

Entering the Promised Land

Contentment at Last

by William Gibbs

Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last

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Dedicated to mature believers,
who know the price
of growth.

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Though these passages present impossible demands upon the human resource, God most evidently expects them to be realized in every believer's daily life. He knows better than we that we could never produce any such quality of life; yet He is not unreasonable in His expectation, since He stands ready to supply all that He demands. The new rule of life which is placed before the child of God under grace is, then, impossible from the human standpoint, and its realization must depend on a definite reliance upon the indwelling Spirit to do the whole will of God.

Lewis Sperry Chafer

In this book...

Introduction to Book

Part 1 Headed for the Promised Land

Part 2 Entering the Promised Land

Introduction to Book

Presentation of the Growth Sequence. The Christian life begins at salvation, when we believe the gospel message. The message says this: Jesus Christ took our sins on Himself on the cross; He died physically and spiritually as He was paying the penalty for our wrongdoings. This satisfied God's justice and enabled the Father to deal in mercy and grace regarding those who meet His criterion...which is to believe the gospel message. When we believe, we are born again, adopted into the royal family of God, and sealed forever by the Holy Spirit. But then the gospel message continues: After salvation, we are offered the privilege to choose a path of growth. But we can refuse this and allow ourselves to decline and decay, forgetting God and acting as though our lives have no connection to Him. So we can follow one of two trajectories: one toward God or one away from Him. There are many conditions that contribute to our growth, and we will examine these. And there are many forces that cause resistance to our growth; we will look at these, as well.

Record this: The reason we grow is to get closer to God, which—if we persevere—culminates in maturity and leads to the fullness of God and absolute surrender, accompanied by victory over sin. This one sentence alone encapsulates the topics of our last three books, which provide a natural progression from one level of maturity to the next. Here are the previous books, for which this study is a sequel:

God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living

Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God

Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide

These books are excellent preparations for this current study, which will build on the concepts they presented. The books—once again—treat the following: growth, surrender, and victory over sin. Advancement from one stage to the next depends on continual growth, made possible by using all the assets and techniques that grace makes available. If we grow enough, we will reach the point of super-maturity, at which time we can surrender entirely to God's will. This will, in turn, open the door to victory over sin and the release of maximum blessings. The road to such maturity is long and arduous, but grace will sustain and carry us through the entire process, if we remain committed to His grace system as we grow.

The final products of super-maturity, which include the fullness of God, surrender, and victory over sin, lead to the next step, which is *contentment*. This is the Promised Land, which we have moved toward—or away from—since the beginning of our saved lives. Our goal is to *get there*. The Promised Land is a blissful state of contentment that we, as earth-bound humans, can experience, whereby we can walk in perpetual fellowship with God and enjoy the full bounty of His grace and love. We will examine two aspects regarding this “Land”, including these: Part 1) “Headed for the Promised Land”, and Part 2) “Entering the Promised Land”.

Anticipating Different Kinds of Messages for Various Types of People. Various messages of God are intended for respective categories of the human race, of which there are several. The type of human we will say the least about is that group known as “lost humanity”, which includes those who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are lost and without God in the world. If you are in this category, and want to make a change, please go to this website: www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com, and click on the button on the homepage, which reads, “How to Become a Believer”. The message given there is uncomplicated...salvation from death to life can be completed instantly...and it will last forever. Eternity is at stake.

Other categories of *homo sapiens* need variable messages, and it is the objective of this book to provide information regarding all types, in order to meet the needs of various groups. Our audience consists entirely of believers, who fall into graduated levels of progression, based on their maturity. We provide messages unique to each respective level, as follows:

1. **Saved, but carnal, believers.** God’s message for them is that they must confess their sins to the Father, so they can receive forgiveness and return to fellowship with the Holy Spirit.
2. **Immature believers.** The message for them is to get on the pathway of growth through prayer, meaningful study of the Word, and engagement of the gifts of fellow believers. We will embellish this message as we proceed through this study.
3. **Mature believers.** Messages for believers nearing full maturity call for them to incorporate into their souls a full understanding of God’s love, after which they can receive the “fullness of God” and move on to “surrender” and victory over sin. The message that this study will add is that they can then live in the Promised Land, or the land of blessing and contentment. This will be discussed thoroughly.

It is important to note that the achievement of *contentment*, our topic in this book, may seem introspective and selfish, but the opposite is true. Like the rewards we earn that are stored up for us in heaven, our reaching the level of contentment glorifies God. He wants to bring contentment to us as complete fulfillment of His promises. And with contentment, we will be empowered as never before to bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, and peace, expressed in numerous ways. These outcomes will honor God.

Writer’s Note. One housekeeping note, before we begin, regarding the “scholarship” of this study: My goal is to present God’s message as I see it in Scripture. If God has given me the gift of discerning truths in the Word and the ability to put what I see into words, *not as matters of academic prowess and excellence*, but as understandable presentations of God’s techniques for living, then the purpose for this study will be fulfilled. The result: The message given will resonate within the hearts of true seekers. Be assured that my sole interest is to reflect God’s Word in a way that is true, and that honors and glorifies Him. I search for truths that will strengthen me and all those who share in what I have discovered. God bless your reading...but more so...your living. May He direct your paths.

Part One

Headed for the Promised Land

In This Part...

Preview. Introduction to Part One

Chapter 1. Dualities and Differences

Chapter 2. Satan and the World

Chapter 3. Dealing with Sin

Chapter 4. Humility before God

Chapter 5. Gifts for Service

Chapter 6. Growth of Believers

Preview

Introduction to Part One

Framing our Spiritual Growth. This “part” is about getting ready to enter the Promised Land. There are many factors in our preparation for this experience, as we will see. In this part we examine **growth** and **spirituality**, two operations that will bring us to new levels in our relationship with God. This enhanced relationship will enable us to enter the Promised Land. Reaching this point in our growth and spirituality will require instruction and training, throughout which we will need assets of grace to provide for and sustain us. The method for getting through training and preparation is called “endurance”, which stands for the presence of varying levels of faith (hopefully *increasing* levels) throughout our preparation. Training consists mostly of 1) enlightenment from the Word, and 2) tests and trials designed to prompt our growth. These will function alongside other techniques to move us toward maturity.

As we set the stage for this study, we want to see our place in the hierarchy of human beings, or where we fall among the various categories (suggested earlier) into which humanity is divided. In that connection, we know that we belong to the category of humans known as “believers”. It is good for us to be aware that God provides for believers categorically, but that there are conditions of maturity and spirituality which must be met before the full range of provisions can be claimed. We will see how to get all the provisions he promises.

Awareness of the place of Satan and the world is essential, if we are going to understand the major opponents to our growth. In order to grow, we must deal with sin. Sin, that propensity arising from our very nature, is goaded and supported by Satan and the world, and dealing with it is perhaps the most important task we face. As we begin to encounter sin, we must acknowledge early on that overcoming it is outside the reach of our own resources. We can, though, learn how to deal with sin through grace mechanisms; these will become increasingly apparent to us as we mature.

One of the key attitudes to take into a quest for maturity is humility. We must understand our limitations, and recognize God’s supremacy. Humility puts us in a frame of mind to become a student of God. From Him, we can learn and acquire what we need to increase our faith from day to day, until we have reached maturity.

Another big part of growth is the exercise of operational gifts that come to all believers from the Holy Spirit. These gifts must operate in an atmosphere of fellowship with God, wherein gifted believers share this fellowship mutually. This suggests that effective gifted services will be conducted within a system populated by mature believers. Gifts must operate by God’s design, in order for them to be productive, which means that *equality* must be practiced and maintained. An important part of maintaining a supportive environment is the achievement of equality among Christians. Equality

supports growth, and must be examined (albeit in an appendix, to be cited later).

Pushing Toward the Finish Line of Maturity. The growth we will be doing is measured by the amount of faith that we develop. Faith is what we want more of...what we want to build up. Faith is initially our acknowledgement of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf...the time of salvation...after which faith becomes an attitude of dependency on God’s power and grace. As we mature, we acquire a stronger awareness of God’s reality, His direct involvement in our lives, and our part in His plan. Faith that is maturing is moving from a mere state of “believing” God to one of “knowing” Him. This level of faith is hard-won, and will come only after intense shaping and transformation.

As we advance toward maturity, one of the final hurdles we must get over is the mastery of a single concept: God’s love. We cannot reach super-maturity without fully understanding how God’s love works. This is vital information for us. Our evolving image of God will envisage Him as a loving and patient God, who wants the very best for us—now and forever. Also, because He loves us, He is always available to us; we can come to Him in prayer. And if we are right with Him and moving toward Him, He will *hear* our prayers. This is a crucial part of our growth: We must remember to pray.

All of this is in Part 1. Many things that will be treated here are dependent on previous studies, which will rarely be duplicated at much length, but which will often be either referenced, or summarized. For your best understanding of the concepts presented in this “part”, we suggest you read the books listed on page 2, the titles of which are abbreviated here as *God’s Training Program*, *Surrender*, and *Killing Sin*. (For a quick review of the essential doctrines presented in these books, please see Appendix F, “Here is How the Christian Life Works”.) We will constantly extend specific concepts examined in these and other studies to help us master them; and they will also build a base for new discoveries from the Word. When we repeat ourselves, just remember that repetition and reflection are essential and instructive. (2 Pet. 1:12-13)

In summary, we will be discussing in Part 1 how we grow into great maturity. Then, in Part 2, we will show that the training and maximum growth done in Part 1 will lead to *surrender*, which extends to victory over sin. These lead to the condition we want most (know it or not), which is *contentment*. Contentment may seem a little simple and trite, but it is more complicated and meaningful than it seems on the surface. We will explore contentment completely, and show why it is more important and valuable than we ever imagined.

Chapter 1

Separating Dualities and Differences

Dichotomies Set the Stage. The Bible is full of pairs. Sometimes they are opposites, and sometimes they are symbiotic. It is good for us to distinguish good from evil, divine activity from satanic devices, truths from lies, and God's work from man's work. We can only suggest these in this short chapter, and give some examples of things that come in two's. God wants us to rightly divide His truths, and part of that is knowing which side the various forces, people, teachings, and actions are on. Are they for God or against Him? This is what we must watch for, as we look forward to the pathway to maturity, the fullness of God, and a life filled with contentment.

Differences among People. The greatest distinction among all of humanity is that which exists between those who have believed the message concerning Jesus Christ and those who have not. These are the saved and the unsaved, meaning the redeemed and the condemned. These two groups represent the only two races in existence, with all other distinguishing characteristics among humans being of much less importance. Believers and unbelievers comprise the two most diverse groups, both in standing and destiny. Believers are saved, in union with Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit...and they are the possessors of eternal life. Unbelievers are lost and without direction spiritually, and they will spend eternity without God.

Unfortunately, believers still have sinful natures that look exactly the same as the sinful natures of all other humans, saved or unsaved. This causes the behavior of a believer that is not being led by God to take on the appearance of an unbeliever. Anything an unbeliever can do, a believer can do as well, no matter how heinous. So the way a Christian acts may not match his eternal placement (in union with Christ), because a believer who is being dominated by sin will reflect a *state* that does not represent his *standing*. Put another way, the "condition" of a believer controlled by his sinful nature will not portray his permanent "position" in Christ. We'll say more about this, but the main point so far is that, while believers and unbelievers are radically different, they may look exactly alike.

But believers can also look spiritual, Christ-like, and righteous, if they are being led by the Spirit, rather than the flesh (sinful nature). This separates them from believers who are controlled by the sinful nature. Believers who are directed by the flesh are light years in distance, conditionally, from believers who are operating in the power of the Spirit. The difference between spiritual and carnal believers is clear-cut and absolute, operating as an on-off condition. A believer will always be controlled by either the Spirit, or the flesh, but never by some shaded combination of the two.

Another distinction among believers has to do with growth and maturity. Believers will be operating, at any given time, at some plotted point along the growth scale. Their position on that scale will range from the beginning level (infants) to the middle level (intermediates) to the advanced level (mature believers). *Maximum* growth leads to the *ultimate* level (seldom seen), which is called "super-

maturity” (fullness of God, surrender, victory over sin). (We will see these in more detail later in this study.) Levels of maturity, then, follow a continuum, from the least to the greatest, wherein the status of one’s faith can move from a weaker spot to a stronger one. The measure of one’s faith determines the degree of one’s growth.

The ideal human condition, the place and position which God favors, consists of 1) being “saved”, 2) being controlled by the Holy Spirit, and 3) maturing. Such an outcome not only pleases God, but provides the prospect for the best possible life on earth. The quality of such a life, however, is not measured by the world’s standards, but by criteria set up by God. These standards represent divine objectives and eternal values.

Conditional Dualities. There are other “dualities” pertaining to believers, which disclose the way God’s system works...its requirements and its rewards. These dualities consist of conditions on one hand, and outcomes on the other. We want to list a few of these that distinguish prerequisites and outcomes in the Christian life, in order to set the stage for upcoming discussions on the need to meet God’s requirements in order to receive “more grace”. Here are some examples of God’s requirements, and what is provided when they are met:

Condition	Outcome	Related Scripture
Ask	Receive	Luke 11:9-10
Walk blameless	No good thing withheld	Ps. 84:11
Seek the Lord	Lack no good thing	Ps. 34:11
Ask according to God’s will	Receive what we ask	1 John 5:14-15
Thirst and hunger for God	Filled with good things	Ps. 107:8-9
Delight in God	Get the desires of your heart	Ps. 37:5
Make the Most High your dwelling	No harm or disaster will come near	Ps. 91:9-10
Trust and do good	Dwell in the land with safe pasture	Ps. 37:4
Love God	Everything works together for good	Rom. 8:28
Seek God with all your heart	Find God	Ps. 29:13
Being righteous	Flourish like the palm tree	Ps. 92:12-15
Trust God and acknowledge Him	Paths will be opened	Ps. 3:5- 6
Seek His righteousness first	All things will be added to you	Matt. 6:32-33
Abide in Him; His words abide in you	Ask what you wish; it will be given	John 15:7
Pray and give thanks	Peace of God will guard your heart	Phil. 4:6-7

These dualities give the flavor of our role as believers, and show what God brings when we follow His leading. There are endless other such dualities. Like the ones just seen, most provisions which God offers are conditional. Our job is to find out what the conditions are and meet them.

It is also important to understand that conditions will not be met through determination or effort, but by our learning how to use the *resources God offers* (grace techniques) to enable us to *overcome what we are* (human), so we can *exhibit qualities that are righteous and godly* (divine good). Fulfillment of God's requirements will never be accomplished in our own strength, but rather they will only be completed by God, according to the plan He has devised to enable helpless and feckless humans to satisfy His will. When we reach the level that we are living by and for the will of God, we will participate in the endless bounty of His grace, which includes strength for any task, and blessings of every kind. It is the goal of this study to help all of us see more clearly how we get into the Promised Land (the one for this Age), and what we can expect when we get there.

We will see many binary sets as we proceed through this study. Infants vs. mature, spiritual vs. carnal, walking in the light vs. walking in the darkness, and so on. Our objective is to choose the right pathway toward growth: seeking truth, getting closer to God, and discovering God's empowerment for the great things He has planned for us.

Chapter 2

Satan and the World

SATAN, THE WORLD, AND US

Satan's Attempts to Stop Believers. We must cite impediments to our progress. These include Satan, the world, our sinful nature, and the law of sin. All of these operate within and/or around us. Satan is prominent among these, but he is not as we often picture him...some hideous monster that sends people running. He is actually beautiful and brilliant, and his open and compelling appeal is visible, mesmerizing, and humanly irresistible. He is also powerful, with unfathomable personal strength that takes down foes with ease; plus, he has a great fighting force consisting of a billion-being army of fallen angels to reinforce his attacks.

In addition, Satan has the ENTIRE WORLD at his disposal, to use pretty much as He pleases. The world makes sin attractive, as it projects Satan's deceptive appearance, and—as stated above—his draw is beyond the ability of unassisted humans to resist. But summoning to sin (or self-righteousness, which is also a sin) is not all Satan does; he uses the world to create anxiety and inflict pain to cause us to forget God...more on this below. When we are told to watch out for Satan (that prowling lion), this is intended to alert us to his subtle workings in the world. (We have taught in previous studies that Satan also works directly on our minds, to keep us from processing truths that will teach us to use God's strength in dealing with Satan. This must not be forgotten, but our emphasis in this study is on Satan's schemes to use the *world* to take us down.)

God is still God, even with Satan on the loose, and God is ultimately in charge, so how does Satan come after us? Satan must have God's permission to do what he does, but God gives him wide latitude in the world, because his temptations, taunts, and attacks provide tremendous training grounds for God's children. God protects believers in ways that fit His plan, but allows Satan to have access into the lives of believers, as it serves His purpose. For a complete study on the place that Satan has in the world and the way he uses it to oppose God and undermine believers, read *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*. See especially "The War Against God", pages 55-93, and "The World", pages 95-117.

Satan uses primarily two avenues of attack against believers, both of which are designed to weaken believers' resolve to focus on God, to grow, and to trust God. The two areas of encroachment are seen as 1) temptation to sin, and 2) administration of suffering to strain and wear down believers' faith.

Regarding his first strategy, Satan wants to pull us into sin, because that keeps our sinful nature in charge and cuts off the influence of the Spirit in our hearts. When we are living "in sin", we are living in cooperation with Satan, and in opposition to God. Satan will use every device in the world to pull us

into patterns of sin (and/or “human good”), many of which are addictive and repetitive. He knows our weaknesses, and freely exploits them to entice us to sin.

Satan has another strategy, which is to impose suffering and shortages on believers, compelling them to trust in resources found in the world, including their own, to deal with the problems which Satan introduces. Satan is constantly accusing us before God, appealing to God for permission to test us. God allows this to prove and strengthen our faith and advance us toward maturity. If we are growing, the effect of pressure is to make us grow in our trust of God, which makes Satan’s strategy to subvert our faith through pressure...counter-productive. But more often, Satan’s strategy works and causes God to be doubted, and faith to weaken.

The best example of testing for training was seen in the experience of Job, who went through great suffering at the hand of Satan. This was allowed because he was the most mature believer in the world, and God wanted him to demonstrate his advanced faith and maturity. But as happens too often, since even the most mature believer can slip under pressure, Job caved. He ended up confessing his failure, however, and was restored in the end to twice his previous blessings. (For a complete discussion of Job’s struggle and triumph, see “Is God Good? The Story of Job”, page 22 and following, in *Bible Basics on Living in God’s Plan: Pathway to Purpose*.)

All of Satan’s efforts are aimed at weakening the faith of believers. If he can get them to doubt God’s existence or power, or—perhaps more subtly—God’s love, he can make easy prey of them. Satan whispers words of doubt *inside* of believers, but a lot of his work and influence comes from the *outside*...from the world. The world is a primary tool for Satan’s wiles, and since he is the ruler of the world, he can use any asset in the world to trick, deceive, and mislead believers (within certain limits which God sets).

Satan uses *people* and *events* to destroy the faith and well-being of believers who are growing. People can be used individually by Satan, some of whom are actually “possessed” by him or by one or more of his fallen angels; or fallen angels (demons) can be grouped and used collectively, to shape the format and function of governments, organizations, and other assemblages of people, in order to undermine the cause of Christ and God’s divine establishments. (Divine establishments include individual freedom, marriage, family, and the governments which are designed to protect these.)

The winds that blow against God’s truth and those who are growing by it are devastating to the operation of faith and spirituality in the world, and if we ever wonder where such “wind” comes from, we need look no further than Satan. He is the originator, designer, and leader of all opposition against God and His people. And God’s people are total suckers for a pretty face and a fast line; unfortunately, Satan has both of these. Yes, we have grace assets to help us, and we will look at these, but we must acknowledge that the forces aligned against us are virtually overpowering and unstoppable. We must adopt all of God’s resources and employ all of God’s strength to protect us from evil intrusions of such great proportions.

The World and Satan. A believer who is growing in his faith and in his awareness of the place of God in the world, must—at some point—determine what is more real to him: God...or the world. The world overwhelms us, and thrashes us around like an oscillating blade in a washing machine, pulling us

in one instant toward sin and pleasure, and in the next toward disillusionment through pain and deprivation...and it will never leave us laundered and clean, as we shall see. We may seek relief through sin's titillation, or prosperity through the world's alluring machinations; yet nothing in the world gives us solid ground to build on, except in a temporal, worldly sense that will last only so long, and then will vanish.

(Our prayer: God, our Father, deliver us from slavery to the world. Excuse the world...its forces...from our presence, and care for us in its absence. We want you. You are real to us. The world can evaporate and disappear, but we desire only you. We choose you.)

Conversely, we may choose the world. When we think of the world, we may tend to think of sordid practices involving immorality or criminality...conditions and behaviors that are considered degenerate and/or destructive. These are in the world, for sure, as Satan admittedly uses crass evil to undermine faith. But he also uses innocuous pursuits, such as "trying to get ahead in the world", to take us away from God. We will look at the example of *making money* to analogize Satan's strategy in the world. Much of Satan's use of the world involves advancing the trappings of wealth and the presentation of fame and success as the greatest achievements possible.

Please understand that there is nothing inherently wrong with money or earning money. It is *Satan's use* of the legitimate enterprise of earning money, coupled with our own predilection for wrong, that makes it the source of great evil. He does this by distorting its purpose and corrupting its function. Satan, along with our sinful nature, gives meaning to the phrase, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10a).

A quick caveat seems in order: Money can be used to destroy the Christian walk of faith, but this does not mean that we should not work hard to acquire an appropriate amount of money. Laziness in working...in the world...is disapproved in Scripture. Here are some examples of the divine view of laziness:

Prov. 10:4-5—Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.

Prov. 24—A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

2 Thess. 3:11-12—We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

Prov. 6:6-9—Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?

Prov. 21:5—The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

Prov. 27: 23-24—Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.

