on his mind...it was his helplessness. Paul wanted his readers to understand that every single thing in their lives, and now in ours, is within the scope of God's power, will, and purpose. Conversely, it is ludicrous that we should believe in ourselves, instead of in Him. But most of the time, we choose our own way...and our own judgment...over His.

Here is a phrase from verse 9 that confirms what we are saying: "...this [near-death suffering] happened that we [Paul] might not rely on ourselves but on God...." Paul is clear that our very existence depends on God...every breath...and that we cannot sustain ourselves without Him. So it is inappropriate for us to trust ourselves, but—get this—it *is also a sin!*

Rom. 14:23b says, "...everything that is not of faith is sin." Anything you do or think or say that operates outside of faith in God is a sin. When faith is absent, you are in a *state of sin*. Heb. 11:6a adds this to this notion: "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]." When faith is not active, we are in a perpetual state of not pleasing God.

But what about "self-care". We have to work and take care of practical matters all the time, because

we live in the world. If we don't take care of ourselves, we will starve. Self-awareness and self-care are principles of life that assume that we will take care of our responsibilities for the common-sense maintenance of our well-being. The most important principle here is, "Don't be lazy!". But even principles of self-care are subsumed within a larger, over-riding reality, which is what we find in God and His Word. No one would ever suggest that we should do *nothing*, but what we must understand is that every thing we do, even in the area of self-care, or recreation, or taking care of day-to-day business, or whatever, must be cast against a backdrop of God's will, a life of prayer, faith in God the controller of everything, and a reliance on the truths of God's Word to govern our lives.

The techniques we are learning have to do with our trusting in God and relying on His power to accomplish *His will* and do *His work...through us*. I am convinced that there is no area of our lives that will not be improved, no matter how mundane or corporeal, if our faith is growing, if we are staying in fellowship, and if we pray constantly. God never leaves us, and we should never leave Him. God and His Word must always be with us, and—no matter how much confidence we have in our "real-world" skills, we must never see ourselves as sufficient in ourselves...without God.

When our attention shifts from ourselves to God, a new priority arises that recognizes the superiority of God's provision over the unreliable sustenance of self-dependency. When our focus is glued to ourselves, we will stumble and fall, whereas—if our consciousness is affixed to God—we will move out on a divine path toward meaning and purpose. This is because faith in God, rather than ourselves, gets results. Jer. 10:23 says, "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps."

One thing is certain: We cannot live the Christian life...only Christ can live that life, and He does that through us. But the most compelling tendency of our flesh is to trust ourselves...to operate independently of God, until we get into trouble. This is why we can go days without praying, why we ignore our need to confess our sins, why we open God's Word only once every week or so. This is why we spend our thinking-time dreaming about what we want, or what we don't have, or what we want to do, rather than in a reverent acknowledgement of the all-powerful God.

When we encounter life's problems or pursue our own aspirations, we tend to be focused on ourselves as the solver of all problems, and the creator of our own blessings. In reality, what we can provide for ourselves, including material/physical provisions, and especially spiritual assets, will not compare with what God wants to give us. The harder we try to solve our problems *apart from God* and His resources, the more we get in God's way, and prevent Him from blessing us in His superior way.

Somehow, we have to get the message that God is God...and we are not. This sounds familiar...maybe even a little cliché, by now...but we too often live our lives as though we have no clue as to the veracity of this truth. When we begin to understand Who it is that determines the outcomes of all events in our lives, we will be on our way toward a faith that is aimed at Him. We must get closer to God than we are to ourselves, which is not natural, and will take a lot of training. Arrogance does not go down easily.

We close this lesson with a clear message from Jer. 17:5: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.’” Faith in ourselves does not bring blessing, but cursing. Faith in God brings His best to us.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. The experiences God brings to us are designed to teach us to trust Him, rather than _____ .

Question 2. True or false: We should work hard to “make it” in the world, but complete provision comes from God.

Question 3. Which of these do you think would contribute the most to our tendency to trust ourselves: greed, pride, or lust? Why?

Other Scriptures

1 Cor. 1:8-9—We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead.

Rom. 6:19a—I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves....

Remember

Faith in self is natural, and is highly promoted as desirable so that we can become “self-sufficient”...competent and confident. Recognizing our own abilities and a good job we do is one thing, but relying on these in a process of excluding God, prevents what we do from having meaning and good effect. We must learn to trust God, and not ourselves. This is a hard lesson to learn.

B. Faith Isn't “Works”

We have established the smallness of man and his inability to please God on his own, and the bigness of God and His unique ability to please Himself through us. But there are those who insist that works play some part in the process of our being saved and in living the Christian life. This flies in the face of grace and its provisions, which do not rely on the puny resources of man, but on the power of God. It is the quintessence of arrogance for us to think that something *we* do can impress an infinite God.

Phil. 2:12b-13 says, “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God

who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” The phrase “work out your salvation”, means to accomplish or complete our own “deliverance”. The deliverance referred to is escape from the control of the sinful nature, and all the forces of evil that it invites. This deliverance applies to our temporal condition here on earth, not our eternal salvation. In the Christian life, our “work” is “trust”, which is why the next phrase says, “for it is God who works”. He does the work, not only the actual carrying out of His plan *through us*, but actually assisting us in our “willingness” to go along with it. We will explain.

Here is what this means, as I see it, from the verse just quoted: As we are “completing our deliverance” by obeying His Word through the use of His techniques...including being in fellowship and growing in faith through study...God puts into us the *will* to do something, and then enables us to *act* to accomplish it. This outcome is based on complete preparation and maturity, which is what is achieved when we “work it out”. He puts a will into us to act, because, 1) we want it, 2) we ask for it, and 3) we qualify for it.