Our instructions are clear: Direct your labor toward profit, and carefully plan how to make and spend money. Give value to what you have earned and use it and invest it with careful consideration. It is GOOD to earn money honestly and to pay attention to what you acquire. Give to money its proper value, and manage it well.

So what's the rub? It is Satan's distorted use of money, and the persuasion he uses to make believers think that acquiring money is the most important thing we can do. This leads to all kinds of mischief in order to get money. Money that is gained through dishonesty or subterfuge, especially if it is harmful to others, is particularly stained with evil. James 5:5-6 condemns the behavior of those who earn money illicitly and hurt others in the process: "You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you" (see also verses 1-4). Accumulating wealth by taking it away from others is commanded against, and will have bad results: "Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire" (James 5:2-4).

CHASING THE WIND

Wealth is Likely to be a Problem. Money itself is not evil; it is the over-valuing of money that causes bad things to happen. This is a good example of the kind of trap that Satan sets for us in the world. He makes the world seem appealing and attractive, but it has barbs that grab us and hold us, while it injects poison and immobilizes us. Look next at some verses that tell us what a problem wealth can be:

Prov. 11:4—Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

Prov. 11:28—Whoever trusts in riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.

Prov. 30:8-9—Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

Matt. 19:23—Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

1 Tim. 6:9-10—People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

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

Matt. 6:19-21—Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust

destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matt. 6:24—No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

It is clear that too much money tends to have the effect of causing us to look away from God. This is because the possession of money creates a false sense of confidence, a belief that money is all we need to solve our problems. By the time we realize what is happening to us, we will already be ensnared in the nets of the world, and extraction will only be possible by our being restored to God's resources, including resumption of our faith in what He can do for us apart from the world.

Money also erodes our desire for godliness, and any sense that we need it. When we awaken to the reality of how empty riches are...apart from grace and grace systems...we will be amazed that we were tricked so easily into believing that our greatest gain could be measured in monetary terms. Until we grow, however, the lure of money...with all its adornments...will be irresistible.

1 Tim. 6:11-12 says this: "But you, man of God, flee from all this [all this eagerness for money, as seen in verse 10], and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." Not only is Paul instructing Timothy not to overvalue money, but to run away from such values and chase after growth and godliness instead. The truth emerges that money is a deterrent to spiritual well-being, whether it has to do with too much of it, or too little. Either condition can cause a believer to take his eyes off God, which will result in his not praying or studying; when this happens, he lapses quickly into carnality and retrogression. Our hope is in this: When we attend to our growth, we can trust God through times of lean, and continue to focus on Him whenever we have more than we actually need. Perspective depends on maturity, and whatever faith we have developed will be sustained if we will persevere on the growth track, whether money comes or goes.

1 Tim. 6:17 tells us what happens when our hope is constantly directed toward God, rather than toward money. This verse says the following:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Having "stuff" is one thing; enjoying it is another. As we saw in Jer. 17:6, "...he will not see prosperity when it comes." The problem is that having a good deal of money ultimately leaves its possessor dissatisfied, and he thinks the solution is to have still more. And the beat goes on.

After the courtship and honeymoon of acquiring money, there is a time for seeing that it cannot give true happiness. What promises a great sense of purpose and permanent security becomes a hiding place where many people live out their lives, insulated from reality...that is, until that reality crashes down the door of their secluded hideaway. For believers who rely on money alone for security and meaning, this reality comes in the form of a shaking from God, who will not be ignored forever by His children. He is the one who said, "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24b), and "where your

treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). Prov. 23:4 adds, “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint.”

The question is, what do we “chase after” if money is not the thing that will give us the good life? That is the central question in this study. If the world and all that it offers is not the point of our lives, then what is? Where can we find happiness? This is what we will explain before we are through. Ps. 37:16-17 suggests an answer: “Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.” Countless times Scripture talks about the privileges of the righteous, and righteousness is frequently contrasted with practices in the world. But righteousness does not come easily, as we will see, especially with our lives being always, per force, conducted IN THE WORLD. There is no escape from the ravenous wolves of the world...so we must stand and face them. But, thank God, we are not alone.

What we can Learn from Solomon Regarding the World. The best example of the value of the world’s largess (or its lack of it) for believers is found in Ecclesiastes. What a perfect statement of abiding faith this book is...faith in the world, that is, which is where Solomon lived most of the latter part of his life. Don’t worry. He was restored after forty years of “chasing the wind”, when he authored Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, and wrote much of Proverbs . His story is astonishing. The description of his efforts trying to find satisfaction in the world, and the summary of his experience, is found in Eccl. 2:10-11, which says this:

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Someone said, “To the man who has everything, everything becomes nothing.” Solomon had it all, and enjoyed none of it. Such is the outcome of worldly pursuits that do not include God. Solomon conducted eight experiments while he was “chasing after the wind”, attempting to glean from the world the pleasure, satisfaction, security, and contentment that he wanted. The eight experiments were, as follows:

1. Attempts to understand man’s existence through education and philosophy.
2. Efforts to get pleasure from partying and “doing whatever you can think of”.
3. Using the family as a means to ultimate happiness.
4. Being over-obsessed with time and schedules.
5. Relying on money and success and achievement to bring a sense of place and purpose.
6. Building power and a reputation to sustain security and self-realization.
7. Using sex as a source of satisfaction and fulfillment.
8. Being a hero to garner recognition and notoriety. (Endnote 1)

Solomon was the richest and smartest and probably the best-looking man alive (after all, David and Bathsheba were his parents)...and he was the king. He had unlimited power and privilege, and could do or get whatever he wanted. So he was able to tap the very best that the world could offer in every area of human endeavor. And what did he gain from all his forays into the world's treasure? Eccl. 1:2 answers this: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." He found NOTHING in the world that could provide lasting value or contentment, even though he was the wealthiest, most powerful man in the world. Relying on the world will not work, even though, when we look out at it, we see many promises of success and meaningful lives, stated or exemplified mostly by those who "know how the world really works".

Don't Envy the Prosperity of the Wicked. Greed always fosters discontent. Part of our frustration in the world is seeing what others do and have, that we cannot. The wicked often prosper, which creates both envy and emulation among believers. We want to have what they have and do what they do, and...whether we have little or much...we tend to value it and pursue it. Prov. 23:17 warns against this, saying, "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of [growing faith in] the Lord." Prov. 24:19-20 adds this: "Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out." Our view of the kind of prosperity that is often evident for the wicked looks like that of David, which we see expressed in Ps. 73:2-5, as follows:

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles, their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.

It seems there are examples all around us of people who have no interest in God, but who are successful in the world, enjoying wealth and health in abundance. How content they seem. And for some time they may actually find satisfaction in their fame and fortune, even though they have rejected God. But our "success"—that of believers—will be measured by a different standard, with the result that we will not find lasting satisfaction in anything the world offers, *if it displaces our faith and our walk with God*. We do not *need* what the "wicked" have, even though we think we *want* it. An accurate assessment of what is good and worthy of our interest will not take root until we have committed to growth long enough and seriously enough to move past a preoccupation with the world and its lure. But the world is in our face, isn't it, which means it is impossible to ignore. We must deal with it, even though it has us surrounded.

Should we Fast? One main purpose of Satan in the world is to deter believers from growth. For example, the world works constantly to "hook" believers into some fascination or entanglement with the world, some of which are openly harmful, while others are cloaked in innocence. Satan even uses "essential" things to distract us. For example, food is important to our survival as human beings. Sexual relations are important for the survival of the human race. These "necessities" can become impediments, because of our tendency to over-attend our visceral pleasures. We attend to our bodies more readily than we take care of our souls.

This brings up the issue of fasting, which we want to clear up. Fasting was a big practice during the Age

of Law, and was practiced to some degree during the “transition” period between the Age of Law and that of Grace. During the time of Christ’s ministry on earth, and for a short time thereafter, the Age of Law was fading, and the implementation of the Age of Grace was getting underway. (Writings in the Bible reflect the various ages. The ones we are concerned with include 1) the Age of Law, 2) the Transition Period/beginning of the church, and 3) the Age of Grace. (FYI: All the ages, from beginning to end, are broken down in Scripture, as follows: The Old Testament was written to show Creation and the origins of our faith, the history and laws of God’s chosen people Israel, and prophecies related to them and the Messiah; the gospels were written to record and propagate the work of Christ; Acts was given as an introduction to the work of the Spirit and an account of the early church; the epistles provided a full disclosure of all facets and operations of the Age of Grace, or Age of the Spirit, and gave references to the next age; and Revelation gave a full prophecy and preview of end times.)

It is interesting that fasting is not commanded, or even recommended, ONCE in the epistles, which are our main source for truth and growth. It is true that Paul fasted as part of his apostleship (1 Cor. 6:5, 2 Cor. 11:27), but he never included fasting as a mandate for spiritual growth. In 1 Cor. 7:5, he did concede that husbands and wives could practice sexual abstinence for a specific amount of time...by mutual consent...in order to devote themselves to prayer. But in the next verse, Paul said, “I say this as a concession, not as a command.” So Paul was not out there pounding the pulpit for more fasting. It was not a requirement. The wide-spread use of fasting took place prior to the Age of Grace, and is not something demanded for us.

This is important to note: The epistles, as we stated, contain our PRIMARY source for “truths for living”. They are what Jesus Christ promised as clarification for everything that He had said and done. To understand what Jesus intends for this age, we must look to Paul and the other writers of the epistles. Through an examination of the letters of the apostles, this much is clear: FASTING IS NOT INCLUDED AS A PROSCRIPTION FOR SPIRITUAL LIVING IN THIS PRESENT AGE!

Fasting is still important, I believe, but in an extended application, and not in the literal sense of refusing foods or marital intercourse for specific lengths of time. Fasting, in a broader sense, represents a refusal of bodily (or fleshly) accommodations, meaning a separation from the world, but even more than this is implied. *It is detachment from the world, spiritually...*which translates into all areas of life. We live and work in the world, which is a given, but we must not *love* the world. Fasting is keeping the world at arm’s length, even though our lives are submerged within it.

Here’s a question: When is it appropriate for believers to be distanced from the practices and values of the world? Answer: all the time. But that is the perspective of a super-mature believer (what we aspire to) and cannot be expected from other believers, ranging from new ones to those who are measurably mature. Moving away from the world will be a natural outcropping of moving closer to God, which will not happen until substantial growth has occurred. Stepping back from the world is the fasting that will come from the power of the Spirit, as we learn to live more faithfully in communion with Him, praying and studying and growing into fully-accessible instruments for His use...a process for which the “world” is not helpful.

I like what Andrew Murray said about this, in his discussion of prayer:

Give up everything to follow Christ in the path He opens to us. Pray much. Fast if you need to. Do anything you must so neither the body nor the world can hinder you in the great life-work He has for us—talking to God in prayer, so that we may become people of faith whom He can use in His work of saving the world. (Endnote 2)

As we mature, we will become less enamored with the glitz, glamour, and goods of the world, and more satisfied only with the things of God. It just happens with growth. Giving up the world doesn't even sound all that interesting from this side of maturity...it's so fascinating and fun, and face it, necessary...but our view of the world will change *as we grow*, and at some point, God will become everything to us. I believe there's nothing greater. But take note: Until we start to mature as believers (and, alas, how few there are who will) we will not be equipped to LIVE AND OPERATE IN AND AROUND THE WORLD...AND REMAIN UNTOUCHED BY ITS NEFARIOUS AIMS. Growth is the key, and the use and application of everything we are learning—the techniques, assets, and concepts—is the way to achieve this growth.

The world is also a great source of pain and worry and temptation to growing believers, and we will discuss these in the next chapter, in connection with dealing with sin.

Chapter 3

Dealing with Sin

DEALING WITH SIN

Getting Sin Under Control. There is a difference between weakening sin, and defeating it. And beyond defeating it, there is the issue of “killing” it. It is true that we can weaken sin by using the techniques God has given; these will be reviewed briefly in this chapter as part of our preparation to defeat it. But actually killing it once for all is a process left for that time when this earth is no longer our home. It is possible now for us to beat it, to have victory over it, but not to kill it. When we use the techniques for growth faithfully, we will advance in our faith and eventually reach super-maturity, which will equip us to *conquer* the menace of sin. (For a thorough study on the management and defeat of sin, please read our last book, *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*.)

There is a lot of confusion concerning sin. Being readily able to handle sin, just because we have been saved, is a common theme from pulpits, but this does not fit the message of Scripture. We wish it could be so easy. But we still have a sinful nature, and this nature works in league with all the other forces of evil to tear down our spiritual stance. Before this nature can be checked, we must cross the desert of preparation, acquiring the learning and fulfilling the training needed to reach sufficient maturity for victory over sin to become a reality.

Dealing with sin, like squaring off with any opponent, or facing up to any addiction, requires step-wise growth that goes on *one day at a time*. It is like God’s provision of “daily bread”. Dealing with sin is a moment-by-moment process, with our guard never being dropped, because we know that if we go slack, we will catch it in the jaw. Sin is like an onion, in that—when we remove one layer (e.g., deal with one chronic sin)—other layers appear beneath (meaning other sins are there to take the place of the one we just peeled away). When we get victory over one sin, we cannot sit down and say, “There...that’s done...I have beaten sin.” That is because more are coming. Beating sin is actually possible, but we have miles to go before that will become a reality.

Our present objective is to get sin under control, so that we are dealing with it in the “immediate” and reducing the amount of time it is dominating us. This is simply a matter of using the techniques we have learned. To make sure we have these procedures mastered, we will review them all before we are through with this chapter.

Consequences of Sin. There are those who say that embracing the “grace” approach as God’s way of dealing with sin encourages laxness and permissibility among God’s people. But this reflects a misunderstanding of “grace”...or what grace means in our relationship with God. Grace is based on love, and is the basis for God’s treatment of sin in the lives of His *children*. Sometimes, in fact often,

God's love represents "tough love", or the opposite of permission to live as we choose. Grace administers training, which will be witnessed in two forms: 1) as "discipline", for believers who are carrying unconfessed sins on their records, and 2) as "experiential instruction", which is seen as "training exercises" given to those who are in fellowship. To be clear, we see two kinds of "believer-preparation", one referring to *discipline*, and the other to *training*. It's all training, of course, but—technically—the first is for correction (discipline), and the second is for advancement (training). All preparation through discipline or training, whatever form it takes, is to get us to notice God, adjust to Him, trust Him, and walk closer to Him.

Sin is never overlooked. In fact, God "judges" us for our sins, though this is not the same as the judgment that will come to *unbelievers* in the form of "eternal condemnation". The judgment of believers is seen in two forms, one in time, and the other when we are no longer bound by time. We are, first of all, judged in time for unconfessed sin...through discipline, as we mentioned. There is no question that this discipline can be quite painful. Secondly, we will be judged at the "Judgment Seat of Christ", when we are gone from this earth. We have covered discipline in the past, and will have more to say about it below, but first we will take a brief look at the "Judgment Seat". When we stand before Christ for this judgment, the "works" of believers will be evaluated, with the result that any fruit borne by the Holy Spirit *through us* while we were on earth will be rewarded...while self-generated works will be burned up. (Our sins will not be an issue, as these have been paid for and removed for believers.) Here is what Paul told the Corinthians concerning this:

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping the flames. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

We have examined this verse before in some detail, and refer you to former studies for in-depth analysis. For now, we want to be clear that "works" will be rewarded. Remember: these are not "works" of our own making; our self-designed or religious works NEVER have merit with God. These are works completed by God; only what He does will count. Our job is to learn how we can be used by Him in the completion of His work. And even though He does the work, we will get the rewards, because the work He does through us brings glory to Him.

Our immediate concern is with the consequences which accrue to sin now...in time. The late J. Hampton Keathley gave a good run-down on these consequences, which we have paraphrased below, interspersed with some of our own thoughts. Keathley's list can be found in his book, *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation* (pp. 96-100). We must interject: *ABC's* is, in my opinion, the best primer for new or struggling Christians available today. Milk to meat, Keathley's studies will give his readers a great boost toward understanding and maturity. The book is informative, insightful, and inspiring. Here are the consequences of sin that Keathley provided in *ABC's*:

1. **Loss of Fellowship with the Lord.** When we sin, we no longer qualify for fellowship with the Holy Spirit. At that moment, His control over our hearts is truncated and our sinful nature takes over. This condition exists until we confess and are restored to fellowship, when the

Spirit will resume control. We do not lose salvation when we sin, but the resultant loss of fellowship means that we are not “living” in the power of the Spirit. 1 John 1:6 addresses this, as follows: “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.”

2. **Divine Discipline from the Lord.** As we have stated in the past, discipline is not punishment. Discipline is the *corrective* form of preparation, whereas training is the *instructive* form. Notice the effects of these: We cannot be *instructed* until our spiritual alignment is *corrected*. Correction would not be necessary if we confessed often, and received forgiveness for the sins which we have committed. But without confession, discipline will be forthcoming...and that is no fun. Discipline for sin, rebellion, or ignoring God can be quite imposing, and will go on until we return to fellowship. Rev. 3:19 puts it simply, saying, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.” “Repent”, with reference to believers means to “confess”. Confession gets forgiveness and ends discipline. (If suffering goes on after confession, its nature changes from discipline to training.)
3. **Loss of Power and Production.** When we sin, fellowship is lost, and the fire (energy) of the Spirit is “quenched” (1 Thess. 5:19). Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing worthwhile spiritually. This is because we will have only the flesh with which to work, and the flesh can produce nothing spiritually qualitative. Until the control of the Spirit is restored, the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5:22-23) will not be seen. Gal. 3:1-5 encapsulates this concept:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

4. **Loss of Opportunities.** When we are controlled by the flesh, rather than the Holy Spirit, we will not be attuned to the leading of the Spirit, and will miss opportunities for service. Our gifted service cannot operate without the filling of the Spirit, which makes us virtually useless spiritually. Sin changes legitimate “self-interest” into sinful “self-centeredness”, which prevents attention to God and cuts off creditable service to those He wants to lovingly care for through us. Gal. 6:10 frames this by saying, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” If we have unconfessed sin on our record, and are walking “in the flesh”, we will not be serving in the Spirit, thus missing specific opportunities that will never come again. We shall pass this way but once.
5. **Broken Relationships and Disharmony.** Carnality brings rancor and pain to relationships, due to the loss of spiritual perspective and the absence of God’s love in the heart. Believers out of fellowship will not enjoy fellowship *between them*, even if “social decorum” is being followed. 1 John 1:3 describes this, as follows: “We proclaim to you what

we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” Harmony is built on fellowship.

6. **Loss of Physical Health and Vitality.** Sin is not the only cause of sickness, but it certainly may be a major cause, as per 1 Cor. 11:27-32, which says this:

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

7. **Loss of Rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.** As we saw above, when the works of believers are evaluated for the sake of rewards, credit will be given only for work done by the Holy Spirit, which is the only work that God recognizes. When our sins are confessed, we will see His work done through our hearts and hands. Revisit 1 Cor. 13:13-15, presented earlier. According to this passage, creditable works will be rewarded, while all others will be burned up. We will be “saved”, regardless, but with no works surviving the fire, it will be by the skin of our teeth. (Endnote 3)

God is our Helper with Sin. Our connection with the divine is our greatest source of resistance to sin. We are helpless to combat sin, apart from empowerment imbued by the Holy Spirit. We must look to God for solutions regarding sin...before, during, and after the sin. We will not resolve the sin problem without God; this means we will not stop sinning, and we will not dispose of sin’s record, without Him. Bishop Handley Moule said the following about God’s role in dealing with sin:

Day-by-day holiness is Jesus’ active obedience becoming our present obedience by the power of the Cross through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This is the Life of God in us: we trust the indwelling Christ who changes our hearts, thus producing right character in us leading to right conduct through us. Jesus Christ has enabled union with Himself and His holy Father. His holiness becomes our holiness by faith. His victory is our victory. Jesus’ victory over the world, the flesh, sin, death, and the devil is our victory over the world, the flesh, sin, death, and the devil. The resurrected Christ lives in us by the Holy Spirit; He who raised Jesus from the dead gives us life and that life is the freedom not to sin (Rom. 8:11). (Endnote 4)

What a beautiful statement of God’s presence within us, and recognition of His power to bring victory over “flesh, sin, death, and the devil”. To this Moule added the following:

I know what it is to lay the whole of it [besetting sin] upon my Lord’s head, and the whole of it beneath my Lord’s feet, and without anticipation of the future, to know that for the next step He is able to keep me from stumbling [re: Jude 1:24-25]. (See Endnote 5)

It is frustrating to want to do better and be better, and still be plagued by sin. Since we are

progressively understanding that overcoming sin does not rely on us, but on God's power, it seems foolish that we should continue striving to conquer it on our own. We must rely on God to enable the victory we seek. 2 Peter 1:3-10 shows what we can expect when we acknowledge God's power and follow up with a growth regimen that will enable us to live in that power. Here is what this passage says:

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

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Notice that God's power is what we need for a godly life, and that we get that through knowledge of Him. Through His "glory and goodness" (His character), He gives us the "precious promises". What do these do? They are the way for us to participate in the "divine nature", meaning the power that is available to us. The NET translates the first part of verse 3: "Through these things he has bestowed on us his precious and most magnificent promises, so that by means of what was promised you may become partakers of the divine nature..." Through the techniques and assets and provisions He has promised, we can access the power that will help us escape corruption in the world. By following His Word, we can beat sin, because the Word tells us how this is done. None of this is automatic. We have to grow to bring God's nature into our battle with sin.

DEFEATING SIN

Killing Sin. When we say "killing sin", we actually mean "beat it down so that it no longer has power over us". It is never really dead-dead. Even when we win a victory today, sin will live to fight another day. The best we can do is *defeat it today*, and every day, as we keep on growing and moving toward God. As we shall see later, it is possible for us to move into a land where sin is a wimp and Satan has headed for the hills...right where we will be living...in these bodies and on this earth. But that is not today. We are just beginning.

New believers sometimes assume, and many pastors imply, that our defeat of sin is an inevitable consequence of our being saved. This causes confusion, because neophytes discover early on that sin has legs under it, and it is running at full speed right toward them. This can be disillusioning. What they should be told is that GROWTH must occur in order for them to develop all the skills needed to access God's strength, which will enable them to resist and—at some point, overcome—sin. Too many techniques are presented as though they are fully operational and efficacious from day one. Growth is required.

Believers at any stage can have problems with sin, and they should keep the perspective that Christ has paid for those sins on the cross, and that all he asks is that we confess them. Following confession, our job is to grow as rapidly as possible by studying (i.e., learning truths for living), praying, and enduring God's training. Only then can we ever hope to beat sin.

Keathley described this situation in *ABC's for Christian Growth*, where he said this:

People often lack assurance because of struggles they have with certain sins. They wonder if a true believer would have these kinds of problems. The real problem is ignorance of man's sinful nature, the spiritual warfare we are in, God's means of deliverance, and the need to grow and mature in Christ. (Endnote 6)

There are a ton of doctrines tied up in this one statement. The one we are most concerned with is this: WE MUST GROW TO BEAT SIN. This is the major theme of the book, *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*. We see this book as absolutely essential for understanding and dealing with sin in the life of a believer. Please download (for free) or purchase this book at www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com. Since we can't enclose that book within this one, we want to sketch several *Killing Sin* highlights, featuring some of its more salient points.

Points from the Book, *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*. Here are some of the key points covered in *Killing Sin*:

1. **Wanting God.** The defeat of sin begins, not with a desire to kill sin, but with a desire to get closer to God. Good comes from wanting God, more than from wanting good. When we want God, and follow through with steps to know Him better and move toward Him, good will happen, and sin will be overcome. Ps. 73:25-26 encapsulates this concept perfectly, saying, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."
2. **Seeking God.** Those who want God will seek Him, by using the techniques He gives for finding Him, knowing Him, and drawing near to Him. Seeking God in a way that gives thrust to our growth will increase our faith and enable us to trust God to beat sin down. Jer. 29:11-14a says,

"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," declares the Lord..."

True seekers will find Him.

3. **Fellowship.** Whenever we have confessed our sins (1 John 1:9), we will be in fellowship with God (until the next sin). While we are in fellowship, the Holy Spirit will have access to our hearts so that He can perform His feeding and strengthening ministry in us. This is the most important step in our growth, because if we are not in fellowship, we will not be able to pray properly, and we cannot learn Scripture. Fellowship is the beginning point for everything we

will ever accomplish as believers, because this is “step one” in accessing His strength. Only through His might can sin be overpowered. 1 John 1:3 says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (For a broader discussion of fellowship, as seen in 1 John 1, see Appendix A, “Fellowship and 1 John 1”.)

4. **Use of our Gifts and Those of Others.** As we grow, we learn to use our gifts to serve God by helping others (much more on gifts later), and the operation of others’ gifts certainly help each of us personally. The purpose of gifts is “edification”, or building up...but building up what? Our *faith*. Growth is the reason for gifts; unfortunately, one of the main reasons believers today are not reaching maturity is that they are not accessing the gifted services of those who have already matured. Eph. 4:11-16 tells us how this is supposed to work. This passage says the following:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

For gifts to work and produce maturity that will combat sin effectively, there must exist a cooperative arrangement ordered and energized by the Holy Spirit, in which believers use their times together to exercise their gifts. Any other association among believers does not contribute to growth or the fulfillment of God’s plan...i.e., there is no time for idling. Christian service is a serious and full-time undertaking. With the leisure and entertainment penchant of many Americans, such attention to the serious job of Christian service may seem lack-luster. Maturity will show them, however, that it is anything but boring. It is totally satisfying, for those who get there.

One important point to note is that we must find our gift (or gifts) and operate within the parameters of our divine appointment. God picks our gifts, not us. There are many “invisible heroes”, who will be rewarded greatly in heaven, but who are hardly noticed on earth. There are no “second-tier” gifts, though we always seem to want the most visible ones, and devalue those which are not prominent. Aspiration for gifts is fine, as long as it depends on growth, God’s will, and God’s assignment; there is no place for “imitation” or “usurpation” of others’ gifts. No production will come from an ear trying to be a hand. Try picking up a spoon with your ears...or hearing with your hands.

5. **Growth.** This is the place where the willing depart from the wandering. Those who want God

and who are willing to sign up for God's training program will step out on a path that will be exhilarating, trying, surprising, enervating, perplexing, demanding, challenging, back-breaking, exhausting, stretching, pain-inducing, unrelenting...and fulfilling. If this makes no sense to you, get back on the trail; you haven't seen it yet, because you are just beginning. On track, you will witness what it's going to take to finish the program. Sorry, I wish it were easier.

To grow, a believer must confess regularly, pray devotedly, study faithfully (personally, yes, but more so through the gifts of pastors and others), exchange gifted services repeatedly, endure constantly, and trust to the level of one's limits. Growth causes struggle (more about this below), but it builds faith and gives the believer an assurance that God's plan is working to provide a life that will be satisfying and productive.

Col. 1:9-12^a tells us how growth brings God's power to our lives, so that we can see Him producing His fruit through us. This passage says this:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father...

If we are growing, that is evidence that we are on the right path. There will be marked and noticeable changes in our thinking and our behavior pattern when growth is happening. To continue to grow, we must persevere, and those who truly want God will carry on, rain or shine. The thing we must be aware of is that the growth of our faith does not come from straining to "believe". As we believe, *at the current level of our faith*, and KEEP GROWING, faith will get stronger. We must not be frustrated at our sins and failures to trust, but instead we must keep moving forward until our faith has reached new heights, where sin and failure will eventually become things that no longer dominate.

6. **Growth Strengthens against Sin.** Here are some verses indicating that growth prepares us to resist, and eventually to defeat, sin:

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.

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. 1:9-11—And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may

be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Phil. 2:15-16--...so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

Heb. 5:14—But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Heb. 12:7-11--Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Heb. 6:1—Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation...

1 Cor. 3:7—So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

Parenthetical afterthought: Understanding the Word is central to growing, but—even though we get instruction from gifted believers, which gives us knowledge—we can only get actual “understanding” from the Holy Spirit. It does not matter what we *know* if we are not in fellowship with the Holy Spirit (and/or if we do not believe what we are hearing). Knowledge must be metabolized; only if it is “digested”, through believing it and embracing it, thus enabling the Spirit to process it, can it become *understanding* and *wisdom* that can be utilized in our daily lives. Also, we must pray for wisdom and enlightenment from the Word for us to get the full benefit of our learning time. Learning in the right way, then, is essential to the enlargement of our faith, which is the aspect of our hearts that actually grows. (For a thorough discussion on the process of study and learning, see *Bible Basics on Living in the Power of God’s Word: Pathway to Truth and Wisdom*.)

- 7. God’s Training Program.** If you have not studied the book, *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, please download it from the website listed on the copyright page of this current volume. It is surprising what God has in store for us, when we become super-mature believers that know how to live in His power and honor Him. As stated above, God’s training is intense, and those who sign up must know that the rigors of His training routines

will not be a cake-walk. I fought this concept for a long time, until finally I embraced it as God's loving way to teach His children to trust Him through all kinds of conditions. Finding joy in trying circumstances is a real challenge, but this is exactly where we are headed, as we shall see.

Ps. 66:8-12 summarizes the process for training, as follows:

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

Later on in this book, we will have an entire chapter on "growth". As we see from this verse, maturing is hard, but grace is ever-so-good and helpful. There is deliverance, even in the most intensive training.

8. **Prayer.** Prayer is more important than most believers know. We will NEVER defeat sin, if we do not learn to—and learn how to—pray for strength, protection, and discernment in dealing with it. Many religions, including Christianity, encourage and practice "praying", but there is only one proper condition for prayer, which consists of these: being a child of God through saving faith in Jesus Christ, being in fellowship with His Spirit, and being consistent and current in the absorption of His Word. To be effective, prayer must also be accompanied by faith, and offered up with a submission to God's will. Until all these conditions are met, prayers will not be heard. (For clear scriptural proof and a full description of these conditions, plus a complete discussion of prayer in general, see the book, *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer: Pathway to the Throne*.) For the sake of this current study, we want to present several verses related to the benefits of prayer in dealing with sin and promoting growth, with comments, as seen here:

Ps. 32:6-7—"Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." The "godly" includes those who are in fellowship. The petitions and prayers of believers out of fellowship are not heard.

Is. 1:15-16a—"When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight!" Once again, when our sins are not confessed, and we have not been "cleansed", God will not listen to our prayers.

John 9:31—"We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will." Sinners include unbelievers, for sure, since that is where their lives are lived...in sin, even though they may appear to be pure and sparkly to the world. But the term "sinners" takes in believers, as well, meaning believers who are operating out of fellowship and not growing.

James 5:16b—"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Only when we are righteous...with all sins forgiven through confession...can our prayers have power

and promote good in and around our lives.

Eph. 6:18—“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” When we pray “in the Spirit”, we know that the Spirit is in control. We also know that we can have His control only when we are clean.

1 Thess. 5:17a—“Pray continually...” This tells us how often we are to be conscious of God and praying in communion with Him...continually.

Col. 4:2—“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” A life devoted to prayer is one characterized by the energizing of the Holy Spirit, wherein growth of faith is taking place in the light of God’s Word.

Col. 4:12b—“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.” Fellowship and growth are highlighted, even in our prayers for others.

When we pray properly, we will be strengthened against sin. If we try to fight sin, even if we are doing most other things correctly, we will be beaten by it if we do not pray. It is my prayer that you will let this sink in: THERE IS NO VICTORY WITHOUT PRAYER! We must pray for strength, deliverance, and protection, or the “evil one” will overpower us and pin us down.

9. **Faith.** Faith is not something we try to wring out of ourselves or determine to generate from our own hearts, or something we even have to think about, as though we were going to force its growth and gauge it as it grows. Faith just happens, as a result of inner positive volition toward God, followed by study and training. It is what we have at salvation, when forty wonderful things happen to us, simply because we believe. (For a complete list of these, see Appendix D, “Eternal Security”.) Faith is accepting God’s truth about Himself, His Son, His Spirit, His plan, His promises, His truths for living, and the future He has carved out for us. Faith has no merit of its own. Its worth is derived from the person or truth toward whom it is directed. Faith is something we are told to “build up”, so that it gets stronger as we proceed, because if it does not get stronger, it will weaken.

There are a couple of conditions that will cause faith to stop. The first condition causing faith’s absence is loss of the control of the Spirit. When we are in fellowship, we can believe...and we will be tuned in to receive nutrients from His Word that will strengthen our faith. But when we are controlled by the flesh, we will not have any impulse to believe God and His Word, and faith will not be present. Secondly, faith will not operate if there is no divine truth (knowledge, understanding, and wisdom) on which to hang it. Faith must have content or an object, such as the gospel for salvation, and “truths for living” for “living faith”. Once we are in fellowship and learning God’s ways for fulfilling His will, we can serve Him in ways that please Him. Faith can become “greater faith”, and maturity can really start to develop.

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.” This means that we cannot perform “good deeds”, or control sin...without faith. Faith is the key to productivity. It is the quality we want more of, even if we can’t see it, feel it, or predict it. Faith is turning our heads Godward and saying, “Yes, I know that you are everything, and that all good comes from you. I believe that you are making a way for me to participate in your goodness, and because I believe, I will keep seeking until I have found the very place of your highest holiness.”

10. **Cleanliness.** Cleanliness comes through confession. Confession is God’s mechanism for forgiving and removing sins committed by believers. Without confession, there can be no cleansing; without cleansing, there can be no filling, energizing, and leading of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, we will never grow, and sin will dominate us all of our lives. We provide next several verses that provide a scriptural basis for the doctrine of confession, as follows:

1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

2 Cor. 12:21—I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

Ps. 32:5—Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Ps. 51:1-4—Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

1 John 2:1—My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

11. **The Law of Sin.** The law of sin does not get sufficient attention. This law links itself with all the evil forces in the universe, and brings them home to our inner core. It is the authority and essence of all evil...engaging Satan, the world, and our own sinful natures as its allies. This law regulates the flow of evil into our lives, and increases its intensity as it confronts greater spirituality. The law of sin escalates as a believer grows and as he increasingly walks in the Spirit. In other words, the more spiritual we are, and the more we are growing, the harder the forces of evil will come against us.

The operating principle of the law of sin is described in Rom. 7:23, which says, “...but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.” The *increase* of evil, as good is arising, is cited two verses prior to this one, in Rom. 7:21, which shockingly declares, “So I

find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” With the advancement of good, evil advances to match it. This means that the more mature we become, the more potent will be the tests and temptations we will face. If you have not struggled with sin, you have not grown sufficiently to witness what “greater evil” can do.

The law of sin is “within”, which might make it easy to confuse with the sinful nature, but there is a difference. The law of sin is the operating principle behind the sinful nature, whereas the sinful nature is the operating agent for sin. The law of sin has authority over the sinful nature, and the sinful nature does the bidding of the law of sin. When the sinful nature is in control of us, the law of sin is also in control, because it directs our nature.

The law of sin is not the same as the Law of God, as the first defines and promotes evil, while the other provides the definition of God’s holy standards. The law of sin is easy and natural, while God’s laws are naturally impossible. The law of sin requires grace to *resist* it, and the Law of God requires grace to *fulfill* it.

Because of the law of sin, it is important that we not become lax in our growth. If we ease up at any point along our pathway toward maturity, we will be swamped by sin, which is always nipping at our heels. As we trust more, sin tries harder. What can we do? We can trust even more by intensifying our growth. Take heart! There is an end to all this madness, and we can defeat sin, if we persevere and reach an elevated level of maturity. In the meantime, continued growth will allow grace to keep pace with sin...if we don’t slow down. There is a principle of “grace increasing as sin increases”, which is seen in Rom. 5:20. We are relying on this principle to sustain us as we grow.

12. **Flee from Sin.** We are told to flee from sin, which is something we can do at a practical level to reduce sin’s influence on us. Fleeing, it seems, can be done at any level of maturity. Fleeing is a “preventative” measure, by which we use moments of strong spirituality, which are possible for any believer, to make decisions and plans about conditions in our lives that will diminish opportunities for sin. One example I heard about a believing man who had little resistance to pornographic movies, so any time he checked into a hotel on a business trip, he had management remove the television set from his room. Practical. Effective. Preventive. This took away the opportunity for him to sin through pornography, based on a decision he made while he was strong, so he would not be tempted later when he was weak.

There are many examples of such moves which can help, I believe, and using them can’t hurt, as long as we acknowledge that it is God that wins the battles. Instead of watching porn, this man had an opportunity to study the Bible, creating a double-benefit from his “staying away” from sin. Going to a bar or getting a job at a liquor store is not a good idea for an alcoholic. Take a moment to see how the “besetting sins” in your life can be lessened, simply by fleeing them, or structuring your schedule and exposure away from them.

1 Tim. 6:11 says, “But you, man of God, flee from all this [“this” being an example of evil stemming from a love for money], and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.” Once sin is on the scene, it is harder to resist, so “flee” may better be translated

“avoid”. In other words, stay away from sin...and concentrations of sinners...as much as possible. This is pragmatic.

1 Cor. 10:14 gives another “flee” command; this one works also as “avoidance”, as follows: “Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.” Or...stay away from things that you may value so much that they distract from your commitment to growth.

2 Tim. 2:22, similar to 1 Tim. 6:11 above, calls for “avoidance” and shows the corresponding behavior of “seeking righteousness” from that position. This verse says, “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (Do you see here the fellowship and fruit that comes from having a “pure heart”?) It is certain that true righteousness comes through cleanliness, study, prayer, and faith, and these must *precede* any successful avoidance. Maturing is something we should be doing *all the time*, and something we can rely on. But there is nothing wrong with planning *productive* directions and behaviors, and consciously avoiding those which are *destructive*, as a matter of practical sensibility.

13. **Stand and Resist.** James 4:7 gives us an expected command and a surprising outcome. This verse says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” “Submitting” to God has a connection with “surrendering” to God, and “resisting Satan” is the work of maturity. Submission and resistance of Satan would be expected of a believer with advanced faith. What may not be expected is that when we reach this level, Satan will assess our spiritual status and determine that he will no longer be effective in pulling us into sin and self-righteousness, so he will give up and move on to more-manageable projects. He will *avoid* us...go the other way...FLEE...because our submission and faith has enabled us to resist him.

One of the great benefits of reaching a level that enables “surrender” is that attacks of evil from Satan and the world...which have been ramped up to match our growth...will subside! Testing and temptation diminish at that time, which enables unprecedented spirituality and tremendous productivity. When we reach the “fullness of God”, the promise is fulfilled that sin will no longer be our master.

14. **God-consciousness.** Prov. 3:5 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 your paths straight.” Not always are the pathways of our faculties and the demands of our schedules clear enough to permit structured prayers, but we can always take a moment...more, if possible...to acknowledge God. “Father, I know you are there (and here). Bring grace, please.” As we mature, the thing that is frequently time-shared with all the other demands and activities of our lives and minds is *awareness of God*. As we saw in Heb. 11:6, those who come to Him do so because they believe He exists and therefore *seek Him*; these are the ones God rewards.

The advantage of thinking about God and acknowledging Him is that it strengthens us against sin. This is what we see in Prov. 16:6b, which says, “...through the fear of the Lord [acknowledgement with faith] a man avoids evil.” When our hearts and minds are focused on God, our attention to temptation and sin will be reduced.

15. **Fullness of Christ.** The “fullness of Christ” is a form of the “fullness of God”, which we will discuss later. When we reach this level of maturity, sin will no longer be the boss, and we will enjoy unprecedented communion with Jesus Christ. The concept of the fullness of Christ is presented in the following verses:

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

Col. 2:9-10—For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

Eph. 1:22-23—And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

16. **Unbelief and Sin.** Heb. 3:12 says, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” Unbelief is a sin. There are a couple of things to think about, in that connection. First of all, unbelief is the only sin which brings eternal condemnation. In another vein, unbelief—for believers—is an infected area in the heart where sin is able to spread and fester. “Sinful” and “unbelief” go together. Whenever our faith is weak, we will be easy prey for evil to overcome. Conversely, strong faith will fortify against sin...which is why we grow.

17. **A Fear of Discipline is not Enough to Stop Sin.** A quote from *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You* helps us cover this point, as we see in the following:

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

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

When that relationship is close, sin has to diminish. Walking in the power of the Spirit can do what fear of punishment cannot. (Endnote 7)

Romans 2:4 adds to this, letting us know that knowledge and understanding of God's love and kindness can motivate us to keep our sins confessed and keep us growing. This verse says, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Repentance for believers is—of course—confession, or changing our minds about the sins we have committed.)

18. The Role of the Spirit's Power in Beating Sin. The Holy Spirit can certainly kill sin. The only reason we do not see Him killing sin in our lives is because of our reluctance to go through the steps needed to get closer to Him. If we are getting closer to God, we will find there a grace that is more than adequate to cover our sins when we confess, or to keep us from sinning when our spirituality and maturity are sufficient. Rom. 8:12-13 frames this idea perfectly, saying this:

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

This is a picture of spiritual *life* within a believer, whereby the grace assets offered by the Holy Spirit become operational in our hearts and throughout our spiritual experience. When we are controlled by the Spirit, we are "alive" spiritually, because He energizes us. The power of the Spirit is often omitted in today's churches, especially within mega-churches, where there is a lot of excitement and emotion, but too little *spiritual* power. They are, as 2 Tim. 3:5 says, "...having a form of godliness, but denying its power." The Spirit is infinitely powerful. Why would we rely on ourselves or the world for what the Spirit gives? Here are some additional verses describing the power and work of the Holy Spirit:

Eph. 3:16-18—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...

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.

Gal. 5:25—If we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [walk by] the Spirit.

Gal. 5:16—So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

2 Thess. 1:11—With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

When we are said to be doing something with or by the Spirit, we need to understand that it is being done, NOT BY OUR POWER, BUT BY HIS POWER. In connection with the power of the Spirit and beating sin, we ask you to take time to read the article on the first epistle of John (1st John). This can be found in Appendix B, “Analysis of 1st John”.

19. **God’s Deliverance from Sin.** When we want to be closer to God, sin is always going to be holding us back to prevent it. God is willing to rescue us from sin’s grip, if we follow His steps toward growth and Spirit-walking. 2 Tim. 4:17-18a gives some of Paul’s final written words, as follows:

But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.

This report can be ours, so that we will be rescued from Satan’s tempting and tantalizing smorgasbord of delightful sin-goodies, which always promise to please, but secretly aim to destroy. Or we can go our merry way, ignoring God, passively permitting sin, and living in self-dependence. The honest truth about the two pathways is that it is *easier* just to cool our Christian jets and put our lives on “cruise” than it is to get on and stay on the rocky and pitfall-riddled pathway to God’s holiness. This is probably why so few, as they also say of Navy Seals, make it through the program without giving up and washing out.

Is. 46:4 gives us assurance that we will find rescue and assistance, if we will keep moving. Here is what this wonderful promise says: “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.” Does this happen to every believer without regard to their spiritual status and direction? Absolutely not! This promise is for believers who are walking in the power of the Spirit and adhering to the growth pattern which God has set. They are the ones who will be carried and sustained.

20. **Surrender and the Fullness of God.** In both books, *Step by Step toward Surrender*, and *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*, the principle of getting the fullness of God through complete surrender is exhaustively explored and explained. We will provide a discussion of this topic in a later chapter in this current study, and tie it to our anticipated topic, contentment. But for now we will merely highlight the important doctrine of surrender by saying that it is the last and most-important step along our growth track, and it is the *final and fullest solution to the sin problem*. When we surrender, our focus will shift completely from just “being good” to “producing righteousness”. The difference will become clear.