2 Cor. 3:5 reminds us that any good thing we do, any “righteous” thing, comes from Him. This verse tells us, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves [NET has “from ourselves”], but our competence comes from God.” It is hard for us to let go of our own control, and our assumption that we are truly the center of the universe. This will not stand before the true and living God.

The late J. Hampton Keathley made the following observation concerning our efforts, as compared with God's:

Because of all we face in the enemies of God who are arrayed against Christians, the world around us, the flesh within us, and the devil against us, the Christian life and ministry is an absolute impossibility apart from God's supernatural ability which must be appropriated moment by moment through faith. The nature of these forces and our weakness necessitates the need for nothing short of the divine power of God. To think that we can live the Christian life is the height of ignorance or pride. (Endnote 1...Endnotes are on p. 106.)

The Holy Spirit is within us. Christ dwells there. We have every divine resource in God's arsenal at our disposal. The life God wants us to live is not one we fabricate or generate, but one that is given to us. It is by the Spirit alone that real service gets done. Rom. 7:6 says it this way: “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” It is not our commission to learn the rules of good behavior, but to become familiar with ways that the Spirit performs God's work in and through us. The do's and don'ts of Scripture apply, but these will be done only by the power of the Spirit, and not by self-effort.

Salvation is not by “works”, but by grace, and the Christian life is not lived by “works”, but by grace, which will produce the “work”. Here are some verses that confirm that we shouldn't attempt to keep the law in our own strength, because we are too *weak* to make it happen:

- Matt. 26:41—Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is will-

ing, but the body is weak.

- Rom. 3:27-28—Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.
- Rom. 6:19a—I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves....
- Gal. 3:2—I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?
- Gal. 2:16—Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.
- Gal. 3:3—Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

If we are in fellowship, studying, and maturing, we will be motivated properly and energized supernaturally by God's power. Self-discipline is NO substitute for faith. Our efforts truncate God's power. We started with Him, and we must walk with Him...or we'll be walking alone, the song that says we never will...notwithstanding. We will either believe in God for our minute-to-minute walk, or we will not. If we believe right now, as we write or read these words, we must also believe five minutes from now, and in the middle of the night tonight, and at our first blink in the morning. We must keep on believing. Nothing short of ongoing, unflinching confidence in God will suffice. We must understand how fruitful faith in the true and living God can be, and how futile is the faith that is directed toward ourselves, and our abilities.

We close with this oft-repeated precept, found in Prov. 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." When we trust Him, we reject our own works as a means to serve, and embrace Him as our life, "in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). Isn't it ironic that righteousness comes, not by our trying harder, but by our trusting more? This is why we must be "re-trained" in our thinking, because it is counter-intuitive to believe that we can do more...by doing less; and that we can get more work done by letting Someone Else do it.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What does the term "salvation" mean in Phil. 2:12b?

Question 2. If we are in fellowship and growing, where will we find the motivation to "go to work" (i.e., use the techniques)?

Question 3. True or false: Our *first* job as believers is to learn the rules of good behavior.

Question 4. More _____ produces more work. (Hint: Look at the title for Part Five.)

Other Scriptures

Gal. 5:4—You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ...

Eph. 2:8-9—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.

Luke 17:5—The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

Remember

The question of “Who does the work?” should be clearing up. We want good works in our lives, and righteousness, and fruit. But we must know that it is God Who produces good works, and therefore, we must know how to use His grace system so that we become tools by which He completes it.

Chapter 20

Strengthening our Faith

In This Chapter...

- A. Walking by Faith in Christ*
- B. Building Stronger Faith Through the Word*
- C. Building Stronger Faith Through Training*
- D. Living by Faith*

A. Walking by Faith in Christ

We use the names ascribed to members of the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) almost interchangeably, because they are all parts of one Being: God. They have divine “roles”, but they are one Person. We mention this because this section deals with the person of Jesus Christ, Who is revealed as one “indwelling” us. But then we say the Holy Spirit also indwells us! There should be no confusion here...these are one and the same. The Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit can be distinguished, but when we speak of “Jesus Christ” in our hearts, we are also speaking of what we call elsewhere the “Holy Spirit”. They are God.

We are in Christ, and He is in us, and our spiritual lives are governed by the degree to which we allow Him to “be alive” in us. If we are controlled by the Spirit, rather than the sinful nature, Christ empowers us to become like Him. Eph. 3:16-19 mentions all three members of the Godhead, and shows what the indwelling Christ is supposed to be doing in our hearts:

I pray that out of His glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that sur-

passes knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This passage calls for us to be strengthened with power through the Spirit of Christ...in our hearts...so Christ can “dwell” in our hearts through faith. The mystery is solved. The Christian life is lived by being strengthened by the Spirit of Christ, so that He is alive within us...made operational there by our trusting constantly in Him and His Word.

But notice the word “dwell”, which is the translation for the Greek word *katoikasi*, which can mean “dwell or occupy”, but which can also mean “to pervade, prompt, and govern”. This is a perfect picture of the filling of the Holy Spirit, Who prompts and governs the heart when he “pervades” (or fills) it. When the Person dwelling in our hearts is doing so with a sense of ownership and supervisory authority, He will strengthen us with His power. He will be at home, fill the space, and control everything in the area He occupies...inside our hearts.