Poem Reflecting the Growth Process of Shedding Self. When we grow enough, our selfish and sinful interests will decrease, until at last we understand God’s love...and surrender to Him. Here is a poem from Theodore Monod that expresses this transition. Notice the progression toward maturity, from hollowness to fullness; this transition is seen especially in the last line of each verse, as follows:

Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be,
When I let the Savior's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered—
“All of self, and none of Thee.”
Yet He found me; I beheld Him
Bleeding on the cursed tree;
Heard Him pray, “Forgive them, Father,”
And my wistful heart said faintly—
“Some of self, and some of Thee.”
Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and ah! so patient,
Brought me lower while I whispered—
“Less of self, and more of Thee.”
Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered:
Grant me now my soul's petition—
“None of self, and all of Thee.”

Theodore Monod (Endnote 8)

Conclusion. We must get it straight. God exists without us. He does not need us. But He offers the exceptional privilege for us to associate with Him...the infinite God and Creator. His love for us is great; He pays attention to every thought or twitch of muscle or flight of fancy that we have. He has numbered the hairs on each head, and He tells us not to be afraid. He is with us and within us, always welcoming our advances toward Him. We need Him, even though we act as if we don't...exhibiting self-will and being preoccupied with the world most of the time.

Assuredly, we can go our own way, but this will not stand. We are believers now. There's no way out. The right choice is for us to let go of ourselves in this life called “Christian”, so we can embrace God in

the life called “Christ”. Thus we can become what only He can make of us, whereby “self” can be diminished, as God is increased. As He becomes bigger to us, we will find His strength through which we can shun the character of Satan, and portray the character of Christ. By God’s grace, which offers all the essential processes for growth, we are certain that we will at some point participate in His victory over sin and carnality.

Chapter 4

Humility before God

HUMILITY IS WARRANTED

Where Humility Begins. Humility begins with recognition of God as God. When we are in fellowship and growing, we will be able to see that God is big and we are small; and know that He can do anything (Job 42:2), while we can do nothing (John 15:5). Humility is simply an honest look at reality. He really is big and we really are small. A friend of mine once humorously quipped, “You don’t have an inferiority complex; you’re just inferior!” The implication is that there is no escaping reality. True humility is based on our learning *who we really are*.

When we compare ourselves to others, we will be relatively better than some and relatively worse than others. When we speak of a comparison between us and God, the contrast is blinding. We can’t imagine how great and grand God is, nor can we see readily how tiny and helpless we are. The more we know God, the more we see how magnificent He is and how sorry we are. And this forms the basis for our beginning to trust Him. When we really *see* Him, we will know we can trust Him more than we can trust ourselves or the world. If we think we are independently a big deal, we are lying to ourselves. Gal. 6:3 says, “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” We may not perceive this clearly yet, but as we grow, the true image of God will loom larger in our minds, and we will eventually see Him as an overwhelming, concrete reality...not just an abstract idea.

Once when I was traveling toward Guadalupe National Park in Texas, a huge image rose from the haze as I was moving forward. I thought it was a large thunderhead. It was only when I drew closer that I recognized with a start that it was a mountain, and it was not until I was directly beneath it that I could see how really big it was. I was looking at Guadalupe Peak. The point: When we grow and get close enough to God, we will see how big He is. That is when the awe begins.

The Biggest Expression of Humility. A key indicator for humility is our awareness of our own sinfulness. If we do not recognize our sins, we will never confess them, which means we will never be forgiven (as believers) and will never be in fellowship or led by the Spirit, thereby never being able to produce divine good. If we do not understand God’s standards and requirements, and if we do not acknowledge His grace, we will see neither the need nor the opportunity to be restored to communion with Him through confession. Thus we will remain in carnality, and will therefore not move toward Him.

A viable alternative to carnality and stagnation is that we can prepare to grow by purifying ourselves through sincere admission of our guilt, and then we can move upward toward maturity by humbly

accepting His Word. We start the growth process slowly and simply...after we are saved. We can begin to learn at that time and gradually move up through the spiritual grades. We learn about our security in Him, about grace and mercy, about sin and self-trust, about confession and fellowship, about study and training, about the panoply of grace assets and techniques, and about His promises and the abundant life we can have in Him.

All this starts with humility, or a realization that we cannot stop sinning on our own. We will sin, and when we do, God's requirement is for us to come before Him with the truth about what we have done. This is confession. Oddly enough—it is that very act of coming clean that will erase the sin from our record. When we confess, we bring a heart of contrition to God, and expose to Him all our sins and failures (something He already sees, but wants us to admit). Ps. 51:16-17 highlights works or actions on our part that we hope will bring forgiveness, and contrasts these with God's procedure of presenting our sins directly to Him for immediate cleansing. This passage says, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Remember, God looks at the heart; that is where genuine confession must take place.

When we know in our hearts that there is nothing we can invent that will appease God or cover our sins, we will know that the only thing we can do is cast ourselves on His mercy. Fortunately, that mercy is more than adequate to bag our sins and toss them away. God honors our humility, and makes us blameless because of it. Anytime we sin, we should take the sin to Him, so He can excuse it. (Please read previous studies if you are one who believes that such *ease of dispensing with sin* means that you can *live in ease with sin*. Ultimately, we want to stop sin altogether. The OBJECT, as John said in 1 John 2:1a, is this: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.")

We will say more below about "operational humility", which is the attitude of humility taken into daily affairs and activities. Hopefully, we have established the importance of seeing shame and contrition for sin as essential conditions for cleansing, and as an indication of humility. Confession is the initial and most essential component in building our spiritual lives, which is why the proud will never grow.

TO BECOME HOLY, BE HUMBLE

Walk Humbly. For a comprehensive discussion of humility, we refer you to the article "Walking Humbly with Our God", in *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*. In that study, we cited James 4:6-10, which we will quote here, as follows:

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

This is a powerful passage, giving us a complete rundown on the process of becoming "holy", or "sanctified", which are synonyms referring to our "being clean" before the Lord. The outcome of this

verse is cleanliness and being lifted up. The process is seen in the phrase, “wash your hands and purify your hearts”, which refers to confession and cleansing. We know this because of the command, “grieve, mourn, and wail...Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.” And the cap: “Humble yourselves”. These conditions are perfect descriptors of the procedure for coming before God with our sins, who will “give grace to the humble”. (Not so of the proud, who refuse to confess.) Notice also from this passage that humbling ourselves is part of “submission” and “resisting the devil”, two very important techniques, which will receive attention later in this study.

Look at the result of our being humble and presenting our sins to God: “...he will lift you up.” When we confess our sins, He takes us instantly from being carnal creatures: dirty, controlled by sin, and resisting God...to righteous saints: clean, controlled by the Holy Spirit, and pleasing God. We are still at choice, of course, and we can return to carnality as quickly as we were brought out of it, but if we confess continually, and take advantage of fellowship by attending our growth, we will spend more and more time in righteousness. This will enable us to keep moving toward maturity...which is our goal. As we are maturing, we will be “drawing near to God”, where we will discover Him “drawing near to us”.

Observe the message of 1 Pet. 5:5b-6, which repeats the theme of James 4. The message is this:

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Humility brings lifting, pulling us out of the mud and setting us on higher ground. The trick is staying there, which is what we will learn to do if we stay in fellowship, and follow the oft-repeated drill: pray, learn, and endure the training. Then we will not only hold our ground, but will continue moving upward on the highway to holiness.

Humility enables us to grow, but it is also a product of growth. As we grow, we become more humble, because we are getting a clearer picture of God’s greatness and our smallness. The wisdom we gain when we learn properly is based on an understanding of God’s grace, love, and power. Words cannot describe what we find when we get closer to Him. This is when we find out what it means to “love God”, and to live in awe of Him. This is where faith reaches a pinnacle, because our humility has enabled us to see God. Regarding this faith, as it is related to humility, Andrew Murray said this:

We need only think for a moment what faith is. Is it not the confession of nothingness and helplessness, the surrender and the waiting to let God work? Is it not in itself the most humbling thing there can be,--the acceptance of our place as dependents, who can claim or get or do nothing but what grace bestows? Humility is simply the disposition which prepares the soul for living on trust. (Endnote 9)

Typical of his imitable style, Murray captures the place of humility...and its appropriateness, which is based, once again, on reality and truth. To maintain pride, we must maintain a worldly view of life, but when God is factored in, our view of ourselves must, per force, be changed. In God’s presence, there can be no place for pride. But when we are humble, we can look for the Lord to fulfill Ps. 25:9, which says, “He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.” Father, teach us your

perspective and help us know who you are, so we will know who we are...to become more like you.

Chapter 5

Gifts for Service

THE SOURCE OF GIFTS

Gifts and Love. God chooses the “gifts” (abilities to serve) that we are to have, based on what He has known since eternity past about our choices in life, and the services that would fit us best. This is a sovereign decision of grace, based on God’s perfect knowledge and wisdom. Gifts are given for one purpose: to help believers grow. Even gifts that are not instructional or interactive are zeroed in on one main goal: *promoting growth*. Someone with the gift of helping is not directly teaching or witnessing when he sets up the chairs for a Bible class, but this is an essential skill and role with spiritual underpinnings and outcomes (AND eternal rewards). ALL gifts feed into the purpose of supporting and assisting believers to advance toward maturity. (Side note: Evangelism is a by-product of maturity, not a primary first-line objective. Growth and maturity come FIRST...then evangelism will be done right, and in the exact spot where God knows it is needed.) Another example: Providing food to hungry believers may not directly feed their souls, but it gives them fuel to concentrate on messages from the Word, which *will* feed them. There are no useless believers or wasted gifts.

The service which we will do with our gifts is based on love. There can be no gifted service without love. Here is why: If a believer is out of fellowship, no love will be present. But a maturing believer, who can hold himself in a place of fellowship through frequent confession, will be operating in the power and love of the Holy Spirit. This love is not a surface-level show of affection, but the real labor of the Spirit in the prompting of love and the performance of God-ordained service. Fellowship plus service equals the greatest expression of Christian love possible, because true service goes to such lengths as laying down our lives for the sake of others. In fact, the exercise of our gifts in service is the *primary* way to express love. In that vein Eph. 4:14-16, extracted from a longer passage that provides instruction on the function of gifts, links our service with love, as follows:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Notice the cohesion that holds the “group” together: it is love. “Speaking the truth in love” means “EXERCISING GIFTS that result in the dissemination of God’s truths from a position of love”...which is generated by fellowship with the Spirit. We “love the brothers” by exercising our gifts, not through free-lance attempts at love, or from observation of events that stir our sympathy.

Those are fine, in their place, but that is not what Scripture is calling for. Godly love will come only from spirituality and maturity. “Fake” love, for attention, assuaging of guilt, or *emotional* fulfillment, must not take the place of Spirit-directed love, which is going to be fulfilled most completely in areas of gifted service.

Services done “in Jesus’ name” will be done *in the Spirit*. For example, giving a cup of cold water will only count if it is done “in His name”, or under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, which means that it will likely be done by a mature believer with the specific gift of “serving”. (See Matt. 10:42.) The same act done “in the flesh” will not be service at all, and will accomplish little or nothing.

THE OPERATION OF GIFTS

Gifted Service will be Done in God’s Strength. 1 Pet. 1:11 says, “If anyone serves he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” If we do the service on our own, who gets the credit? We do. And if we serve through God’s strength, who gets the credit? God does! God is not a glory-hog; He’s just God. He gets the glory, not because He needs it or is seeking accolades, but because it can be no other way.

God will get the glory because He is the origin, the cause, the meaning, the sustenance, and the future of everything. There is no other legitimate repository for glory. He designed our lives and service to be done in His strength, with glory accruing to Him, not because He cannot survive without the credit, but because that is the only authentic way it can be done. The sooner we realize that God is the sole and ultimate producer of everything good, the sooner we will move rapidly into position to become participants in HIS good, and stop trying to generate our own.

Looking Out to Serve. If our view is toward ourselves and not others, we will not fulfill the purpose for our gifts. Service is for others, and not for ourselves (although we do benefit when we serve). When we serve, we pass on “gifts” from our “gift”, and expect nothing in return. Phil. 2:3-4 says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” When we are competing with each other and trying to ascend socially, we will miss the point of service, which is *servicing*. When we exercise our gifts, we are reaching out to others, because *we care about their spiritual growth*, knowing that we can contribute to their progress through our service (whatever our brand of service might be).

Any time people get together, Satan begins organizing to maximize the presence and pronouncements of flesh...the “sin nature”. He is very active in churches trying to create ill will or one-up-man-ship to foster rancor and discord among believers. The best way for a believer to exercise his gift is to basically MIND HIS OWN BUSINESS and WORK HIS GIFT, without comparing himself to others. Gifts are not the product of social pressures and values; they are outcroppings of spiritual maturity, which become opportunities for each of us to SEE WHAT OTHERS NEED AND USE OUR GIFTS APPROPRIATELY TO PROVIDE IT. That means drop what we’re doing and run toward the need! This includes all areas: spiritual, physical, emotional, monetary...whatever! Be alert to occasions when your service may be needed. Pray for awareness to help you see such opportunities. Stay in fellowship and

grow, to make your service meaningful. And trustingly WAIT, when that is called for, until God sends you out on a “service call” in His own perfect time. Remember that all service is His, to be directed and coordinated by Him. God does the work, but be prepared: A mature believer will be quite busy!

Equality Among Believers. It is important to understand that equality is an important issue in Christianity. This topic is so important, we will give it full treatment, but not in the main body of this work. To get the full story on equality and make it available to you, we are including a complete discussion on this rarely-discussed issue in the Appendices. Please see Appendix C, “Equality Among Believers”.

A Word on the Work at Hand. There is a place for diligence. This is tricky, because it can quickly become a call to self-directed service, which is not true service at all. But there are times when we may have done all the right things, and have become prepared to serve, yet we want to just get some sleep, or “sit this one out”. Heb. 6:11-12 cautions against laziness, saying this:

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Even though our service...indeed, the entirety of our Christian experience...is grace-based and not works-based, there are things we must “do”. We must confess, pray, learn, endure, and serve, all of which require initiative and movement of some kind. But these are grace-based activities, offered to seeking believers who want to move closer to God. For them, any activity which draws them closer to God is not work at all, but a great privilege. And there are no spiritually-warranted activities for which a believer using the grace system will not be empowered. Our job is simply to GROW, and from this growth will come SERVICE.

If we are truly interested in the things of God, we will follow through with our growth...in order to serve. Heb. 5:11 says, “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.” The meaning of “slow” here is “reluctant”. They were not learning, because they were not interested in truth. They did not pursue God or the truth, which left them flat when it came to advancement into greater service. Here is the principle: We must *want* the Word, in which case we will *hear* the Word and *believe* what we hear (Heb. 4:2); and we will *treasure* what we are learning (Ps. 119:165), so that hearing can become knowledge, which will become understanding, which will become wisdom, which can be applied to experience where it is needed. All of this will be done only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This will prepare us for service. (For a detailed description of this process, see *Bible Basics on the Power of God’s Word: Pathway to Truth and Wisdom*, especially the chapter, “A Love for Truth”.)

Authority and Effectiveness in the Exercise of Gifts. When we exercise our gifts, we can do so with confidence and authority. We are to be humble, but humility does not mean weakness. We can be strong, demanding, and unwavering in the exercise of our gifts, assuming that we have gone through the rigors of training and spirituality that have brought us to greater maturity. Novices have NO authority, as they are students without any rights or say-so. But a mature believer who is operating within the parameters of his or her gifts elicits veneration from a position of great authority and

strength. Concerning the use of his own gift, Paul said the following to the Corinthians: “This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down” (2 Cor. 13:10).

The big question we must answer when we are engaged in using our gifts is this: Will what I am doing contribute to the growth of those I am serving? Everything is about “edification”, which is constructing an “edifice”...a building. That edifice is faith, and we are building it...within each of us and throughout all of us. Edification is our purpose. This is to be our primary preoccupation throughout our Christian lives: How can I help others grow, as they are doing the same for me? With the strength of maturity, and commitment to this goal, the outcome can be phenomenal. Can you imagine what is possible with a powerful group of mature believers...the kind of supportive environment they could create?

Coming Together to Feed and Grow. When believers are together, whether it is two or ten thousand, the purpose should be to exercise gifts to encourage growth. We worship collectively, of course, with music and prayer and gifted teaching, but much more than this is needed, particularly the operation of gifts from each member toward other members who need his or her service. An important part of the education of young children is “free play time”, when they are free to interact and play in natural and healthful ways. There should be “free edification time” for churches, to complement any interaction among members that takes place outside the church. The purpose of the structured “edification time” should be strictly to edify, which can be done by creating maximum acquaintance of those who have the resources...with those in need. This would serve as a sort of clearing house for gifted services, and would maximize gifted operations. THIS IS NOT A TIME FOR SOCIALIZING IN A WORLDLY SENSE, but a time for focusing on God, and on needs related to growth, including physical, emotional, and monetary needs, as well as spiritual ones. Sometimes the greatest service is to remove some impediment to a believer’s growth.

The assumption is that the satisfaction of all needs (distinguished from “wants”) relates in some way to one’s growth. The method we recommend for achieving maximum association of specific needs with appropriate services, is to have all believers interact in group gatherings. This will not be perfected, since believers are not perfect, but it is, in my view, a suitable and profitable form of Christian interaction...and it is authorized in Scripture.

We must be clear: Any time believers are together, spiritual (and other) needs should always pull appropriate gifted services toward them. We must be aware of our own gifts, and pray and watch for occasions to exercise them. How many opportunities do we miss every day to engage our own gifts to build others up? We spend so much time trying to impress others, or *taking from* them, that we ignore what we can *give to* them. When we are with another believer, we should be on alert and watch every word to make sure we are edifying and not undermining or damaging. We must be full-time, maturing, serving Christians, not casual or indifferent ones. Everything we do is about our own spiritual growth, *so we can help others grow*. Take time to read 1 Cor. 12, 13, and 14 which give a good discussion of gifts in operation...and in cooperation. We have also discussed this topic at length in previous studies. For example, see *Step by Step toward Surrender*, pp. 95-100.

Rom. 15:2 tells us, “Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” Each action must be evaluated in light of its benefit to the believer(s) we are with. This will help them, and—if we all do this—each of us will benefit equally. Eph. 4:9-13 encapsulates this whole process, showing the method and the outcome of our gifted exchange. This passage says the following:

(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he 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 has given gifts so that these gifts can function in such a way that each believer may be fed and nurtured through them, in order that maximum growth can be achieved until we all reach the ultimate level of maturity, which is the “fullness of Christ” (more on the fullness of Christ later).

1 Thess. 5:14 provides a good final admonition concerning the operation of our gifts, saying, “And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” Is our being together a time of judging or competing? No. It is a time when we are to help each other remove any barriers to growth and “gin” each other up spiritually. Those who do nothing and are neither growing nor contributing to the growth of others, need stronger prompting, but generally, the performance of gifts should be done gently and softly, especially when dealing with believers who are reticent. Gifted service is generally “on-demand”, meaning “as-requested”, but the quiet ones need coaxing, at times, to get them to disclose their needs. The timid need encouragement! No one should be considered second-class, nor should anyone be ignored or side-lined. All should be treated equally, and with patience and love. It is time for us to mature, and as we mature, it is time to offer service, so that ALL of us can be strengthened by the rest of us.

Chapter 6

Growth of Believers

BEGINNING OUR GROWTH

The Beginning. Growth is prominent in Scripture as the means for getting closer to God and as the only way to get ultimate victory in the Christian life. Growth comes *before* victory. It is astounding that so many “preachers” make an appeal for salvation by promising instant victory, prosperity, peace, power, and happiness, simply by becoming born again and saved. This is false advertising. Being accepted into the Army Ranger program does not mean you are instantly a Ranger. A step has been left out: growth through study and training. When someone becomes a child of God, he or she is an infant...a neophyte. *Newborns* need a mild form of nourishment and gentle care in the beginning; certainly they are not ready to be sent out on a “job” for the Lord. It will be a long time before they are ready for that. They must grow first. How absurd is it to think we can do anything in the Christian life without maturing? The notion of an infant operating heavy equipment comes to mind. Totally ridiculous.

Newborn babies need milk. So says 1 Pet. 2:2-3: “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.” In the beginning, all a new believer should do is feed on the Word. Techniques can be acquired as growth occurs through knowledge. These include confession, prayer, and so on. If their growth trajectory is going to take them beyond infancy to childhood, and then past childhood to adolescence and maturity, they must be increasingly prepared for the exigencies and demands of their developing Christian life. This means they will need to understand how difficult advanced training can be, and know the benefits to be gained by enduring its difficulties.

2 Pet. 3:18a shows the objective for us at any stage. This passage says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Grace and knowledge are the soil in which God gives us growth, which is enabled by our sitting at the feet of the Master (the Holy Spirit of Christ) to learn and to blossom. Here are some verses (with comments) that describe the growth that new believers may do:

Eph. 4:12-14a—“...to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants...” When we are prepared through the operation of gifts exhibited by mature believers (vv. 9-11), we can leave infancy and move on into deeper and richer teachings.

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.” Paul is praying for the Holy Spirit to be in charge of their hearts, so they can LEARN and thus KNOW GOD BETTER.

Col. 1:9-11a—“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 [and here are the ways we please Him]: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father...” We see clearly what pleases God: good works, GROWING, being strengthened with His power to endure and trust, and giving thanks. What are these? They are works done through growth, which leads to the enablement of His power, beyond which all we can do is give thanks. “Thanks” is giving credit to God as the one who completes the good works.

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.” For a beginning Christian to stay pure and avoid sin, he must enter a concentrated period of study (basic training), whereby he not only understands what he is being taught, but is able to process it into his heart by treasuring what he is hearing. Treasured knowledge—hidden in the heart—becomes wisdom, which can be applied to situations in life.

1 Cor. 3:1—“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.” Trigonometry is not taught in the first grade, because the young students are not ready for it. So it is with those young in the faith...they must work up through the concepts to reach a level when advanced teachings make sense and can help them. Otherwise, the teaching they hear is just gibberish. New believers must be started at the beginning...and no steps can be left out in their curriculum as they prepare for higher-level instruction.

Starting up the Ladder. We start at scratch when we are born again, and we can sit on that spot, or we can begin the race. We are offered the choice of going our journey alone, or we can hitch a ride; this means that we can attempt to live the Christian life in our own strength and by our own ingenuity, or we can learn how to live in God’s strength and by the directions given in His Word. The choice sounds intuitively simple, but the percentage of believers choosing to live life God’s way, and by His power, is minuscule. Believing is hard, whereas self-effort is comparatively easy. But this is the lesson of maturity: Faith is the key to doing worthwhile work, and work without faith is meaningless (logically, it would follow that faith without works is a dead faith, as per James 2). Our object is to grow by building our faith.

So, we start with milk, involving simple concepts and tasks, as follows: 1) understand the cross and what has happened to us, 2) grasp that we sin as believers and must confess, 3) comprehend the need for and the place of prayer, and 4) accept that we must study to grow. Often, these concepts are ignored or abandoned for less “spiritual” pursuits, such as manning a soup kitchen or greeting folks

outside the church on Sunday morning. These are fine, if that is the gift and assignment of those doing it, and IF THOSE DOING IT HAVE TAKEN CARE OF THEIR GROWTH. Great caution is needed in dealing with new believers, because it is so hard for them to turn around, once they have headed out in a wrong direction. (No one is harder to teach than someone who is settled in his own understanding of the Bible, even if he is wrong.)

The danger is that we will enthusiastically adopt causes, activities, or doctrines that *undermine*, rather than *promote* our growth. We can end up being zealous, but for a cause or belief that is not supported in Scripture. Rom. 10:1-4 describes this condition, as follows:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 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.

Primary reference here is to the Jews choosing the law as the means to salvation, rather than accepting the righteousness of Christ. But this also illustrates the pattern followed by believers who want to live their lives by "works" and legalism, rather than by grace and faith. The big test for any doctrine or truth is this: Where does the power come from for fulfilling what is called for in the teaching? If the power of God is omitted in the process recommended, REJECT THE TEACHING! Accept only those teachings which exalt God, and which depend for their fulfillment on His resources, rather than those of man or the world. 2 Tim. 3:5a captures this concept very well, saying, "...having a form of godliness but denying its power." This is why teachings on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives are so important. We can be sincere, earnest, excited, and settled in our beliefs...and be dead wrong. Once again, ask the question: Where do we see the power of the Spirit in what we are being asked to believe and/or do? New believer, you soft cluster of clay, choose the way of power. Mature believer, promote the power of God among new believers.

Gal. 3:3 echoes this point: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" When we know what to look for, we can begin the faith curriculum, which will lead to our growth. Heb. 6:1 kicks us off, saying this:

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance [describing our act of turning to Christ for salvation] from acts that lead to death [moving away from practices of "works"], and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

In other words, once we are saved and have been introduced to fundamental and basic doctrines of God and salvation, we can "leave" these and move onward into studies that show us how to LIVE IN GOD'S POWER TO PRODUCE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. We can graduate into studies which the writer of Hebrews called "solid food", as shown in Heb. 5:12, 14; solid food is characterized by "teaching about righteousness" (v. 13)...meaning "spirituality".

The growth that we seek does not come through "busy-ness" in churches or organizations (some may even promote "important" causes), but through the quiet assimilation of truths, especially truths for

living, which are obtained from God's Word. This is accompanied by the practice and training that God brings or allows to cement our burgeoning faith. Faith and love do not come to us just because we decide it would be nice to have them. They are the result of extended growth and significant amounts of time controlled by the Spirit. Growth and spirituality come from *many* decisions over time...arising from a thirst for God and a commitment to tirelessly search until we have found Him. The hungry believer wants to find—not just a home, because we have that—but the very heart of God. And the more we discover about Him, the more we will grow.

ADVANCING IN OUR MATURITY

Moving on Up. We talk at length about the core grace techniques and assets, but there are some that have been brought up in the past that have perhaps received too little attention. We frequently cite the most crucial techniques: confession, prayer, study, trust, and endurance...along with the newer ones, surrender and defeating sin...and there are sub-techniques emanating from each of these. But there are other important procedures that beckon our attention, such as thanksgiving, fear of the Lord, acknowledging God, preoccupation with Christ, believing the promises, waiting on the Lord, being still, being humble, glorifying God before angels, and living in God's plan. If you have not read the ten original books covering both the main techniques, and these, hopefully you will have the opportunity to go through them, so that you can build a stronger foundation for our more-recent studies.

We want to move now into deeper concepts of growth, looking further into the Bible's instructions on how we can move closer to God and mature our faith. We are now getting into the area where we have to run with the big dogs...or get off the porch. We are called upon, as believers well on our way to maturity, to "obey". This must be clarified. Rom. 6:16 helps by saying this:

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

For believers, obedience means using the techniques...which leads to righteousness...such as learning about love and grace, believing the promises, enduring training, and accessing the gifts of mature believers. Obedience means following the blueprint for growth, as we saw in *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You* (p. 124), where we showed how Col. 3:1-17 lays it out. Take time to read this powerful passage in the Word. It shows how believers who are building their "faith and love", and those who have "understood God's grace in all its truth", are maturing, and can now be filled with "knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." This will lead them to "live a life worthy of the Lord" and to "please him in every way", which will enable them to "bear fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God". And what will happen when they grow? They will be "strengthened with all power according to his glorious might". See why we want to grow? What could be better than being strengthened with the power of Almighty God? How wrong we are to try to depend on our own puny resources for Christian service, rather than the infinite power of God!

We act, but God empowers. Which comes first? The power. But action will come and fruit will multiply AS WE GROW! By the time we reach maturity, we will be walking in the power of the Holy

Spirit, and will be ready to move on to “surrender” and contentment. Then we will enter His rest, where we will find ourselves worked to the bone. But we will not tire, as Isaiah 40:31 says, “...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.”

One of my favorite promises is found in Ps. 92:12-15, which says this:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.

This promise contains within it a study of growth, which is broken down into a sequence for our advancement, as follows:

1. The “righteous will flourish” means “those in fellowship can grow”. Fellowship, or the filling and teaching of the Spirit, is a base requirement for growth.
2. “...planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.” “Flourishing” reflects an elevated state of growth, meaning that maturity is reaching a higher level, one which is being recognized in the “courts” of God.
3. “They will still bear fruit in old age” shows how those who stay “righteous”, and/or those who walk in the Spirit, can bear exceptional fruit, into perpetuity. The final outcome of growth, and our greatest goal, is to walk so close to God that the work God does is the work we are doing, which brings great benefits to us...and glory to Him.

We will show where this growth is headed throughout the remaining studies in this volume. Growing in grace and knowledge keeps surfacing as our most important goal as believers, and as the way to our most-significant service.

PROMPTS FOR GROWTH

The Place of Prayer in Growth. One of the greatest producers—as well as a great product—of maturity...is prayer. In other words, the effectiveness of prayer depends on our growth (degree of faith), while prayer reciprocally advances growth. Paul constantly stated that he was “praying” for the growth of his listeners, and he asked them to pray for him. And there is little doubt that we should pray for ourselves, such as we see in James 1:5-6, where we are told to ask for wisdom...and throughout the gospels, where Jesus strongly emphasized our need to pray regarding all practical and spiritual matters. Paul also highlighted the need for prayer, especially when it comes to getting protection from Satan, but in all other areas as well, as shown in Eph. 6:18a, which says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

When we make requests of the Father, we are asking Him, “Have I grown enough to get the answer I seek?” For example, when we ask to be delivered from a sin that is haunting us, God will examine our growth—the size of our faith—to determine if we have matured enough to get this privilege. When

our faith reaches a certain level, we will receive protection from that particular sin, and will be able to resist it. If this doesn't happen right away, is God ignoring us? No. We have just not matured enough to qualify for this privilege. When we are not receiving respite from a particular temptation, we have our orders: KEEP GROWING! And KEEP PRAYING! Relief will never come without prayer, even though in the short term, temptation may continue as part of the training phase of our growth.

For an absolutely delicious drink of heavenly water, spend some time with Andrew Murray. His words are a great reflection of God's greatness and truth. His emphasis on prayer was clear, as exemplified in his devotional book: *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. From that book we extract the following:

As we take His word from the Blessed Book and ask him to speak to us with his living, loving voice, the power to believe and receive the Word as God's own word to us will emerge in us. It is in prayer, in living contact with God in living faith, that faith will become strong in us. Many Christians cannot understand, nor do they feel the need, of spending hours with God. But the Master says, and the experience of His people has confirmed, that people of strong faith are people of much prayer. (Endnote 10)

There is little we can add to this. Murray is saying that we will grow when we spend time with God in prayer. We don't even need words, at times, but can just sit in quiet awareness of God, and admiration of the life He brings. There's nothing quite like it.

For a complete discussion on prayer, check out *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer: Pathway to the Throne*.

The Place of Study in Growth. Growth is crucial to everything we want to do in our spiritual lives. Without growth, we will not be able to trust God, walk in the Spirit, pray effectively, produce spiritual fruit, build wisdom, or resist sin. We will be useless to God and will never achieve His will or fulfill His plan for us. Once we comprehend the *importance* of growth, we must acknowledge the greatest *facilitator* for growth: an understanding of God's Word. The Word gives us all we need to know about God and His grace apparatus, and it tells us how to use all the assets that grace provides.

2 Tim. 3:16 tells us that the Word is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Learning truths that *tell us how to live* will 1) make us "stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured [full of faith]" (Col. 4:12), and will 2) fill us with "knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9). But it is not just *knowing* the Word that prompts our growth; it is understanding it and absorbing it as wisdom *by believing it and treasuring it* that enables it to be placed on the launching pads of our hearts for application to our experience.

Through our learning of the Word from the Holy Spirit, by means of direct study and the gifts He has given to our fellow believers around us; and through the processing of divine truths by believing them and treasuring them...we will be changed. We will actually be "transformed through the renewing" of our minds (Rom. 12:2). As we study and understand the Word, we will see how to use the techniques God provides to enable us to increasingly depend on Him to produce His life in us. The Christian life is all about understanding what God is doing, seeing how we fit into His purpose, and signing up for His

training with unswerving commitment.

We see the necessity and value of the Word's wisdom declared throughout Scripture. For example, 2 Peter 3:18 commands us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 2:2, another example, calls for us to desire the truth, so that "by it you may grow in your salvation [the Christian life], now that you have tasted that the Lord is good". There other examples. God gave special instructional abilities to teachers of various kinds "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..." (Eph 4:12-13a). Paul fully understood the value and impact of *learning* God's Word. This is verified in a statement which described his own role in *teaching* God's Word, found in Col. 1:28, which says, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone [believers] perfect [mature] in Christ." Paul knew his teaching would have the effect of increasing the maturity of his audience. This is why he called on the Philippians to stay on the learning track, saying this:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ... (Phil. 1:9-10)

So, an endless array of passages in the Bible call for us to *grow in the Word*. This is because nothing nurtures maturity like understanding God's Word, particularly the truths that specify how we should *conceive of Him*, and how we should *live by Him*. Prov. 3:13 caps it, saying, "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding." (For a full discussion of the importance of learning the Word, please read "Training in the Word", a chapter in *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*.) There is no substitute for listening to God's Word to help us grow.

Waiting as a Part of Growth. J. Hampton Keathley, III, presented a series of sermons that gave a complete discussion of the doctrine of "waiting". These sermons have been encapsulated into written form and are listed under his name along with the title, "Waiting on the Lord". These are available at www.bible.org. As is usual with Keathley, his coverage of the topic is thorough and informative. Our comments here will incorporate his concepts and conclusions with our own, to see how waiting on God applies to our growth. (Endnote 11)

We have indicated clearly that there is a lot to "do" to grow (not as a matter of "works", but as a matter of accessing grace techniques and assets). So how can we "wait", while we are growing? The first thing we must understand is that waiting is not sitting on the couch doing nothing; waiting is an *active* process...not a *passive* one. While we are waiting, we will be "doing" growth-promoting activities, such as praying, studying, and so on; and in our hearts we will be trusting to the full level of our accumulated faith. Waiting actually includes a "confident expectation", so that true waiting can only be done when it is accompanied by believing.

Ps. 130:5-6 says the following: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope [faith]. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning." God had the "more-than" phrase stated twice, apparently for emphasis, to show the intensity of waiting that He expects. He wants us to "wait intensely, with confident expectation".

That does not sound passive.

God has a time for doing things, which is always the perfect time within the scope of His plan. Generally, we want things to go according to OUR plan, but God's plan is the one we must live by, which means that—at times—we will be waiting for His time to come around. But the time in between does not need to be wasted, as time spent growing is always time well spent. If God has something He wants to give us, or wants to have us do, that will come when God is ready, pending our being prepared to *receive* and/or *do*.

As we grow, we know better each day who the Lord is. As we know Him better, we trust Him more, because we see Him for what He is...our loving Father. Like the psalmist, we can say, "But as for me, I am like a green olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever" (Ps. 52:8). And because we have confidence in God's love, we can add, "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in thee" (Ps. 39:7). (KJV, Endnote 12)

We are not just waiting on blessing or relief or insight or strength, though we wait for these; we are waiting on God Himself. We want more of Him, and Him alone, not just what He brings or gives. *He* is the prize. *He* is the ultimate gain. *He* is all the blessing we need. When we know this, the wait will be over, because we will have arrived at the point of faith and growth that allow us to live in contentment. Ps. 37:7a says, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently [in faith] for him..." (Lam. 3:25) We want only Him and He is the one for whom we wait: "Patiently wait for God alone, my soul" (Ps. 62:5, NET).

And what is the result? The answer for this is found in Is. 40:31 (NET), which says, "But those who wait for the Lord's help find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles' wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired." Supernatural strength and energy will come to those who are waiting, and they will see divine good produced through them, because of their rising faith. "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun" (Ps. 37:5). Trusting, waiting, committing...there is so much to do. These contribute to growth, and they grow as they are practiced. We cannot wait to begin waiting; we must begin today. The old military slogan must now be fulfilled: Hurry up and wait! "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (Ps. 27:14).

TRAINING FOR GROWTH (THE BIG PROMPT)

Suffering to Grow. One of the hardest lessons for me to accept was that Christians must go through a certain amount of suffering to grow. I do not know the exact formula for arriving at the suffering/growth ratio, but I do know that there is pressure and strain involved in our growth. Tests and trials...and temptations...are all allowed in our lives to give us spiritual "reps" for building our faith. The choice we have is whether to take the crooked and rocky path of growth...all uphill...or to just coast and slide down a slippery slope of ease, which has been smoothed and oiled with Satan's deception and our ignorance. Growing is not an academic or philosophical process; it is real-life, involving real pain and pressure. (See how many recruits to Christianity *that* message will bring.) We will grow...or we will shrink.

I used to believe that not growing would bring only painful discipline (which it certainly can), and that confessing, praying, and studying could only bring blessing. But I discovered, after considerable resistance to the concept, that real growth requires intensive training, and that the experience will be rigorous and demanding, sometimes painful, if it is to be effective.

Ps. 119 speaks of our being “afflicted” to convince us to pay attention to our spiritual growth. This is what we see in verses 67, 71, and 75, respectively:

Verse 67—Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Verse 71—It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

Verse 75—I know, Oh Lord, that your laws [your Word] is righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Whether this affliction is the result of discipline, or is allowed for training, its purpose is to get us into the Word, and on the path of growth. We see this concept in many passages in Scripture. Here are a few of them that make this clear: we must suffer in order to cement our growth gains:

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.

1 Peter 1:6-9—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.

1 Peter 4:12-13—Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Many other scriptures and examples of suffering for growth exist in the Bible. Paul’s training provides a clear case where suffering was used to strengthen and “build him up”. The following passages illustrate the mold for growth, as demonstrated in the experiences of Paul:

2 Tim. 3:10-12—You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 Cor. 11:23-29—Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received for the Jews the forty lashed minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I

have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

How can we not be moved when we hear of Paul's suffering? Paul was also tempted unbelievably, as we see in 2 Cor. 12:7-10, which says the following:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

As we grow, tests and temptations will become stronger, which increases the need for us to grow ever more vigorously to stay ahead of them. An end to the training is coming, if we persevere, and we will see how that can happen to us, especially in Part 2. Until then, we must endure, persevere, and remain constant. A picture of *perseverance* is seen clearly in another case of Paul's suffering for growth, found in 2 Cor. 4:8-10, as follows:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

When we finish the training, the very life of Christ will be seen "in our body", so that we can glorify Him through the teaching and strengthening ministry of His Spirit. Then, when the race is done, we can lay our gold medals at His feet, at which time He will say, "Well done."

The Results of Discontent in Suffering. Ps. 106:32-33 leads off this important discussion of "discontentment", and shows what happens as a result of a faithless response to tests and trials. This passage says, "By the waters of Meribah they angered the Lord, and trouble came to Moses because of them; for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips." The story of the Jews in the desert is a poignant picture of the way believers often reject grace and provision and turn away from God in rebellion and self-willed independence. It also shows how suffering for *training* can become suffering for *discipline*, and how our hard-headedness and hard-heartedness can drive us further into carnality and darkness.

Ps. 106:43 portrays the posture and behavior of the Jews in a negative stance toward God, saying of them, "Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin." Being "bent"...warped, crooked, twisted, and gnarled...describes a believer who stops growing, and who collapses into worldly carnality, self-service, and unbelief. This is not so much an aberration, but rather is almost the standard operating procedure among believers; how few there are who have the true perspective of God, and who want God on *His* terms. Most have their own agenda and ideas of

the “good life” and how to get it, and they go the easy way of living in and for the world. This includes the “religious” crowd, who are characterized by self-righteousness and self-styled worship and service.

The story of the Jews being delivered from Egypt is well-known, but little understood. Deliverance from slavery through the parting of the waves of the Red Sea is symbolic of the conversion experience, when salvation comes to anyone who decides to believe the gospel of Christ. This represents the time of entry into the Christian life, which—until we mature—is like a desert. The newly-freed Jews, who had seen the Passover of the Lord and had just witnessed the parting of the waters of the Red Sea (one of the greatest miracles of all time), were no longer under the bondage of Egyptian oppression. They “saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians”, with the result that “the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant” (Ex. 14:31). Yet notice what happened next: Once the singing and celebration subsided, about three days after crossing the Red Sea, the Jews laughed one last time and then looked around them. Oh-oh. They saw sand and waste. By the way, Moses, what will we eat? And where is the water? Omigosh...what have you done, Moses? And then they started to complain.

They finally found some water, but it was bitter, and—even though they were complaining—God gave them a way to sweeten the water by throwing a piece of wood into it. There was, of course, a miraculous change in the molecular content of the water, but the Jews took it as a matter of course. Then they complained about hunger, and God once again...with grace and patience...met their needs, this time with manna and quail. This was another miracle, accepted with dismissal by the Jews. One of the lessons we can learn already from this story is that miracles, not even the parting of the Red Sea or the provision of supernaturally-delivered food and water, can persuade people to *believe*, when they are inclined to *disbelieve*.

The Jews had the Red Sea, then water, then food...which should have convinced them forever of the reality of God and the benevolence of His grace. But memory of miracles is not enough to sustain faith. When the Jews were tested again by a water shortage, miracles were forgotten and they began to doubt and quarrel. But before we tell the rest of this story, we want to give the moral, which is this: All the proof in the world will not persuade a stubborn heart to believe. On the other hand, those who want God and keep growing will (sooner or later) find truth and blessing in the worst of circumstances, and will give thanks that He cares enough about them to train them. This is, as you might suspect, the testimony of a mature believer. But those who have *not* matured, who are living by sight and not by faith, will look to the deceptive world and their misleading surroundings for affirmation of God’s goodness; unfortunately, these will only confuse them. Where they should be looking is into God’s Word, which will teach them of His love and patience and provision, and will explain the purpose and worth of His adoring discipline and training.

Here is what happened when their water, and their faith, dried up. After a few weeks in the desert, where God in His grace had been giving them what they needed for survival, they came to a place which was later named Massah (meaning “place of testing”) and Meribah (“quarreling” and “complaining”). It was there that God gave them a mid-term exam. The test consisted of another condition of “no water”, as we suggested, and it was there that their failure of the test had serious consequences. (Take note: God’s testing is always an opportunity for growth, but it is also an

opportunity for failure.) The Jews saw that there was no water, and took that as the final reality, quickly discounting God's love and care for them. They complained to Moses, saying, "Why do you [Moses] bring us out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst" (Ex. 17:3)? And they blasphemed, "Is the Lord amongst us or not" (Ex. 17:7b)? See how quickly God can be forgotten? We always tend to ask, "What has He done for me lately?" instead of "How does God feel about me, and what is His plan?"

The issue is this: "discontent at the time of testing". How can we prevent this? How can we avoid complaining and becoming alarmed and upset when challenges and setbacks come? The answer is simple: by trusting in God. Admittedly, that is not easy when we are looking right into the face of disaster and misfortune, perhaps even death, and what do we see in these to validate our faith? Perhaps little. It is easy for some to glibly exhort, under such circumstances, "Just trust in God!" But we will not...we will not trust...not at first...not until we are prepared. We must fail, and perhaps fail over and over, until we have failed enough, and taken our failures to God enough times, that our faith will have GROWN enough to meet and match our pressures.