Observe this power at work in verse 20 (still Eph. 3), which says, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...” Christ does so much that we cannot measure it, IF His power is “at work within us”. This means that His working within us **DEPENDS ON** His power. This is a contingency: If His power is working, through His “filling” and control, then the effects of that power will take place in our hearts, with the result that He can live His life *from the inside out* through us. And the condition for this (as per Eph. 3:17) is FAITH.

Faith leads to strengthening and spiritual receptivity to enable us to experience the love of Christ and to be filled with His completeness. Faith and fellowship lead to His filling, and when He fills us, He controls us, and when He controls us, He is managing the place He calls home, so He can direct our lives and produce His character within us. The character He produces is love...His love...expressed in many ways, but always originating with Him.

Gal. 5:5 says, “...by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.” This righteousness will be produced through us by the Spirit, while we wait (a form of trust, as we shall see in Part Seven) and hope (also a form of trust). When we are exercising our faith, it will be because we are in fellowship and are growing in the Word (repetition...repetition). Without faith, there will be no righteousness, either at salvation, or now in our lives as His children. Gal. 2:20-21 describes it this way:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

The lives we now live are lived “by faith” in Jesus Christ. And it is His life that gives us strength, as per Phil. 4:13: “I can do everything through Him that gives me strength.” We are engaged, and working until we are exhausted, but it is Christ that gives us the strength to do it. Col. 2:6 adds this: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live [walk] in him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

When we walk by faith in Christ, we will be given his “fullness”, and—being filled—we can live our lives in His divine power. Col. 2:9-10 concludes it this way: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” He is the source of our work, our good, and our lives, because He has the power.

It may be a little confusing that we have cited confession of sins leading to fellowship as the means for the control of the Holy Spirit, and we have specified in this section that faith is the condition for this control. We will discuss this in more detail later, but—in a nutshell—confession *restores* the filling of the Spirit after we have been out of fellowship, and faith *sustains* that filling, once we have been restored. One gets us there; the other keeps us there (preview of Part Six).

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What does this phrase mean: “...that Christ may dwell in your hearts”?

Question 2. The work of Christ within us depends on His _____ .

Question 3: What is the key condition for sustaining the power of Christ’s life within us?

Other Scriptures

Eph. 5:18—Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Rom. 8:29—For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Remember

The life we have within us is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He indwells us, but does not always control us. Maintaining the filling and control we seek from Him is done by faith in Him. When we are in fellowship and full of faith, we will be filled with Him, and His divine power can work through us to produce His love.

B. Building Stronger Faith Through the Word

We have learned from Scripture that faith can be weak, or it can be strong...or somewhere in between. Faith can grow, or it can regress, depending on our intake of God’s Word. Learning Scripture strengthens our faith, and when we are not learning, our strength will be in decline. When faith weakens, we fall into either sin or some kind of “law-keeping” (also known as legalism), both of which are destructive. An example of weak or diminishing faith can be seen in Hos. 4:1-3, which gives us the following:

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

This condition follows a verse we have seen before, which says, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” Their destruction is associated with the fading of faith, fellowship (“love”), acknowledgement of God, and wisdom.

The solution for diminishing faith is to get it growing. 2 Thess. 1:3 says it well: “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.” When we grow, fellowship is more consistent, and the fruit of the Spirit can be borne.

This is why Paul was committed to teaching the Scripture...so believers could grow into spiritual maturity. This is indicated in Col. 1:28, where Paul says, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [complete or mature] in Christ.” God has given us all we need to know in order to grow. In Acts 20:32, Paul states this again, saying, “And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” What builds us up? The *message of grace*! Remember this: It is the message of grace that builds us up!

There are so many passages calling for us to grow by studying the Word that we can’t cover them all in this brief study, so we will give a sampling of them in the following:

- 1 Pet. 2:2—Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
- 2 Pet. 3:18—But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- Eph. 4:12-14—...to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.
- Jude 1:20—But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.
- Jer. 9:23-24—This is what the Lord says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.

The most important catalyst for growth is *study* directed at the topics, principles, techniques, and

promises of the Word. When we are enthusiastic about this, as expressed through faithful study routines, we will see changes in ourselves, and in our lives.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. When our faith weakens, we will fall into _____ and _____ .

Question 2. When faith grows, what is the main fruit that will increase? (Hint: See Gal. 5:22.)

Question 3. What quality was Paul trying to imbue in believers through his teaching?

Question 4. What is the message that builds us up?

Other Scriptures

Col. 4:12—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.

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

2 Tim. 3:16-17—All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Remember

The Bible is our source for greater strength, because it shows us the way to get closer to God... and how we can draw on His strength to please Him, produce His fruit in our lives, and fill our lives with meaning and purpose.

C. Building Stronger Faith Through Training

The terms testing, training, and trials lead into a consideration of suffering. Suffering does not come to us for its own sake; every experience God brings to us has a purpose. Suffering always happens as part of a guiding experience from God, Who is always loving, but not always gentle...always directing experience toward our growth, but sometimes having to cut us down to size to keep us standing tall in His grace. Grace is better, as we shall see completely in Part Seven.

We have seen two distinct reasons for suffering: 1) discipline for unconfessed sin, and 2) pressure to get us to return to our studies. But there is a third reason for suffering, which we have only cursorily mentioned in the past, but that we want to explore further in this section. This additional cause for suffering is found in God's purpose for testing our faith, or "trying our patience", which is to

prompt us to learn to use grace and trust God...even when training causes us discomfort. The experiences that come under the category of testing and trials are designed to refine us and to build our endurance and faith, and give us confidence that “all things work together for our good”.