The Jews failed at Meribah, and even then God was gracious and gave them water. But there were consequences. As a result of their failure to trust God, God in His infinite wisdom, knowing how long it would take them to build their faith, allowed them time to grow. The amount of time He knew this would take was a whopping FORTY YEARS! They would be under intensive training for forty long and difficult years before their faith would reach the level that they could cross the Jordan to face the uncertainties and challenges of the Promised Land. He was preparing them, teaching them to trust in His Word, as per Deut. 8:3, which says this:

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

How long will it take us to learn this same lesson? Perhaps forty years. Hopefully less. But if we stay with instruction from the Word and believe what we learn, we will accelerate the process of training, so that we do not have to spend many long years learning to confidently depend on God's grace for our physical and material sustenance and our spiritual strengthening. Until we have reached a sufficient level of maturity, we will not be able to do anything *but* complain and be anxious and doubt God. That is why we must exercise all the grace techniques which God has given us...so we can weather the tests and absorb the benefits of training, and so we can keep growing. Eventually, growth will lead us to rest and peace in the Promised Land, as we shall see.

The real lesson here is complicated. We don't ask for more faith *in this moment*, because the faith we have right now is ALL THE FAITH WE ARE GOING TO HAVE...at this time. We need more faith today than we had yesterday and more faith tomorrow than we have had today. But today our faith is just what it is. To make it bigger, we must feed and water it, and allow God's pruning and husbandry to make it stronger and more productive. We begin today, and continue tomorrow, and the next day, and we never stop, because we will never get the faith we need by halting and starting again. We must keep moving.

We must keep our faith GROWING, and never take a day off. If we do not persevere and endure, and we slide back as a result, what will happen? The suffering and testing that we are going through will be EXTENDED, as it was for the Jews at Meribah! We *grow*, so that the next test will be one that we will *pass*, as the Jews finally did; or perhaps it will take ten more failures, or one hundred, to come to the place where we are prepared to enter the Promised Land. The more attention we pay to our maturation now, the sooner we will get there.

Rejection/Persecution as a Form of Testing and Trials for Growth. Luke 6:22 describes a form of suffering experienced by believers that can be either physical or psychological. These contribute to our growth, but make no mistake; either condition can be severe and painful. Here is what this verse says: “Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.” This hatred can come out as attacks in the tangible world, or they may be seen as hateful speech or ostracism that makes us feel unloved and worthless.

You might think you are exempt from such rejection, because you are not a “super-warrior”, but it is not always the most-visible Christians who suffer the most. If you are doing God’s will and are in fellowship, even though you are alone or just privately going about your spiritual routines, you can be under attack the same as a believer who is teaching truth to thousands. Satan will be whispering accusations against you in the ears of God, yes, but also in the ears of those who know you, convincing them to hate you and think ill of you, even if you have done nothing wrong. And if you have wronged them in some way, Satan will have extra ammunition to use against you...through them.

Rejection will come to *growing believers*. But we can be blessed, even under persecution. “Blessed” means “happy”, which is what will characterize the experience of a believer who is serious about his growth. As we grow, we will find joy and peace in rejection, because our perspective will come to incorporate the view that God is either allowing...or bringing...events that will give us the *greatest opportunity to advance and move closer to Him*. We will come to see grace in all that God puts before us, and we will know that He intends all training for our benefit.

THE LAW OF GRADUAL GROWTH

The Law of Gradual Growth. Andrew Murray wrote about a principle he called, “The Law of Gradual Growth”. Here is a quote from the sub-chapter by that same name in his book, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*:

In our spiritual nature, we, too, are under the law of gradual growth that reigns in all created life. Only on the path of development can we reach our divine destiny. And only the Father, who determines the times and seasons, knows the moment when the soul or the Church is ripened to that fullness of faith in which it can really take and keep a blessing.

As a mother who longs to have her only child home from school, and yet waits patiently until the time of training [on] that day is completed, so it is with God and His children. (Endnote 13)

This describes very well the growth pattern of a believer who is moving toward God, who is on the “path of development”. It is only by growing that “divine destiny” can be reached, leading us ultimately

to the time when we attain “that fullness of faith”. This is the time when we will be able to say that training is done...when we can rest in God’s contentment and blessing. Consideration of this notion, *contentment*, finds us leaning forward into Part 2, coming up soon.

FAITH: THE SEAT OF GROWTH

The Place of Faith in Maturity. We are talking about growth, which we know is all about the size of our faith. Okay. Faith is everything. We need more faith. But faith does not grow by itself. It must be nourished. A flower planted in the sand in the middle of the desert, with no water, will not grow. It needs water and nutrients to grow. By the same token, faith will not grow if it is not watered and fed by the Word, and trained through God’s strengthening program.

But even if faith gets bigger, this does not make a “believing human” stronger, APART FROM GOD’S STRENGTH. Key point: We ourselves are not stronger; we just have greater access to *His* strength. What faith does is displace the weight of life in the world onto the One who can manage it; i.e., faith shifts the load to God, who can effortlessly carry it. The “stronger” our faith is, the more we rely on the strength of another...our Father. Faith is relinquishing godly work to the ONE who can perform it. When faith is working, God Himself goes to work, which He does *through the believer* exercising the faith. It is as though one’s faith opens the “work” gate, so that God’s divine good and Christ’s character and the fruit of the Spirit can be produced in the one believing.

This faith, by the way, has as its object, the Lord Jesus Christ, which translates also into faith in God the Father and the Holy Spirit. The agent that interacts with us directly is the Holy Spirit of Christ, who is always available to us as the active party of our union with Christ. Our fellowship is directly with Him, and He is the source for the divine energy, filling, leading, and moving that we need for work and service. Faith activates the ministry of the Holy Spirit, so that we can then “live by faith” (Gal. 2:20), as do all believers who are “righteous”, or in fellowship (Rom. 1:17). Faith and fellowship let us “walk in him” (Gal. 5:25), which is the only way we can “please Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Even the confession of our sins, which is our entrée into God’s presence, is an act of faith. Heb. 11:6, just cited, 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.” From Heb. 4:16 we discover that, when we “approach the throne of grace”, we do so “with confidence”, which means “with faith in the one we are approaching”. At the throne, still looking at verse 16, we first of all “receive mercy” through confession, and then we “find grace to help us in our time of need”. Our “time of need” is all the time. The difference is that—with fellowship and faith—“grace” is added to the mix to “help” us.

Jesus Depended on His Father. In Heb. 10:7, Jesus is recorded quoting from a prophetic psalm (Ps. 40:8), saying, “Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’” Jesus’ goal was to do His Father’s will. Our goal is the same as His, but is there a difference? Yes. Jesus Christ had no sinful nature and therefore He had the unbroken filling and motivation of the Holy Spirit. Because of our nature, and because we sin, the control of the Holy Spirit is lost whenever we allow unconfessed sin to stain our “sin record”. And the less faith we have, the

quicker we sin again and again, and go right along without confessing, with the result that we spend most of our time under the energy of the “flesh”, rather than the “Spirit”. We need *more faith*, so we can keep greater focus on God, be aware of our sin more quickly, and confess more frequently, thus reducing our time out of fellowship. Plus, with more faith, we can walk more consistently under the influence of the Spirit, whereby we are less likely to sin in the first place.

Confession works with any level of faith, and will always restore us to fellowship. The problem is that a believer with weak faith, who is confessing, will not have a strong-enough reliance on the Holy Spirit to keep Him from turning right back to his sin. Faith is like a fence around our fellowship-coral. If the fence is weak or low, then confessing and moving into the spiritual enclosure (of fellowship) is no guarantee that we will be kept there; the faith-fence will simply not hold us. The solution for this, so we can build stronger fences—even beginning with the weakest faith—is to pray and study immediately upon return to fellowship. Prayer and absorption of truth serve as fence-builders, which will—over time—enable us to get in fellowship and stay there, so we can enjoy the full benefits of the Spirit’s power.

We have taught many times in the past, with justification from Scripture, that confession gets us into fellowship, while faith keeps us there. When faith grows, we simply understand God better, and value Him more. This is part of our resistance to sin, and our motivation to confess immediately when we fail. Faith helps all the way around. Jesus had absolute, unquestioning faith in His Father. This is what we want.

We want to depend on the Father the same way Jesus did. But can we? No. Why? Because we are not Jesus. We can’t *really* be like Jesus, can we, because of our errant nature? So, how are we ever going to do the Father’s will? Let’s see...(pondering)...who can do the Father’s will? Oh...Jesus. So why don’t we let HIM do the Father’s will FOR us? He is, after all, inside of us in the form of His Spirit, and He is willing and able...so where’s the hesitation? The problem is this: We trust *ourselves* more than we trust *God*...to do God’s work and perform His will. What a tragic (though common) mistake!

If we trust God, He will, by His Son, through His Spirit, do the work that fits His own will and pleases Himself. All we need is more faith in Him. As we have seen, the means to greater faith is growth, so we will continue to seek ways to grow and move closer to Him. We have been told that the outcome of this will be the life of Christ, which will be lived out through us, as we see in Phil. 1:21a: “For to me to live is Christ...” Done properly, our lives will not be lived “for” Christ...they “are” Christ! And if the life we are now living is *Christ*, then our lives will be spent *doing the will of God*. All it takes is the faith to let Him do it.

Why we Must Believe. So, we see why we must “believe”. It is because we can’t trust ourselves to do what God asks; only God can do what God demands. Is this a waste of His time? No. His plan is for us to participate in His program to demonstrate to Satan and all angels—both “elect” and “fallen”—that He is justified in sending those who reject him to an eternity of suffering. This is a long story...please read “The War Against God”, a chapter in *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, for a full description of this important overview of creation and God’s plan for mankind. You will see that it is worth God’s while to bring in willing believers as volunteers for His program, and when we accept the terms of His service, which is that we learn to trust Him...He will go to work

through us and make us conduits for His goodness. (Reminder: As we have said many times, we will be VERY busy when God works, because we are the feet and hands and mouths with which He does His work.)

We *believe in Him*, because *we are inadequate* to do what He does. 2 Cor. 2:15-16 (NET) says this:

For we are a sweet aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing—to the latter an odor from death to death, but to the former a fragrance from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

Paul is talking about his multi-pronged ministry, which included almost every gift in the closet, and is showing that the supernatural work of God is not something that he is adequate for. He concludes in verse 17b (NET) that “...we are speaking in Christ before God as persons of sincerity [faith], as persons sent from God.” He is showing that he has faith, that he is in fellowship, and that he is operating as one sent by God. We must “believe”, because God alone is adequate to “do”. 2 Cor. 3:4-6 (NET) seals this concept, as follows:

Now we have such confidence [faith] in God through Christ. Not that we are adequate [or competent] in ourselves to consider anything as if it were coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who made us adequate to be servants of a new covenant not based on the letter but on the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.

How much clearer could it be? We are not adequate to do God’s work. We can “imitate” the patterns of His work, but we cannot “do” them. When *we* do His work, it is “legalism”, or “based on the letter” of the law. When *He* does the work, it is based on the power of His Spirit. About this, Brennan Manning said, “Doing is not producing.” (Endnote 14) We can’t even make our own plans adequately, as per Jer. 10:23, which says, “I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.” Can we see the truth? We need lots of help! Which means we need lots of faith.

Fighting to Believe. At any stage of our growth, we can believe. This means that we can choose to believe in God’s love, His promises, His power, and so on...but sustaining this faith in the face of oncoming attacks from all the evil forces depends on how *much* faith we have. With “little faith” (Matt. 8:26), we will not last, with the result that we will move into carnality, where faith is virtually absent. This means that our choice to believe must be preceded by previous choices to “want God” and “seek God”. These are the fundamental conditions for building our faith. We will never have the impetus to *build* our faith, if we do not first want God...and therefore seek Him. When we want Him, we will *find* and *use* the techniques He makes available to help us grow our faith.

So why do we use the title, “fighting to believe”? This is because we are focused on the strengthening of the only spiritual quality that will enable God to work in our lives. Without attaining this faith, all the assets and techniques will be of no avail to us; we must fight to get them. By the way, using the techniques is not “works”; it is accessing “grace”. We are not “fighting to do”; we are “fighting to believe”. Lewis Sperry Chafer said of this, “There is a wide difference between ‘fighting’ to do what God alone can do, and ‘fighting’ to maintain an attitude of dependence on Him to do what He alone can do.” (Endnote 15) This is “fighting the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12).

Chafer also gave some of the standards which God has set for His children, which he characterized as “superhuman”. Here is a summary of what he presented to depict “the present rule of life for the child of God under grace” (Endnote 16):

- Referring to John 13:34 and John 15:12, which call for us to love as Christ loved, Chafer said, “To love *as* Christ has loved us is infinitely higher and humanly impossible.”
- From Eph. 4:30, we glean that we should never “grieve” the Holy Spirit, meaning we should never sin.
- We should give thanks for everything, according to Eph. 5:20.
- We should “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).
- We must “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” The word “praises” is actually virtues...the virtues of God...which we are to exhibit.
- We are to “rejoice evermore” and “pray without ceasing”, according to Chafer’s quote from the KJV.
- Finally, who can live up to the demands of Eph. 4:1-3? This passage calls for us to do this: live a life worthy of our calling, be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bear with one another in love, and “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace [pervasive fellowship]”. (Endnote 17)

Following his delineation of these passages, Chafer said the following:

Though these passages present impossible demands upon the human resource, God most evidently expects them to be realized in every believer’s daily life. He knows better than we that we could never produce any such quality of life; yet He is not unreasonable in His expectation, since He stands ready to supply all that He demands. (Endnote 18)

To which he shortly adds this:

The new rule of life which is placed before the child of God under grace is, then, impossible from the human standpoint, and its realization must depend on a definite reliance upon the indwelling Spirit to do the whole will of God. (Also Endnote 18)

In another reference to the insightful writings of Lewis Sperry Chafer, we see the following in regard to the role of faith in our relationship with the Holy Spirit. He asks the question, “What is meant by “walk in the Spirit? And then he answers with this:

There are several passages of Scripture in which this vital issue appears; but it is, perhaps most directly stated in Galatians 5:16: ‘This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.’ The child of God has no power within himself whereby he can enter, promote, or maintain a ‘walk in the Spirit.’ The Scripture, when rightly rendered, does not make the

impossible demand upon a Christian that he, in his own strength, is to accomplish a ‘walk in the Spirit.’ It is rather revealed that the Spirit will do the walking in the Christian. The human responsibility is that of a whole dependence upon the Spirit. Walking by means of the Spirit is simply walking by a definite reliance upon the ability and power of the One who indwells. (Endnote 19)

Our job is to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7, NKJV), so the Spirit can do His walking through us. This is why we must fight, not to achieve, but to have greater faith.

Cementing the Main Concept of Faith: God does the Living; We Do the Trusting. We must be clear in what we are trusting God for. Provision is “added” to us, as per Matt. 6:33, when we search for God’s power (His kingdom) and His righteousness. We believe He will meet our basic physical and material needs when we are growing. But there is a larger objective in our pursuit, which must be emphasized and understood. It is this: We must understand that there is a life beyond the visible and tangible, and even past the mental and emotional, which involves the *point of our connection with God*. When we are saved, the Spirit indwells us forever; He is permanently “in us”. But we are not always “in the Spirit”, since the flesh can take over our thinking and living. What we are trusting God for is to show us how to keep our link with Him strong, so we can operate within the sphere of His power (“in Him”), allowing Him to produce His divine qualities in us.

What this means is that we must depend on God to live His life out in us. This requires maximum growth and faith, and—ultimately—a “surrender” to Him. Paul stated the case clearly in Gal. 2:20, which says, “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.” Faith is the key to having Christ do HIS living in US! Faith is dependence on God to do the living.

The life we are living is lived by the Spirit of Christ, as we have seen before in Gal. 5:25, which says, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [an idiom meaning “walk by”] the Spirit.” This walk, as we saw in Gal. 2:20 is made possible by faith. This is what we see also in Rom. 8:3-4, which—according to Chafer (Endnote 20)—gives a summary of Rom. 6:1 through 8:4. This passage says the following:

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Chafer isolated seven factors in this passage, as seen also in the broader context of Rom. 6:1 to 8:4, which show us the wrong way and the right way to score a possible victory over sin. Here are the factors he discovered:

1. “The law” (8:3) which represents the righteous will of God...The attempt to secure perfect righteousness through obedience, in mere human strength to *any* precepts will always fail. Grace provides that its heaven-high standards shall be realized through the energizing power of the Spirit.

2. “The weakness of the flesh” (8:3), or the utter inability of human resources in the presence of the heavenly requirements.
3. “Sin in the flesh” (8:3). That in the flesh which is different from “weakness”: it is *opposed* to the Spirit.
4. Christ came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (8:3). He took the place of vital union with the sinner; but did not become a sinner, or partake of the sin nature.
5. “And for sin, condemned [judged] sin in the flesh” (8:3). Thus He met every claim of the righteousness of God against the “old man”.
6. “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (8:4): never to be fulfilled *by* us. It is the fruit of the Spirit.
7. “Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (8:4). Such is the human condition for a victorious “walk”. It must be by the Spirit. (Also Endnote 21)

God has provided a way to beat the weaknesses of our flesh and make us victorious by sharing His power with us. The righteousness of the law will never be fulfilled by us, but only by God-ordered and energized behavior as a result of the work of the Spirit. When we are controlled by the Spirit due to our being cleansed through confession, we are then qualified to exercise faith, to pray for strength and wisdom, and to move forward through study and training. In short, when we are in fellowship, we are eligible to grow and increasingly walk in the power of the Spirit. This is how the law is fulfilled...or...how sin is beaten.

The Holy Spirit is “in us”, as per John 14:17b: “But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” The Holy Spirit is our “helper and enabler”, as per John 14:16, which says, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor (Helper) to be with you forever...” He is our “teacher” as per John 14:26: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” And the Holy Spirit will flow out from us like living waters, as we see in John 7:38-39a: “‘Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.”

This is the One we want working in us and teaching us and flowing through us. He does the work. We have seen this many times, and will see it many more times. We must let this point rest in our souls. Nothing we will ever do, especially fighting the ravages of sin, will be possible without the leading of the Spirit. Rom. 8:13b says, “...if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live [spiritually].” We can only “work” in His power; so says Col. 1:29: “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” 1 Cor. 15:10 adds, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

When the Spirit is at work, we will grow and exhibit the character of God. It does not happen automatically, or even easily, but the profit of growing in grace offers this unmatched benefit. As 1

Tim. 4:7b-8 says, "...train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but [training in] godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." The best way to cover all our bases...is to grow. Paul then capped the statement in verse 8 with a serious call to PAY ATTENTION, saying this:

This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially [namely] of those who believe. (1 Tim. 4:9-10)

The term "trustworthy saying" tells us that this is something we can sink our teeth into. Paul is referring to the statements he made before and after verse 9. This is why he said, in verse 11, "Command and teach these things." All the points he is making are worth highlighting, but our main focus is on what he said in verses 7-8: that training in "godliness" has value for "all things"; and that it holds forth "promise" for us...today on the earth...and forever in the presence of God. We can reasonably conclude that there is nothing we could feature that has more importance for our spiritual advancement than training for godliness, which will strengthen our faith, and increase the opportunity for God to produce His life...through us.

Being Fully Grown. There are many verses in Scripture that describe the condition of being "fully grown", or achieving maximum maturity. To close out our discussion of growth, we want to offer some of these to show that it *can* happen...and *should*. Here are some representative scriptures that highlight maturity:

1 Cor. 2:6a—We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature...

1 Cor. 14:20—Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants [innocent], but in your thinking be adults.

2 Cor. 13:11—Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection [maturity], listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Phil. 3:15—All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

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.

Matt. 5:48—Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Heb. 13:21--...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

James 1:4—Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

These verses indicate that maturity is a possibility for all of us, beckoning us to move toward higher planes of faith and spiritual functioning. As we move up, step by step, we will see changes within ourselves, and in our lives.

It is time now for Part 2, “Entering the Promised Land”.

Part Two

Entering the Promised Land

In This part....

Preview. Introduction to Part Two

Chapter 7. Reaching Super-Maturity

Chapter 8. Before and after Maturity

Chapter 9. Surrender Recapitulated

Chapter 10. Victorious Life: Contentment

Preview

Introduction to Part Two

What is Real? Most of the things we study have “spiritual” connotations, which may make them seem “unpractical”. Naturally, we want to acquire assets that are concrete, those that allow us to see visible results. “Walking in the Spirit” or “getting closer to God”...almost everything we talk about...seems abstract and not directly usable. This is the way it will be until the “spiritual” becomes “real” to each of us. God and the life of His Spirit in us is the greatest reality we can know, but we relate to it in the abstract, because the relationship between God and us is a matter of the spiritual *heart*, which is non-material. Spirituality—to the uninitiated—may seem ethereal, but it is not. It is hyper-substantial, even though to the world it seems vaporous.

Part 2 steps even further away from the world of sensory experience, and gets deeper into the world of spirituality and the “unseen”. 2 Cor. 4:18 says, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” We are interested in the eternal. If we are not, we will spend our entire lives poking around in the world’s cesspool of science and philosophy (which are legitimate pursuits, *if* they include God), and never truly explaining our purpose and origin. Our interests are spiritual, if we are properly aligned with God, and as a result we will be less concerned with the material world. Still, as we shall see, when we reach the Promised Land, there is much that can change in our surroundings as well. Keep in mind that a lot of the change that will occur in the Land comes from the *altered perspective* we acquire when we reach maturity. Even the things that don’t change on the outside will seem “good” on the inside.

The Divine Perspective. Our goal is to move toward eternal values and perspectives, and to move away from the view that what we see in the world is the ultimate reality. As we become more attuned to God spiritually by becoming MORE MATURE, the world shrinks as a repository for our values. Conclusion: As we GROW SPIRITUALLY, we will move further into a *divine perspective* of reality, and further away from a *worldly point of view*. This will not bring us accolades on our block, or make us popular at the “Y”, because most of our ideas about God and the way He works will be viewed by the world as ludicrous, foolish, and even crazy. So, be prepared. We are entering, not just a mode of thought that is seen as *unusual* by the world, but one in which our evolving view of God as “everything” is becoming so *offensive* to the world that they will actively and openly oppose it. Though the world would never concede the point, we will see before we are through that our reaching a level of maturity where God is central is the most PRAGMATIC position we can ever have. Those who cling to the world claim we are “unpractical”. They will see soon enough that they are wrong.

All I can say is this: It’s great to be weird, and maybe a little crazy, for God, because God’s life is the best, especially when we reach the point of super-maturity. The question you must ask is this: What do you want? If you want God, you are ready for the training course He has set. And when you are nearing

completion of your conditioning, another decision awaits: Are you ready to go after God's best? It has been a long and difficult trek getting to the Promised Land; we have stood on the banks of this river many times before, wanting to cross; but we have not previously been equipped to face the foes on the other side. Now, however, we are prepared for the final steps of 1) making the crossing, 2) entering the Land, and 3) occupying the Land.

So, there are several steps that the super-mature believer can look forward to: The first step will be crossing the Jordan, which symbolizes acquiring a full understanding of God's love (this sounds abstract, once again, but this is actually "concrete spirituality"). Understanding God's love leads to an acquisition of the "fullness of God", our ticket across the river. The next thing we must do is roll over the walls of Jericho, which stand between us and an occupation of the Land. Taking down Jericho represents an act of absolute surrender to the protection and provision of God, which will enable us to claim our territory. This will give us our first victory in our new home. Following this, we will settle into the Land of Milk and Honey, entering a new time of blessing, provision, victory, contentment, and rest.

Here is a summary of what the super-mature can expect to do:

1. Cross the Jordan, which symbolizes getting the "fullness of God".
2. Take down Jericho, which is a portrayal of the removal of the last obstacle between us and the Land. This is the time when we surrender completely to God's power and care, and is actually a time of miracles performed by God.
3. Occupy the land, where we will find victory and contentment in God's rest.

The Promised Land: This is where we will live, if we will continue to follow God's directions. Here in the Promised Land, ninety percent of the promises God has made to us regarding our lives on earth will be fulfilled. This is where there is rest and peace and production and good behavior and love...and the place where Satan's impact will be reduced. This is the abundant life that God wants for us...one that *does not come to us just because we have been saved*, but one we can have *because we have matured*. Reaching the level of maturity required to enter the Promised Land has involved a lot of study, trials, tests, temptations, and even rejection/persecution. But here we are. So strap on your sandals! The river has been dammed, and you can now begin your crossing!

Chapter 7

Reaching Super-Maturity

OVERVIEW OF THE FULLNESS OF GOD

Achieving Maturity and Understanding God's Love. We have discussed the fullness of God in the last two books: *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, and *Killing Sin before Sins Kills You: A Survival Guide*. The fullness of God is the condition required for entry into the Promised Land. Eph. 3:14-21 gives the complete story of Christian growth, from infancy to super-maturity, through which we become eligible to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Here is what this passage says:

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

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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

For an excellent summary of the meaning of this passage, as it is related to the “fullness of God”, see *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, pp. 51-53. The idea is that we must follow all the previously-studied procedures for advancement toward maturity, and when we are through, there will be one last step that is essential for receiving “fullness”. This last step is seen in verses 19-20, quoted above, which tell us we must “have power” (by achieving a sufficient level of maturity), to be able to “grasp” the full size and scope of the love of Christ. When we actually “know this love that surpasses knowledge”, we will be qualified to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Then, and only then, can things be done “according to his power that is within us”...things we had never before imagined or asked for. REALLY understanding and participating in God's love makes us eligible for God's fullness.

Fullness comes from two things: 1) super-maturity, and 2) a full understanding of the love of Christ (which includes, of course, the love of God the Father and the Holy Spirit). The first one, super-maturity, has been covered completely in this and other studies; the second one needs more attention, because we have to know, not just “about” God's love, but we must know it in detail...all its

measurements and parameters. We must be fully acquainted with all its facets and become intimate with it...interactively and personally. Only then can we hope for “fullness”.

Summary of the Sequence for Being Filled with the Fullness of God. The following is a summary taken from *Step by Step toward Surrender*, p. 53, to help us encapsulate the basic steps involved in acquiring the “fullness of God”:

1. **Confess all known sins** for forgiveness and the filling of the Spirit.
2. **Pray for wisdom**, as well as for the entire complement of things we have learned to pray about.
3. **Study the Bible** meaningfully for spiritual nourishment and growth.
4. **Endure God’s training** for refinement and maturity.
5. **Seek the interchange of gifts** among mature believers for maximum mutual support and growth.
6. **Walk in the Spirit by faith** for steady empowerment and spiritual production.
7. **Immerse oneself, with singular concentration, into an absolute understanding of and participation in God’s “surpassing love”**, with focus on grace operations.
8. **Stand by to be filled** with the whole measure of the fullness of God.

This summary is best seen in two parts: 1) maturing, as per steps 1 through 6, which call for confession, prayer (esp. a prayer for wisdom), study, training, gifted edification, and walking in the Spirit by faith; and 2) understanding God’s love, as per step 7. Fullness comes, then, from two conditions: 1) super-maturity, and 2) a full understanding of the love of Christ (and/or God and/or the Holy Spirit). We will begin our study of God’s love here. This is crucial information. It is my prayer that we will understand the depths of God’s love, and present them in ways that are clear and edifying. I feel we are on holy ground here.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD

Understanding God’s Love Leads to the Fullness of God. When we speak of God’s love, we suggest three aspects of it in regard to the human race. The first is God’s love for all people, as we see in John 3:16, which says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The second is God’s love for His children, as we see in Rom. 8:39: “...neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God.” (cf., Rom. 8:32). And finally, there is the special love and provision that God has for those who have reached maturity. This is what we see in a passage that was referenced earlier, Eph. 3:14-21. For emphasis, we re-quote here verses 16-20, as follows:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in

your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 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.

We will not “know” this love until we have been “strengthened” with His power, suggesting both a walk in the Spirit and an advanced level of maturity. After this, we must be “rooted and established in love”...God's love, which we understand and experience for ourselves; and express toward others as God's love flows through us. The obvious and well-confirmed point is that—when we mature and receive a full understanding of the way God's love works—we will be qualified (which does NOT mean deserving) for God's fullness. Granting of this fullness is an expression of God's love in a special way toward the super-mature. He will know when we are ready for this promotion.

God's Love Endures. One of the most important things we can learn about God's love is its durability. This is possible because of His patience and kindness. While the Jews were in the desert, failing again and again, God loved them and cared for them. He corrected them over and over, but He loved them endlessly. Ps. 136:10-22 gives an account of what God did for the Israelites when He freed them from slavery in Egypt, brought them through the Red Sea, led them through the desert, cared for them, and carried them at last into the Promised Land...because He loved them.

Every verse in Ps. 136 ends with the phrase, “His love endures forever.” This is love for training. He loves us enough to *train* us, and then He loves us *through the training*, even when we fail. He tests us as an outcropping of His love, because He knows training will make our faith stronger and bring us closer to Him. Deut. 8:2 describes it this way: “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart...” God's love perseveres, even when we do not. Ps. 136:1: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever.”

Love and Maturity. Ps. 33:18 frames God's love for mature believers this way: “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love...” Fear is advanced faith, and those whose hope is in God's unfailing love are those who understand it...who “grasp” it. These are the super-mature, who enjoy special love from God, and will receive exceptional privilege and deliverance, as we shall see.

The love of God is just that: love originating from God. ALL divine love COMES FROM GOD! Believers are commanded to love God, but this can only be done by mature believers, who are actually *reflecting God's love*. We are also commanded to love fellow Christians (and others), but this is also a love that flows from God. Our part in loving is staying in fellowship and growing, so we can engage the Holy Spirit within us to love and serve others. We do this easily, when we reach super-maturity. (For a thorough discussion of the way we are to love and serve, see the article, “‘One Another’ Commands of Scripture”, by J. Hampton Keathley, III. This article is available at www.bible.org.) (Endnote 22)

God's Love as seen in His Promises. It is not so much the promises themselves that excite us, but

what they portend. God's promises tell us what He wants to give us. We might ask, "Why does He want to give us anything at all? The answer is this: because of the love He has for us. His love prompts Him to offer to us "everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). And His offer is packaged in the form of promises, which allow us to "participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world" (2 Pet. 1:4). His love translates into promises and His promises translate into His giving to us everything we need...if we are prepared to receive what they warrant. We should pay close attention to God's promises, because they are indicators of what He wants to give to us.

Do we receive *everything* that is promised in the Bible? No. Why? Because we are not walking by faith, in the Spirit, and on a pathway toward maturity. God wants us to have it all. But we crowd out His gifts with self-trust, worldly preoccupations, and personal lust. We want to serve ourselves and the world, more than we do God, and therefore we bypass what He offers. His promises are reliable and effective. Their not being fulfilled is a matter of our rejection of His grace, which is held out to us as techniques, assets, provisions, and blessings. What is the sure way to get the full benefit of all the promises? Stay on the growth track until we reach super-maturity. When we become fully mature, we will see the promises fulfilled one after the other. Until we reach this level of maturity, however, we will see them only partially fulfilled, or not fulfilled at all. After all, we are in training, which is not a time of comfort and ease.

God Delights in Showing Love. Jer. 9:23-24 shows us what delights God, saying this:

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.

God's justice and righteousness are important aspects of God's essence, but the featured quality here is God's kindness, which is nothing more or less than His love. God loves to "exercise" His love. This love is a value He has adopted for His created beings, based on His sovereign and divine purposes, and the place He has given to man because of it. (Once again, we refer you to "War against God", in *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, to see why man is so important to God.) The parameters for the operation of this love are treated thoroughly in Scripture, but we are considering only one aspect, seeing only the part of love that pertains to the operations of grace in our lives. The love of God is an enormous topic that greatly exceeds the scope of this study, but we want to know enough to understand it, and we must know how to move *toward* it. We will now see how this is done.

What it Means to "Grasp" God's Love. How do we "know" God's love? By studying His grace...by examining all the techniques, by learning the promises, and by seeing grace in operation as we train from day to day. We are learning all about God's grace. Justice, righteousness, and all the other qualities of God will be satisfied and served if we will focus on the one quality of grace. This is what we need to know of God's love, and why knowledge of it is essential to our receiving the "fullness of God"; we must *comprehend grace* and *know how it works*.

Without understanding and using grace opportunities and provisions (techniques, promises, training, etc.), we will never reach super-maturity and God's fullness. To "know this love that surpasses

knowledge” (Eph. 3:19 again) means to faithfully learn and apply the methods we have learned. (If you need to strengthen your background regarding the advanced levels of maturity, they are presented in all our books, especially the last four: *Bible Basics for Living*, *God’s Training Program*, *Step by Step toward Surrender*, and *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*. These books are chock- full of grace functions and programs, and all point the way toward greater maturity and trust in God...which, in turn, lead to a complete understanding of love (grace)...and the fullness of God.)

Verses on God’s Love. God wants us to SEE Him! He wants us to KNOW Him! He knows that, when we do, we will understand and appreciate His grace methods. His grace is surprising, in view of the miserable ways that we fail, but we must find a way to accept it, even though we do not deserve it. Here are some verses that help us better grasp the function of God’s love and grace:

Ps. 103:8—The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Ps. 103:11—For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him...

Ps. 103:12---...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Micah 7:19—You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot.

Eph. 1:7-8a—In him we have the redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us...

God’s love is the substance of His grace, and grace is the core of His design for us. We see this love on every page of Scripture and in all the procedures for living that He presents there. To say that we must have a full knowledge of God’s love is to say that we must 1) know Him thoroughly through His Word, and 2) know Him through the interaction between His Spirit and us...as His training and leadership move us toward a full realization of His grace.

Getting the Fullness of God. We have seen how the fullness of God is acquired...through constant growth and spirituality. This fullness prepares us to step across the Jordan, where the waters will be dammed to stop the flow of water; when we are ready, we can walk across. We have built our faith to reach super-maturity, and we have learned completely about how we are to relate to God. These have enabled us to receive God’s fullness and enter the Promised Land...by His strength...based on the certainty of His promises for protection and blessing.

Chapter 8

Before and After Maturity

THE DESERT EXPERIENCE

Looking Back from the Jordan. As we stand on the banks of the Jordan River (spiritually speaking), and look back, we see that we have been in the desert...a kind of crucible...God's training ground. (We are emphasizing here the "training" aspect of our growth, assuming that you noticed earlier the real foundation for growth: our learning of God's Word.) The Jews spent forty years in training...it took that long for any of them to reach maturity. Before even one of them crossed the Jordan, though, they had to go through every test and trial in the book. God kept them on the training field to allow them to prepare for entry into the Land, but out of the original group who had left Egypt, there were only two that actually made it in...Joshua and Caleb.

The desert represents our growth period in the Christian life, a life we have because we have crossed the Red Sea and are now "saved" from slavery. But we have much to learn as new believers, and there is much to be done before we will be ready to enter the church-age equivalent of the Promised Land. God provided for the Jews during their training, but they endured intense pain, deprivation, conflict, illness, and military assaults while they were going through it. We must do the same. They had only bare essentials, and had to rely on God completely even for these. Hopefully, we will discern God's providing hand better than they did.

They were provided with miraculous releases and rescues, but the effects of these were not lasting, because soon after each one, they returned to their faithless thinking. They had just witnessed the avoidance of death through the sprinkling of blood on the door posts of their houses, and the victory of release from the grips of Pharaoh, but when they stood on the shores of the Red Sea, they quickly caved...and wanted to go back to the slavery they had known. Then God opened the Red Sea and allowed them to cross on dry land to escape Pharaoh, but within three days, when they became hungry and thirsty, they complained and fretted and once again wanted to go back to Egypt to take their chances there.

God was patient with them, though, and gave them food and water. These were provided supernaturally...through miracles. The miracles were nice, but they were not *teaching* the Jews to trust God. The lesson, you see, is never this: "What we must do is look at what God has provided and at the exceptional way that He has sustained us. These will sustain our faith." Not so. Awareness of and thanksgiving for God's provision is appropriate, but recognition of sustenance alone WILL NOT SUSTAIN OUR FAITH OR OUR SPIRITUAL WALK! It is not enough to see spectacular works to make us believe.

Our belief will come only from a fundamental hunger for God. If we want God, we will pursue Him, and when we pursue Him, He will bring us along...when we seek God, He draws us to Himself, and how does He do this? He gives us training opportunities that will strengthen our faith and our relationship with Him. There is no better catalyst for real growth than testing from God. Miracles and provisions will not cause growth, whereas suffering and trials (along with learning the Word) assuredly will. If we have little propensity to believe and follow God, miracles will not change our mind. It is only through growth and training that faith can be strengthened, and even then the training must be “endured” for it to benefit us.

Training in the Wilderness. There was a lot of singing and celebrating when the Jews watched the waters sweep over Pharaoh and his army. And for three days they were fine, until they began to question where they were going to get food and water. They came to some water at Marah (meaning “bitter”), but the water was undrinkable. So they railed against Moses. Moses was able to appeal to God on their behalf, and God provided a piece of wood that sweetened the water when it was tossed in. God was taking care of them, even though they were not trusting Him.

God knew that the Jews needed to learn to trust. So He set up a choice for them. They could learn the easy way, with fewer tests and trials, or they could learn the hard way, with maximum-intensity training. Here is what God told them:

If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you. (Ex. 15:26)

There are those who can build their faith without harsh training, but I would say they are rare. Most believers, even those with a strong desire to grow, require suffering and setbacks to learn that God is the one “who heals”. Learning to trust God is not easy for most of us, because we have our own ideas about how life is to be handled.

So the training began. Soon after Marah, the Jews ended up at Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees...more provision. Then they moved on to the Desert of Sin, where they complained bitterly about the lack of food. Once again, God was patient with them, providing miraculous “bread from heaven” each morning, and quail in the evening. They were fed. The test with the food was this: Were they going to follow directions on when and how much to gather, and how to manage it? (See Ex. 16) God gave specific instructions on the food, having them gather food every day except on the 6th day of the week, when they were to gather enough for the 7th day as well. On the 7th day, no gathering was to be done, as this was a time of rest. They did not follow these directions well. No surprise.

Training Begins in Earnest. Ex. 17:1 shows the meandering that the Jews began to do, as follows: “The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place, as the Lord commanded.” (Notice that the training is “directed” by God.) At Rephidim, water shortage again becomes an issue, and the quarreling and complaining resume. They accuse Moses of bringing them out of Egypt to die of thirst. Think about this. This is describing a real, life-or-death dilemma for these Jews. This is truly frightening and crazy-making, if you find yourself in such a situation. It is easy to be

glib and judgmental as we *read* about the “faithless” response of these people, but when we are faced with death or disaster, how unlike them are we? It is only the truly mature believer that assumes a divine point of view under such extreme circumstances. Negative responses to training drills are not easy to avoid, but it is important that we guard against them, because taking a faithless attitude toward training events will only cause their end to be delayed.

So here are the Jews at Rephidim, where the quarreling is persistent. Moses prays again. God responds and tells Moses to go to the “rock”, which will miraculously give water. God provides...but the Jews have tipped their hand and declared their view...by complaining. This was a big mistake. The place was named “Meribah”, which means “complaining”. It is also called “Massah”, which means a place of “testing”. In Ex. 17:7, the response to the test is clear: “And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” What is the first thing we think when tragedy strikes? We think God has left the scene, or that He doesn’t care, or that He is not loving. These are patently false, of course, but the heat of battle, or the pain of suffering, or the darkness of extreme pressure, can easily tilt us over from a peaceful, calm state into one that is agitated and distressed. Miracles did not persuade the Jews to trust; perhaps sufficient training will.

One of their wanderings takes them up to the Jordan River, and they are considering the land they have been assured they can occupy. But doubt prevails, as they consider possible obstacles and foes on the other side. Twelve spies are sent into the Land, and they (except for Joshua and Caleb) describe the land as foreboding and unconquerable. The Jews responded with despair and faithlessness, with the result that they were told they would *not* enter the Land, because they were not ready. The adults standing would never enter (except, again, for Joshua and Caleb), because they refused to be trained, living in refusal of God’s teaching and love. They refused the “rest” God offered them in the Land, because they did not “believe” Him. That unbelief was the result of their not growing, leaving them a long way from super-maturity.

Recapturing the Jews’ Training. The Jews had avoided death by sprinkling the blood of lambs on their door posts at the Passover, and they had escaped Pharaoh’s army by crossing the Red Sea on dry land. (These are symbolic of the process of salvation, reflected in the application of the blood and freedom from the slavery of sin.) They were eye-witnesses to these miracles, were essentially “saved”, yet they were not willing to claim and control the land which was promised to them. They had a “slavery mentality”. Freedom from Egypt represents the process *of* salvation, and the slavery mentality of the Jews in the desert represents a carnal or immature state *after* salvation. NOTE: No believer can enter the Promised Land whose mind is controlled by carnality, or whose faith is dominated by an attachment to slavery (to self, the world, Satan, etc.). No sinfulness or record of sin will be allowed to proceed into the Promised Land. And no untrained believer...one who does not understand the Word, or who has not endured the tests and trials of training...can go in. No sinners. No immature.

Believers of the first generation, the ones who came out of Egyptian slavery, represent believers who are carnal and immature, those who cannot enter God’s rest. Believers of the following generation have a new mindset, which is that they CAN live in the land of promise (and “promises”). The attitude

of this new generation symbolizes proper living under grace, where God provides and equips us with everything we need to stay pure and to grow. If we “listen”, as the first generation did not, we can hear the call to grace, where we will find all the help we need to get to the Land. The second generation wanted what God offered, so they paid attention.

God’s Evaluation of Training. This is how it is today: Some of us are “trainable” and some are not. Those who want God will endure the training and mature. Those who want the world, or their own way, will not last through the training and must wander endlessly through the desert of their lives. Here is what God said about the “untrainable” Jews:

So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” (Heb. 3:7-11)

When our hearts are resistant to God, He will let us wander. God is looking for hearts that are softened through a desire for Him, hearts that yearn for Him. Those who want God will learn to trust God. In verse 12, just following the passage just quoted, the writer of Hebrews concludes, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” When we turn away from God, a disinterest and distrust in God will occur, resulting in our growth and effectiveness being neutralized. We will not fit into the *world* the same as unbelievers, because we are God’s children, but we will be useless to God and our lives will be blank, spiritually.

Verses 16-19 in Heb. 3 continue God’s evaluation of the Jews’ training, as follows:

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed [alternate translation: “disbelieved”, as per NIV]. So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

The Jews could not enter the Promised Land, because they rejected God’s training and chose to walk a path of unbelief. They chose the desert over God. And most of us are doing the same thing. Continuing into Heb. 4, we see this in v. 1: “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.” Verse 6 adds, “It still remains that some will enter that rest...” Verses 8-11 further confirm that God’s rest is still available, as per the following:

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God [i.e., available to believers]; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us [believers], therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their [the Jews’] example of disobedience.

“Rest” is this: super-maturity, the fullness of God, surrender, victory over sin, and—as we shall see—contentment. This is what we are building our faith for...to enter this rest.

Faith and Trust: New Testament vs. the Old Testament. We want to “essay” a distinction between the exercise of faith or trust in the Old Testament, as compared with the faith we exercise today. The difference seems to be in shades and degrees, as all aspects of faith are included in both times, but the emphasis from one period to the next seems to alter slightly. In the Old Testament, there seemed to be a stronger emphasis on “external” conditions, whereas in the New Testament, especially the Church Age, greater emphasis is given to “internal” matters and experiences...just as under the Law, external *compliance* was crucial, whereas under grace, an internal condition of *dependence on the Spirit* is key. This makes sense, as those in the Old Testament did not commonly have the presence of the Holy Spirit *on the inside*, as we do. God was “near”, but not often “within”, as He is now. Therefore, they looked “outside” to see God, while we look “inside”. Their faith was directed more toward real-world events, while our faith is directed toward spiritual conditions.