If we are consistently confessing our sins and taking in the Word of God, then we can know that any suffering we are going through is designed to spur our growth as maturing believers. This kind of suffering leads directly forward. Because this “suffering for growth” is designed for our direct benefit, we can be “joyful” that God is bringing it to us, as per James 1:2-4, which we see here:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

These verses tell us that trials build patience (a perspective of faith), so that we can grow until we lack absolutely nothing. The prospect for that kind of advancement can only please us, and make us welcome the trials...because trials lead to *maturity*. It is a relief to know that suffering is for our elevation and the enhancement of our faith. This gives us an understanding that what is happening is “good”, and He assures us that He will not test us beyond what we can bear. That is, if we are confessing and studying.

1 Pet. 1:6-7 adds to our understanding of this process, saying the following:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Our faith is purified through the refinement of suffering...the “fires” we must endure when we are being trained. Technique 5 can be called, “Enduring God’s Training”. This training is a privilege and an honor for us, and will bring glory to God through our increased maturity and capacity for service. There is a “heavenly-rewards” implication in these verses that we won’t go into (covered in previous books), but the application for us now is that suffering for growth is good, and leads to purification and wisdom.

We see this concept once more in Rom. 5:3-4, which gives us this:

Not only so, but let us rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Perseverance is the maintenance of our faith, even when difficult, trying, and even painful times come. Perseverance is both a sign of our faith, and the way our faith grows. We persevere through faith, and when we endure this way, perseverance grows, building “character”, which means grace assets are imbuing the character of Christ into us. The result is “hope”, or faith for the future.

Very often in Scripture, perseverance is associated with hope. As we mature, hope strengthens,

which allows the Holy Spirit to do His work through us based on a strong and perpetual faith in Him. The outcome is “love”, or the production of the Spirit’s fruit through us. It all leads back to that, doesn’t it? Fruit. We *grow* to be *fruitful*, yet we must remember that we are “branches”, not the tree itself. It is God Who produces the fruit.

When we experience physical, psychological, or other discomfort, we know that it is given to us so we can be developed and promoted. 1 Pet. 4:12 states, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” This suffering has a purpose. One thing we can count on is that *we will suffer as believers* (perhaps not a good selling point), but we can know that tests and trials are to train us and bring us to GREATER FAITH.

In Acts 9:16, Paul was told that he would suffer. Ananias was told to deliver a message to Paul, saying, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” And Paul did suffer. In 2 Cor 11:24-32, we see a list of things that Paul endured, as follows:

- In prison frequently.
- Exposed to death again and again.
- Forty-lashes-minus one on five different occasions.
- Beaten with rods three times.
- Stoned and left for dead.
- Three times shipwrecked.
- Spent a day and night in the open sea
- Always in danger.
- Labored and toiled without sleep.
- Went hungry and thirsty.
- Cold.
- Naked.
- Pressured with the responsibility of all the churches, on top of everything else.

But did Paul mature? Yes. Was he productive? Yes. Did he bring honor to God? Yes. Is his commitment still benefiting Christians? Yes Can we do this, as well? Yes. Will we get through all this without suffering? No. God’s training is effective, but it may not be easy. That does not mean we will not find joy in such suffering.

We are destined for suffering as part of our training. This may not sound like good news, but there is also “blessing” that is promised, even in our suffering. (We will look at the promises for blessing in Part Seven.) But suffering will come. 1 Thess. 3:3 says, “...so that no one would be unsettled [surprised] by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.” Our role is to surrender to God’s will and God’s grace during suffering, as we see in 1 Pet. 4:19, which says, “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” Stay in fellowship; study as much as you can; pray for grace to endure and for relief within the framework of God’s will; and wait on the Lord, confident that He is good, and that He is caring for us.

Finally, remember the time when Paul's suffering exceeded even his remarkable endurance, which we saw in 2 Cor. 1:8-9, and which we re-quote here:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Suffering is not just a word, or an academic concept...suffering hurts! And sometimes it even mounts up, it seems, and we might even “despair” as Paul did. But there is purpose behind our suffering...a purpose of grace and love that we must seek to understand. We can have confidence that God will deliver us from suffering, and will protect us through it. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Is. 41:10). Hold on to this promise.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What are the three reasons for suffering, as per our studies?

Question 2. What is the correct response to suffering? (Hint: Rhymes with “soy”.)

Question 3. We are destined for _____ as part of our training.

Other Scriptures

Acts 9:15-16—But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings, and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Ps. 119:170b-71—I delight in your law. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

Ps. 30:5b—Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

Remember

Suffering is a time of growth. Suffering is an opportunity for us to learn about grace and deliverance. Joy is not a word that comes to mind when we suffer, but it is the proper response to suffering, and the one we will increasingly make, as we move toward maturity.

D. Living by Faith

As we mature, and our faith strengthens, we will log more time “switched on”, or in fellowship, because we will be using grace assets to improve our spiritual condition. Mature believers can be

“carnal”, just like baby believers, but they will likely log more time in fellowship...they don’t “live” in carnality, or in an ongoing state of sin and self-righteousness. They live in the power of the Spirit, which is a “walk” achieved through consistent confession, prayer, and study...all of which build *faith*. And this leads to “clean living”, as well as a “clean condition”, with the result that confession is less needed, because deviations from God’s standards are less frequent.

When faith is weak, or absent, God will not be able to teach us, bless us, motivate us, strengthen us, or guide us. We will have effectively cut off the divine supply for all our needs, especially those of a spiritual nature. When God looks at us He expects to see faith in full operation. In Heb. 3:12, we are warned against a lack of faith in these words: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” The Word speaks strongly and directly against unbelief. When our faith is weak, sin will come, and we will be destroying ourselves, along with everything and everyone around us.

On the other hand, when our faith is strong, we will see good results. Rom. 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.” We were saved by faith in the beginning, and now we are instructed to live by that same faith. We are to “live by faith” the same way we are to “live in the Spirit” or “walk in Christ”. We looked at Gal. 5:16 previously, which says, “So I say, live by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Walking in the Spirit overpowers sin and allows God to produce fruit through us. And now, we must learn to “live by faith”.

2 Cor. 5:7 tells us we “live by faith, not by sight.” “Live” should actually be translated “walk”. This means every step we take should be by faith...every thought, every incident, every decision, every encounter, every moment of our lives should be executed by faith in Jesus Christ. We walk trusting in God and His Word...every second of every day.

We saw in an earlier study how Paul advised Timothy, saying the following:

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. (1 Tim. 1:18)

This verse contains two of the pillars of God’s grace system that Paul wanted Timothy to observe: faith and a good conscience. The “good conscience” comes from having all sins confessed, which means we are in fellowship, and controlled by the Spirit. “Faith” is the condition that sustains that control, once we are restored to fellowship. Paul said, “I give you this instruction...that by following them you may fight the good fight” (v. 18). And the good fight is fought through holding on to faith, which provides a sustained walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We initiate fellowship by confessing, and we sustain the resultant spirituality by trusting in God...moreover, we build that trust by *staying focused* on God and His Word. This encapsulates all we are studying: fear of the Lord, occupation with Christ, acknowledging God, surrender, submission to God’s will, and God-consciousness. Some of these we have covered; others we *will* cover. But these will all converge at a single point called “faith”. Faith is turning ourselves over to God,

with all our problems, aspirations, dreams, hopes, and intentions. Faith is relinquishing control to Him, so that we can be sustained by His Spirit.

Rom. 6:12-13 describes this process for us:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

This is what faith is: *offering*. We offer our bodies to become God's tools. We surrender our will to His will. We relinquish control to the Holy Spirit. We trust in His power to get the job done. We give our lives up to allow His life to be produced in us. We let God be God...in us. And then we draw near to God. We will have many wonderful things to report later about "drawing near", but for now, we want to give this preview: James 4:7a says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God." This is about submission, or surrender, or yielding, or trusting. When we surrender to God's will and exhibit trust in Him, we will get closer to Him, as we shall see.

Moreover, when we surrender, we will see through eyes that acknowledge God, pray to Him, and fear Him. When surrender grows with the realization that "I can't do it, but He can", we will be trusting Him in ways that will open up His power to us, so we can bring glory to Him, and complete our purpose for remaining here on earth. Surrender is the pinnacle of faith, when we totally give Him our hearts, our lives, our all. But we start now...and start small...by finishing this book to build our faith, and then by continuing on toward new heights of spiritual possibility. Living in faith exists on graduated planes, like steps that lead upward. This is the climb we are making.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. As per Heb. 3:12, the Word speaks clearly against _____.

Question 2. In what part of our lives is faith relevant?

Question 3. What is the ultimate expression of faith? (Hint: It is the word used to describe what happened to Napoleon at Waterloo.)

Other Scriptures

Hab. 2:4—The just shall live by faith.

Matt. 6:30—If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Remember

This section has brought us closer to an understanding of what it means to live by faith in Christ, and to walk through our lives in submission to Him. We are not through with this topic, as faith is central to all we must do as we learn to apply God's strategies for living.

Chapter 21

Results of Faith

In This Chapter...

A. Faith Sustains Grace

B. Faith Brings Rest

C. Faith Gets Results

A. Faith Sustains Grace

Rom. 5:1-2 discloses that faith gives us access to God's grace, the source of "rewards" for those who "seek him". Here is what this passage says:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

This passage shows us how salvation is carried out in three phases, all by faith, as follows:

1. Justification—We have been justified through faith, receiving the righteousness of Christ when we accept Him as our Savior.
2. Access—We now have access by faith into the grace that saved us and through which we currently "stand"...or *live*. A "standing" life is the life of a believer living by faith.
3. Glory—Our future consists of glory, which will come to us in the form of glorified bodies and eternal life with Him in heaven.

When we are saved, we are given access to grace, which takes us from being condemned to being justified before God. After salvation, grace becomes our true north, as we seek guidance and provision as believers on the sea of life. Access gives us the privilege to approach God's throne to "receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need." (Heb. 4:16b) When we receive mercy,

we get forgiveness of our sins (through confession). This qualifies us to “find grace”.

So confession opens the door to grace, but Rom. 5:1-2 tells us that “faith” is the criterion for accessing grace. Which is it? It is both. Confession establishes our readiness to access grace, and faith is the medium by which we access it. We have already seen that faith is the basis for perpetuating our “walk in the Spirit”, which is making ourselves at home in God’s grace. Both confession and faith are conditions that must be fulfilled for grace to be accessed.

Without confession, faith would not be operational, and access would not be possible. With confession, faith can operate, and grace will be found. Following the initial event of confession, grace can be perpetuated by the *continuation* of our faith. Once again, we see the interaction of techniques. Confession kick-starts faith, and faith sustains fellowship, which keeps grace active. If faith is strong, due to maturity, fellowship will be consistent, which means we will live in the light of God’s grace. Until then, fellowship will be spotty, and access to grace will be sporadic.

When we are in the presence of grace through fellowship and faith, we will “lack nothing”, as per Ps. 34:9-10, which says, “Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.” This is confirmed in James 4:6, which says, “But he gives us more grace. That is why the Scripture says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” When we “fear him”, implying faith...and are “humble”, implying confession...we will be exalted and “lack nothing”. The operation of grace means **lacking nothing!**

Eph. 3:12 seals the concept by saying, “In him [in fellowship] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” Confidence is faith. Heb. 4:16a says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence [faith].” When we approach the throne in faith, we can obtain mercy and find grace. We will have much more to say about “approaching the throne of grace” in Part Seven, which is titled, “Drawing Near to God”.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What are the two conditions for accessing grace after we are saved?

Question 2. When we are in the presence of grace, what will still be missing? (trick question)

Question 3. What is another word for “confidence”?

Other Scriptures

2 Cor. 12:9a—But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

John 1:16—From the fullness of his grace we have received one blessing after another.

Remember

Grace is that wonderful expression of God's love that waits to bless us. When all conditions are right, meaning fellowship and faith, we can access this grace, and receive all its benefits.

B. Faith Brings Rest

The faith that brings rest is focused on God's power. 1 Cor. 2:4-5 says, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." We shall see that, when we trust God, we will *rest*, because we believe in His power. If we do not trust Him, and instead depend on ourselves and the world for solutions and sustenance, we will not rest, but will live in uncertainty. Ps. 62:5-8 expresses it this way:

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. God most High is my salvation and my honor; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

There is rest when we trust Him for today (faith), and for the future (hope). This rest can be found in God *alone*! And when we rest, we will not be shaken, because He is the rock on which we stand, the fortress that protects us, and the refuge we seek. When we trust Him, we will pour out our hearts to Him...open up to Him, and submit to Him for protection and care.

The concept of rest (or the lack of it) is illustrated by the Jews in the desert, after they left Egypt. They wandered for forty years, because they were unable to enter the Promised Land. Their entry was refused, due to a lack of faith. The writer of Hebrews discusses this in Heb. 3 and 4. In Heb. 3:1, the writer makes it clear that he is addressing believers, by acknowledging them as "holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling". So we know immediately that the "rest" he is talking about is not "salvation", but something that *believers* can have. We will explore in the following this writer's description of the heart-condition of these Jews in the desert, and see what it means to us.

In Heb. 3:8, the writer says, "...do not harden your hearts as you [speaking to Jewish converts] did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert." In verse 10, he points out what God said about the Jews in the desert. "Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways..." These Jews were being reminded of the time when their "fathers" (v. 9) had been delivered from slavery, but were turning their backs on God.

We have seen before that failure to learn hardens the heart and creates distance between God and us, and the heart that moves away from God becomes hardened even more. The result of a hardened heart is that God's ways are not learned. Of these Jews whose hearts were hardened, God said, "So I declared on oath in my anger they shall never enter my rest" (v. 11). The passage in Heb.

3 goes on to say that these Jews *disobeyed* God...they sinned, did not acknowledge or fear God, stayed “out of fellowship”, did not study the Word (as it was given to them), and were in a perpetual state of “unbelief”.

Unbelief was the biggest cause of their not being able to enter God’s rest, as we see in verse 19: “So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.” So they missed their opportunity to enter the rest, and never made it to the Promised Land. Heb. 4:1 continues the narrative, saying, “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.” They received God’s message, but did not accept it, as per verse 2b: “...those who heard did not combine it with faith.” They did not *believe* God’s Word, and this prevented them from entering the “rest”, or *accessing God’s grace*.

So who can enter this rest? We see the answer to this in verse 3a, which says, “Now we who have believed enter that rest...” This belief is not the belief of salvation, but the ongoing faith that believers can express toward God’s power and truth. We know that this faith is not “saving faith”, because of verse 1, which says, “be careful that none of you have fallen short of it”. These are “holy brothers”, so this is talking about BELIEVERS who may “fall short”. This “falling short” pertains to Christian living, wherein we will enter God’s rest...or fail to enter it. Evidence that this rest is for believers is also seen in verse 11, which calls for these believers to “make every effort to enter that rest”. This rest is for those who have been saved, who can now enter God’s rest, if their hearts are attuned with God. The Promised Land is not heaven, or the place of salvation, but a place where *believers* find rest in God’s grace. It is a place of FAITH.

Because they rejected God’s grace and the promises of His Word, the Jews in the desert were saddled with staying there. Lack of faith prevents entrance into the place of “rest”. On the other hand, when we keep on believing the Word, we will enter this rest. Verses 9 and 10 say, “There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.” Here we begin to see what this rest is. It is a place of “not working”. When God completed His creation of all that exists, He rested. And that is what we are to do: rest, as God rested.

Rest is the absence of work. When we rest, because we trust God to do His work, we stop trying to be “good enough” to please God, and learn to “trust enough” to be at ease while He works. When we rest, we turn our hearts, our lives, and all our outcomes over to God. We submit to His will and surrender to His power.

Jesus said this, as recorded in Matt. 11:28-30:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

When we come to Christ as believers, we are coming to find “rest”. The yoke of Christ is easy for us, because He does the work. And the burden He asks us to carry is light, because it is He Who carries it. That leaves only the command to “learn” from Him. When we learn from Him, we will

end up carrying enormous loads, but they will seem light, because our work *for* Him is to rest *in* Him. This is the “work” of faith.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. The faith that brings rest is focused on God’s _____ .

Question 2. What is the primary condition cited that prevented the Jews from entering the Promised Land?

Question 3. Who are the ones in danger of “falling short” of God’s rest?

Question 4. What is the “work” we are to do?

Other Scriptures

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

Heb. 3:4—For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

Remember

When we learn to trust God, He does the work. The Promised Land for us is that beautiful, quiet, serene place where we are at peace, because we have complete faith in God. When we rest in His power and grace, mountains get moved.

C. Faith Gets Results

Heb. 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Absence of faith prevents anything we do from pleasing God. Conversely, *with* faith, we *can* please God. Faith enables us to access the power of God, as we see in 2 Thess. 1:11-12 (NET), which lays it out, as follows:

And in this regard we pray for you always, that our God will make you worthy of his calling and fulfill by his power your every desire for goodness and every work of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

By God’s power our desires to achieve good things for Him can be fulfilled; works are made possible through faith, which provides access to God’s power.

The results of faith are numerous, and more than we can enumerate here. The following will give a brief survey of some of the results that faith produces:

- **Love.** 1 Tim. 1:5—“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”
- **Strength to overcome weakness and sin.** Eph2:1 contrasts with 1:19 in the following: “As for you, you were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (2:1); but notice what we have now as believers, which is “...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength” (1:19).
- **Protection.** 1 Thess. 5:8b—“...putting on faith and love as a breastplate....”
- **Strength for resisting Satan.** Eph. 6:13a, 16— “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground....In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”
- **Obedience.** Rom. 1:5—“Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”
- **Fulfilled Promises.** Heb. 6:12—“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”
- **Production.** 1 Thess. 1:3—“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **Blessing.** Gal. 3:9—“Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Faith provides many results, many that we have already seen, and others that we will continue to discover. Faith gives us confidence and certainty. When we believe, we are *sure*, as we saw in an earlier study. When we are sure of God and His grace and His power and His Word, then many other assets open up to us. We will be sure of the following:

- Christ will strengthen us.
- Everything works together for our good.
- Nothing is impossible for God.
- His grace is sufficient for us.
- His Word is alive and powerful.
- God’s peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
- He will never forsake us.
- We can cast our anxiety on Him, for He cares for us.
- He will protect us from the evil one.
- We do not need to be afraid, because He is with us.

- He will prosper us and not harm us.
- All good things will be added unto us.
- He will comfort us.
- He will direct our paths.
- He is coming soon to gather us to Himself.

There is no “if” in faith. Faith is certain, and therefore it is the same as knowing. When we are fully assured of God’s grace, we *know* it will operate in our lives. We must bring strong faith to *every* event. This does not come so much from a “will” to believe as it does a “willingness” to use the techniques we are learning. If we will learn, follow, and obey the Word, our faith will grow...to be sure.

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. Without faith, there is no way we can _____ .

Question 2. Name three results that faith produces.

Question 3. Name three assets that faith opens up.

Question 4. How do we build strong faith?

Other Scriptures

Heb. 11:1—Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Matt. 17:19-20—Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Remember

The results of faith are numerous, and we will see more as we continue our studies. Faith is our most important reflection of God’s grace, and the key to everything we do as believers. Faith gives us layer upon layer of protection that comes from God’s power, provision that comes from His grace, and assurance that comes from His promises.

Chapter 22

Faith in the Promises

In This Chapter...

A. Introducing the Promises

B. Encouragement in Our Faith

C. Verses on Faith that Back-up the Promises

A. Introducing the Promises

We have studied, and will continue to study, techniques for living. A second major aspect of living, and an essential component in developing faith, is understanding and believing the promises God gives us in His Word. We will refine this concept, and show the blessings inherent in the promises, in Part Seven. For now, we can know that promises are comforting, restorative, reassuring, strengthening, and instructive, and we must make them part of our spiritual portfolio.

Faith is the place of rest. We access God's rest by 1) confessing our sins, 2) praying, 3) learning God's Word, and 4) trusting in God's promises. We saw earlier how the failure of the Israelites to believe the promise of God resulted in their not receiving the substance of the promise, which is entry into the Promised Land. They could not enter God's "rest", because they did not believe God's Word. **Failure to accept and trust God's promises for our lives now will prevent us from getting what is promised, and cause us not to enter His rest.**

We must not fail to enter this "rest". As we begin our walk of trust, we must make sure our feet are touching the bedrock of our faith...the guarantees of God's Word. We present in the following a sample of God's promises, specific truths that we are to believe (more in Part Seven):

- Matt. 10:30-31^a—And even the hairs on your head are all numbered, so don't be afraid.
- 1 Pet. 3:4—Through these he has given us great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
- 2 Thess. 3:3—But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.
- Rom. 8:28 (NET)—And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
- 1 Jn. 1:9—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- 1 Jn. 5:14-15—This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.
- Matt. 7:7—Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
- Luke 17:6—He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”
- Luke 1:37—For nothing is impossible with God.
- Heb. 4:16—Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
- James 4:8—Come near to God, and he will come near to you.
- James 4:10—Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
- John 15:7—If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.
- 1 Pet. 5:7—Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
- Matt. 6:25^a, 33—Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
- Phil. 4:12b-13—I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.
- Phil. 4:6-7—Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- James 1:5—If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.
- 2 Cor. 4:7—But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.
- 2 Cor. 12:9a—But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”
- Is. 41:10—So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
- I Sam. 17:47—All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s....
- Prov. 21:31—The horse is made ready for battle, but victory rests with the Lord.
- Ps. 37:4—Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.
- Jer. 29:11-13—For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
- Ps. 91:9-10—If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.

These are the provisions of grace. When we believe these and other promises in the Word, we will be able to do what Eph. 3:12 describes: “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” Through faith we can enter God’s rest and open the supply line for our mission.

(Questions for this section will be combined with questions for Section B.)

Remember

We must understand and believe the promises in God’s Word for them to take effect, as we will see in detail in Part Seven. But when we learn to walk by faith in God’s assurance of grace, then we will come to know what it means to stand and live in the Most Holy Place.

B. Encouragement in Our Faith

Faith is under attack. Doubt is an opening for Satan, and a condition that invites the world in for a party. This might titillate the sinful nature, but it does not please God, so we must keep our faith strong. We must follow the lead of Abraham, about whom the following was reported:

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver

through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God. (Rom. 4:19-20)

It easy to trust our eyes and our “reason” more than we do the Word. But it does not matter what we see, there is no circumstance in our lives that is not allowed or orchestrated by God. We can be confident that He is always in control, and our relief and comfort are found in Him. This is what we see in the promises, and this is what we access by trusting Him.

Is. 41:10, listed above with the “promises”, says, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Will frightening things happen? Yes. Is this a problem for God? No. But it is a test for us, so we better have this promise loaded up and ready to be launched when threats appear. The promises provide armor against the wiles of the devil, and buoyancy against the inexorable downward pull of our own emotions.

The promises also remind us of Who it is that provides our victories. Prov. 21:31 says, “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” God gives the victory in our battles; He gives solutions for our problems; He gives the energy for our service; He provides the will and plan for our lives. When we understand and believe His promises, fear will have no place in our lives. Jer. 29:11-14a confirms this, as follows:

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

God plans our good. And He has woven the universe together in such a masterful way that, even though there is sin in the world...some internal or external attacker always out to get us...and even though suffering comes, God works everything for our good. All the time! And we can hang on to that. Deut. 1:29-31 gives us a wonderful encouragement in the following:

Then I [God] said to you, “Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the Lord carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.

He will carry us, when we trust Him. Ps. 34:7 continues in this vein, saying, “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” We can choose to accept the promises and use the techniques, or we can reject them. We can choose to believe, or we can ignore and reject God. If we choose to believe God’s Word, as we did at our re-birth, and if we continue to grow, the power and grace of God will be opened up to us, and our hope will cause our strength to be renewed. Faith will enable us to soar to new heights, as we see in Is. 40:29-31:

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they

will walk and not be faint.

God will hold you up. He will sustain you. He will forgive you. He will keep you supplied. He will enrich you. He will love you each and every day, and—as we shall see in Part Seven—He will bless you in ways you can't imagine. As 1 Cor. 2:9 says, "However, as it is written, 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him...'"

Checking for Understanding

Question 1. What are your favorite promises?

Question 2. Will the promises be fulfilled unconditionally, or are there stipulations attached to them?

Question 3. God will renew the strength of those who _____ .

Other Scriptures

Ps. 23—The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Remember

Everything we need for life and godliness is supplied by God. He will withhold no good thing from those who trust Him. The heavy lifting has been—or is being—done by Him. There is nothing left for us to do but lie down in green pastures, and give thanks.

C. Verses on Faith that Back-up the Promises

Understanding Scripture activates faith, and a thriving faith engages the promises. To encapsulate the concepts regarding faith, we will quote some verses dealing with a number of them, to affirm the backdrop for believing the promises. The following verses provide truths concerning faith...and its development and operation...separated into categories:

- **Faith is the only thing that counts.** "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love" (Gal. 5:6).

- **Faith is directed toward God.**
 - o "...that we should not trust in ourselves but in God" (2 Cor 1:8-9).
 - o "Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God." (1 Pet. 1:21).
- **Faith is *from* God.**
 - o "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief'" (Mark 9:24).
 - o "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).
 - o "...grace poured out on me, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 1:4).
- **Faith protects us.**
 - o "...putting on faith as a breastplate" (1 Thess. 5:8).
 - o "...take up the shield of faith, with which you extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16).
- **Faith brings God's blessing.**
 - o "Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham" (Gal. 3:9).
 - o "Blessed are all those who put their trust in him" (Ps. 2:12).
- **Faith avails God's rest.** God has a rest for believers which is entered by faith in His promises. When believers enter that rest, they "cease from their own works, as God did from his" (Heb. 4:10, along with the rest of Hebrews 3 and 4).
- **Faith enables God to fulfill His purpose through us**, as seen in this: "...we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith" (2 Thess. 1:11).
- **We live by faith in God.**
 - o "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).
 - o "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4).
 - o "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).
 - o "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).
- **Faith can increase.**
 - o "...count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).
 - o "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 1:20).
 - o "...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col. 2:7).

- o “Yet he did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promises of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God” (Rom. 4:20).
- o “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).
- **Faith gets results.**
 - o “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for” (Matt. 21:22).
 - o “Ask for wisdom and you will get it, if you believe and do not doubt” (James 1:5-6).
 - o “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible to you’” (Matt. 17:20).
- **Faith gives the victory.** “Everyone born of God overcomes the world...this is the victory...even our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4).
- **Love comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.** “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5).
- **Anything not of faith is sin.** “But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith. Everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).
- **The absence of faith and confession will result in shipwreck,** as seen here: “...holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith” (1 Tim 1:19).
- **Without faith we cannot please God.** “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

(There are no “Checking for Understanding” questions or other verses for this section.)

Key Points: Part Five

- Faith is believing that God exists and His Word is true.
- Faith in ourselves will never work.
- Study of the Word, and endurance of God’s training, increases our faith.
- Fellowship with God enables the function of faith.
- Confession restores fellowship; faith sustains it (notice the interplay between fellowship and faith...they support each other).
- Mature faith allows the Holy Spirit to produce His righteousness through us.
- Faith opens God’s richest assets and blessings to us.

Endnotes

1. *ABC's for Christian Growth*, p. 140.

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.