The word for “believing” in the Old Testament is translated “trust”, which seems to connect with the external environment and practical conditions and needs. The “faithful” outlook was always that God would supply food and water and shelter and direction and protection in the “real world”. The Jews in the desert expected certain things. When they listened to God and believed Him, they “trusted” Him to supply their needs. When they rebelled, they did not trust Him. “Faith”, on the other hand, is a New Testament word, and applies to our belief in the presence and goodness of God as our Father. Our belief is (or should be) directed toward God, as God, not as a bringer of supplies.

It should be mentioned that “more belief”, whether it is expressed as “more trust” or “greater faith”, is always the key component in qualifying for God’s promotions, and—eventually—for entry into the Land. The difference is in application. Trust applies more to conditions in the environment, whereas faith pertains more to things of the heart. Are we trusting God *for things*, or are we trusting Him *beyond things*, knowing that whatever He brings is always best?

Either trust or faith can lead to the Promised Land...that place that was meant literally for the Jews, and symbolically for Christians. By the same token that greater belief on the part of the Jews would have delivered them to the Promised Land, believers who build their faith now and move toward maturity have the prospect of entering God’s fullness, and living in the land of grace. Once again, the Jews’ tendency was to look “out” to see God, whereas ours is to look “in”, since this is where we relate to God. The biggest difference between the “practical” trust of Jewish believers and the “living” faith of believers in the church today is the presence of the indwelling Spirit. Faith conveys a connection with the “spiritual”, and is related to the presence, control, and operation of the Holy Spirit. Faith engages the Spirit within us, and greater faith brings greater closeness and communion with God, thus enabling greater production. Faith in the New Testament has an added dimension, then...namely, the engagement of the power of the Holy Spirit.

With trust, we survive; with faith, we blossom as we bask in the sunlight of God’s grace and love. Trust seems to be a rudimentary form of faith that allows us to anticipate God’s provision and care. But faith is what we have when we mature, when our experience of Almighty God in our hearts overshadows all external considerations and experience...and when faith releases the immense potency of God the Holy Spirit within our hearts. With maturity, life is no longer about the outside, which can be shaky and unreliable, but about our internal contact with God Himself. This is our home. This is

where rest awaits. This may not sound too exciting for those who think that the Christian life is about getting “goodies” from God, but for those who want only God, this is highly encouraging.

Commentary on Faith at Large. Belief is belief. Without visual or other sensory verification, what we accept as truth can only be done by “believing” it. We believe what we believe, right or wrong. To say that my faith in Christ is stronger than a Muslim’s faith in Mohammed is wrong. Faith is faith. The difference in “faiths” is not the strength of the faith, but their object. If the object is not “real” or viable or worthy of trust, the faith exercised will be a waste of time. It is the legitimacy of the object of faith that affirms its dynamic. If the object is alive and powerful (e.g., Jesus Christ), then faith will get good results. If it is dead, faith toward it will yield bad things, rather than good ones. Great and heroic deeds (or misdeeds) can be done in the name of faith, but if the target of that faith is lifeless, then whatever is done will be—at best—nothing at all, and—at worst—very destructive.

Naturally, faith practiced becomes faith strengthened, and faith toward *nothing* turns out to yield more *nothing*...except chaos, confusion, and disappointment. Faith will be increased by whatever it is that feeds it. For stronger faith to be meaningful and valuable, it must be directed toward a true object. If the object of faith is false, it will be strengthened by lies. By the same token, faith in the true and living God will be strengthened by intake of correct information...or TRUTH. This is why it is so important to get large doses of *truth*, because the absence of truth creates a vacuum into which lies and deception are drawn in and embraced. If you are not GROWING IN TRUTH, you will be GROWING IN LIES. *Something* is going to increase within you. You cannot let up on your devotion to growth, or you will find harmful elements growing within your soul. The point: CONTINUE TO GROW! The need is urgent!

STANDING ON THE PROMISED SOIL

Here we Are. Now we have crossed the Jordan, and those of us who are standing in the Promised Land are able to do so because we have completed massive levels of training and preparation. We are the “super-mature”, who have demonstrated great faith, who know God, who know His love and grace, and who have received His fullness. We are those who are ready to surrender completely to God.

We will no longer look backward, but forward...with confidence...to see what the Land holds for us. The first thing we see is a huge and imposing fortress. We know we must get past it to move further into the Land, but in facing this test (or opportunity), our heart does not catch in our throat as it would have before, nor do our eyes widen at the prospect for this being the abrupt end of our venture into the Promised Land...and perhaps even our death. No. Our eyes narrow into a confident stare, as we look into the sides of colossal walls...“Yeah, I know these walls can stop me. I cannot overpower the ramparts and reinforced partitions that hold me out of this mighty fortress. But I have learned that the battle is not mine. It is the Lord’s. These walls are built to stand for centuries, but not before the hand of the mighty God in whom I have placed my trust.”

Because we know who it is that fights our battles, we can stand with confidence before the walls of this fort, knowing that no structure or foe is adequate against a trusted God. In Joshua 5 and 6 we see an

object lesson in faith, known as the “Walls of Jericho”. It is not even a “test”, as such, because our training has been completed. It is just a victory lap, of sorts, for the conquerors. Facing and dealing with this wall is a tremendous occasion of faith, symbolic of our surrendering to our God. (FYI: Our next chapter is on “surrender”).

Backing up one step: A tremendous thing happened as the Israelites finished the crossing of the Jordan and were approaching Jericho. This was an important time in their lives, as it is in the life of any trained believer. This is the time of surrender, and when this time comes, things are bound to change. Josh. 5:12 says, “The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.” The paltry provisions that had come during the time of training have stopped. Why? Because the time for mega-blessings and maximum provision has come.

There will also be company waiting for us, I believe, when we are entering the Land. We will be met by a greeting committee, of sorts, as we go in. Josh. 5:13-15 describes it this way:

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither”, he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did.

While we are standing on the soil of the Promised Land, we will have special provision, for sure, but also special protection, and the uniform of the day will not be combat boots, but bare feet, as we acknowledge our subservience and dependence and reverence toward the Holy God to whom we are surrendering. We have stepped out of the desert and into a place that is holy. This is new. And this is where our training has brought us. What is the message for the trained believer now graduating to a full surrender? “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” Finally, we recognize the holiness of the One we have searched for. And it is stunning.

But Jericho is still in the way. Here is what the Lord said to Joshua as he stood studying the walls of Jericho: “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men” (Josh. 6:2). The battle is already won, and nothing has even happened yet. The Jews believe it, and God knows it. He told them to march around the city once each day for six days. Trumpets were carried before the ark, followed by the soldiers and others. On the seventh day, a new feature was added: the march around the city was repeated seven times, and then the trumpets were blown, only on this day the Jewish people had been instructed to shout when they heard the trumpets; this is what they did. There was a shout of victory, which was followed immediately by a complete collapse of the walls...without hesitation or resistance. Do you see the faith component in what happened? How ridiculous is it to believe that playing some trumpets and shouting loudly will bring down a formidable fortress? This is not based on logical prediction; it is based on faith. And the power of God released by faith leaves no stone on top of another.

This event symbolizes the last rite in the possession of the land, with all its bounty and blessings. This is

“entering”, as compared with the previous generation, which “could not enter because of unbelief”. This is the “rest” of the Sabbath, where labor ceases and contentment begins. The collapse of these walls is a victory of faith. The walls themselves readily symbolize sin, which so often stands between us and God’s fullness as we live our Christian lives. But today...sin is going down. (For a full discussion on dealing with and/or defeating sin, see *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*.) With Satan and sin fleeing in defeat at last, we now are able to operate in full faith, and in complete and joyous dependency on the grace of God...which trained us and is now our comprehensive motivation and guide. (We will see more on this in the next chapter.)

Heb. 11:30 sums it up very well, saying, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.” Faith finally did the job, but boy was it a long time coming!

Illustration of the Experiences of the Jews: From Egypt to the Promised Land. We want to frame the progression of the Israelites from the time of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt until their occupation of the Land, which had been promised. On the next page, we depict the events that transpired on their journey, from beginning to end, and show the significance of each.

Crossing the Red Sea (Salvation)	Wandering in the Desert (Training)	Crossing the Jordan River (Surrender)	Facing the Walls of Jericho (Victory)	Occupying the Land (Contentment)
Symbolizes salvation	Shows learning and training	Reflects God’s Fullness/Surrender	Demonstrates a strong faith	Brings blessing & contentment
Darkness to light	Tests and trials experienced	God’s holiness seen in new ways	Victory is celebrated	Continual fellowship/fruit
No more slavery	Discipline is repetitive	End of training and temptation	Walking/Marching by faith	Resting in God’s strength
Freedom adds challenges	Faith grows under pressure	Sin and Satan are finally beaten	Living by what we have learned	All promises are fulfilled

This is pretty much the story of the Christian life. We become born again and saved, after which we enter a training period (which, by the way, works only for the very eager). Those who want God will find Him during this training experience. If we endure the training, we will reach maturity, at which time we can receive the fullness of God and enter a life of surrender to Him. We will be equipped to face foes in the strength of the Spirit, and will live in victory over sin. We will produce exceptional fruit through our constant communion with the Holy Spirit, and will live in contentment and rest.

Chapter 9

Surrender Recapitulated

SURRENDERING

Product of Growth. Surrender is maximum maturity. It is the pinnacle of all training and learning that we have done. Perhaps there is a better word from Scripture than surrender. If so, I have not found it. Chafer called it “yielding”, but Andrew Murray called it “surrender”. Others have other names (such as Moule, whom we will be quoting later, who called it a “new conversion”). This must not be confused with the Pentecostal movement’s “second blessing”, which is the time that they say we receive the “filling of the Spirit”, as evidenced by the speaking in tongues. Without getting into the issue of “spiritual gifts” and those that might be “temporary”, we can say for certain that the “filling of the Spirit”, as associated among Pentecostals with Acts 2, is not the way we are to achieve spirituality. This approach is, at best, artificial and contrived. Spirituality comes through cleanliness and growth, not through emotional upsurges misconstrued as spiritual experiences.

But there may be a “second” experience after salvation that represents the consummation of a long and steady pattern of spiritual growth. The difference between this experience and that of salvation is that salvation can never be lost, whereas the experience of surrender can be reversed through a condition of negative volition toward God and truth, and/or a return to patterns of sin or legalism. But even though this new condition can be abandoned with a return to carnality, new strengths and assets will be acquired that will make this less likely. Once a believer has surrendered, it is possible, perhaps probable, that he or she will remain surrendered forever after that time. One of the reasons for this is that the lessons learned through training and gradual maturation are hard-won and will not be easily forgotten. Plus, the new closeness to God and a walk by the Spirit make it less likely that drifting will occur. A surrendered believer is the one most likely to maintain schedules and practices that will KEEP him in a state of humility, reverence, fear, faith, and love toward God, and hence...*walking in the Spirit*..

So, whatever it is called, there is—emerging from Scripture—a clear state of advanced maturity, at which time there is a new “fullness”, a completion of the promises, a spiritual self-capitulation, and a total preoccupation with Christ, that gives this new “life” constancy and permanence. We could call it “commitment”, “offering oneself”, “yielding”, “submission”, “presenting our bodies”, “super-maturity”, “getting the fullness of God”, “entering God’s rest”, “drawing near to God”, or “surrender”. But, however we label it, this is a time when growth leads to spiritual graduation and a new kind of relationship with God. I once stated in my earliest writings that there was no “one-shot” decision to “yield” to God, but I have changed my mind about this. I still believe there are many incremental decisions along the way that lead to maturity, but I have come to think that there is a line that we reach, a finishing point, when God will say, “You are now mature.” This may occur more than once, and after

many false starts, but I believe there is a special time when the special few among us can take one final step past the Jordan River, and enter the Promised Land of unprecedented power and grace.

Getting There. God alone knows when we have reached the point when surrender can be accomplished, just as He knew when the Israelites had reached a level of faith that they were qualified for entry into the Promised Land. When we can handle the truth of God's love, when we know what it means to live by grace, when we walk and think in terms of complete dependency on the Father, when faith becomes an attitude rather than a fall-back position, when Scripture and thanksgiving dominate our thoughts in the face of suffering, and when our objectives are related to God more than to ourselves...then we will be ready to surrender to God. When we are ready, we will be promoted. Then we can handle the REAL truth! Until then, we are like children, who are often told by parents: "When you get a little older, I'll explain it (whatever "it" is) to you." When we mature enough, the answers will become clear.

While we are moving toward surrender, we must rely on truth and not experience to feed us. Even our witnessing of miracles will not be enough to help us grow, as we saw with the Jews in the desert. Faith is not strengthened by experience alone; even training events will not be meaningful unless they are attached to truths that we have learned and believed. We need both learning AND training.

Foreshadowing of Surrender. As we are moving toward surrender, we will experience mini-victories and exceptional blessings from time to time as demonstrations of grace. We will make big mistakes during training, and fail often, as difficult lessons are being learned. But we will witness evidences of grace and blessing along the way, even though the pressures of growth are enormous. Seeing grace operate when disaster strikes, or when temptation rages, is a convincing time that God is good, even when bad things are invading. Believers who are not growing will not experience the blessings and provisions that serve as precursors for the time of surrender, nor will they struggle with the strains of exercise for growth that maturing believers will have. Special pressures and/or provisions that come to believers are *harbingers for growth*.

Promises Fulfilled at Surrender. Promises are not completely fulfilled until the time of surrender. Mediocre believers who are cruising through life on auto-pilot with no eagerness to know God better and grow may be told that all they have to do is "believe the promises"...name it and claim it...but legitimate access to grace and favor comes only through sustained growth and spirituality. Satan and the world may stage releases of the world's goods to verify lies about the ease of "believing and receiving", but it is only the believer who commits to a pattern of growth that will see the many promises of God truly fulfilled. We must GROW into the promises. That is the only way to realize them. Here are some verses that go along with our growing into correspondence with what God has promised:

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. 37:3-4—Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Pr. 3:5-6—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.

Jer. 29:13—You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

If you look closely at these verses, you will see that they are not meant for the novice, or for those whose hearts are not fully engaged in a search for God. These promises will only be fitting for those who have grown to the point that God is their dwelling place, the One they trust, the One they acknowledge in “all their ways”, and the One they seek with ALL their hearts. These promises are not for marginal or half-hearted believers, but for those who want God above all else. They go to those who have stood fast through all the training, and who have developed an unquestioning faith in their God. These faithful saints are the ones who express true faith, not just a momentary upsurge of something that passes for faith in the interest of getting what is promised. Talk is cheap, and imitation is ordinary. But faith that releases the promises is fully developed and intense, enabling God to let go of what He always wanted to give. This level of mature faith is not the beginning point for Christians; it is the destiny for those willing to pay the price for the privileges and prosperity of exceptional closeness to God.

Lewis Sperry Chafer and Others on Surrender. To Chafer, surrender, which he called “yielding”, was a once-for-all event, in which our will is turned over to God, after which everything changes. I see this as correct, except for the “once-for-all” part, which implies immutability. I believe surrender can be reversed, with a return to sin and rebellion, even though I also believe that—for the super-mature believer—such abandonment of God is not likely. Here is what Chafer said regarding “yielding”:

It is the divine plan that the element of guidance shall be supplied in us by God Himself. One of the results of the Adamic fall is the independence of the human will toward God; yet man is most spiritual and most conformed to the design of his Maker when he is most yielded to the divine will. (Endnote 23)

Being yielded to God is our highest achievement. This is the greatest fulfillment of our purpose and the greatest statement of our faith. The closer we get to God, the more we want to yield to Him and let Him direct our lives. Chafer concluded the following: “The highest motive for *yielding* to the will of God is not the mere desire for victory in life, or for power, or blessing. It is that we may live the sacrificial life which is the Christ life.” (Endnote 24) We will end with victory and power and blessing, but that is not why we endure. We endure because we WANT GOD! And by truly wanting Him, we know we must prepare to do whatever it takes to be close to Him, to stand near Him...to stand *with* Him.

Chafer cited Bishop Handley Moule’s position on surrender from Moule’s *Outlines of Christian Doctrine*. The context for quoting Moule is that Chafer had just said, “Sinners are not saved until they trust the Savior, and saints are not victorious until they trust the Deliverer.” He now shows the way in which Moule’s position supports this view, as follows:

The first case [salvation] is in its nature one and single: an admission, an incorporation. The second [yielding or surrender] is in its nature progressive and developing: the discovery,

advancing with the occasion for it, of the greatness of the resources of Christ for life. The latter *may*, not *must*, thus include one great crisis in consciousness, one particular spiritual act. It is much more certain to include many starting-points, critical developments, marked advances. The act of self-surrendering faith in the power of Christ for inward cleansing of the will and affections may be, and often indeed it is, as it were a new conversion, a new 'effectual calling.' (Endnote 25)

Moule is saying that surrender is the product of progress and development, the end of which is discovering the "greatness of the resources of Christ for life". He sees this as possibly being a single "act" or event, emanating from starts and reversals along a steady path of growth. Then when the time comes for surrender, there may be, as he sees it, an almost "new conversion", like a second redemption, due to its holy nature and spiritual significance. In other words, surrender is serious, potent, and life-changing. It is likely that nothing will ever be the same after surrender.

Coming to Rest. When we enter the Promised Land, we have entered the zone of quiet and rest. Training is over and we are home. This is the time when faith does the work, and God carries the load. This is a time when our hearts are finally settled on God as the source, purpose, and determiner of everything. We have new, softened hearts toward God, and understand now what he has been doing with us throughout our training period (over the last forty years or more for some of us). All hardening of the heart is gone, as per Heb. 3:15, which cautioned us, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." No more resistance or questioning. We are in His rest, as the writer of Hebrews stated: "...some will enter that rest" (Heb. 4:5). This means we have rested from our own work, as we see in Heb. 4:10, which says, "...for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."

Growing our faith leads to rest, while unbelief leads to sin and rebellion. Entering the "rest" of God means we have turned over the reins of our lives to the Holy Spirit. In Rom. 7, we see attempts to live by the power of the flesh; whereas in Rom. 8, we see life conducted in the power of the Spirit. Entering God's rest is living in Rom. 8, where the Holy Spirit is in charge. Here He will produce divine good, and we will see the life of Christ being lived out through us.

WELCOME TO THIS PLACE CALLED "SURRENDER"

New Arrivals. When we reach super-maturity, God will facilitate our crossing into His rest, so that we will see that even our surrender is a product of grace. Look at Josh. 4:23-24, which says this:

For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God.

After He helps us cross, He sends help to greet us and protect us, as we saw earlier in Josh. 5:13-15, where Joshua was greeted by the "commander of the army of the Lord", who gave Joshua a message to take off his sandals, because he was on holy ground. New arrivals are accommodated on their way

in to surrender, and are then protected as they arrive. Believers who arrive at “surrender” today may not meet the “commander of the army of the Lord” on their way into the Promised Land, but I believe there will be some significant occurrence at the time of surrender. It is a big deal. If we look at the surrender of Job, of Abraham, and at the surrender which took place at Jericho, we see that there is usually some kind of “fanfare” when surrender takes place. It seems that this would vary from one person to the next, and that it could take place anywhere in the physical, material, informational, emotional, mental, or spiritual realms of existence. But it would be recognized as a significant and meaningful occurrence.

It seems in keeping with examples in Scripture and with the provisions of grace that there would be something special taking place at surrender. I suggest that we should be alert to unusual events as the time of surrender is nearing. For those who are nearing this time, it is likely they will see it coming, and will know what is happening when they are crossing into the land of promises.

Fullness of God. The last thing to happen before we surrender to God is receiving His fullness. Once we reach super-maturity and have mastered the concepts and applications of grace and love, we are prepared to receive the complete measure of His fullness. We have studied this in previous writings, especially in *Step by Step toward Surrender* and *Killing Sin*. (See especially pages 136-144 in *Killing Sin*). We have also discussed this earlier in this book, but we want to underscore once more its place in our advancement into surrender. Here are some verses that reinforce truths concerning God’s fullness:

Col. 2:9-10—For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

Rom. 15:29—I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

Eph. 3:16-19—I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Eph. 1:23--...which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

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

God’s fullness comes when we are ready for it. This is not something we choose, but a condition we grow into. It seems to immediately precede surrender, but it may be concomitant with it or even identical to it. (I tentatively posited in *Killing Sin* that fullness and surrender do not occur at the same time, but it is possible that they do.) At any rate, right around the time of surrender, there is a fullness that is attained. If the finer distinctions between fullness and surrender rise in importance, they will be addressed more definitively at some point. It could be that the vagueness of their differences are planned, and that God wants us to focus on Him and His nearness, rather than some condition or provision that becomes ours when we reach maximum maturity. He is, after all, the *point* and *main item*

of interest in all we are doing and hoping for. We can be sure that—when fullness comes—surrender is not far off.

Victory over Sin. Another thing that happens around the time of surrender is victory over sin, which is the message of *Killing Sin*. We saw in that study several things that happen at (or near) surrender that equip us for combating sin. One of the first of these is that we will be fully armored against Satan’s attacks. We become shrouded in the “energy field” of the Holy Spirit, so that Satan’s arrows cannot penetrate. (See Eph. 6:10-18.)

Satan will finally give up on us when we reach the point of surrender. We will resist him long enough in God’s strength that he will tire of attempting to keep us away from God. By pulling us into sin and/or self-righteousness, Satan has hampered our accessing God’s power for a long time. (Satan knows that he has no weapons in his arsenal that can stand up against God’s strength.) But when we stand before Him armored and strengthened by God’s might, Satan is no match. (See James 4:6-10.) Another way to look at this is that our faith can grow strong enough that God honors our trust in Him by telling Satan to take a hike where we are concerned. He allowed Satan to inflict Job, and undoubtedly told Satan when to stop. Satan has great power on earth, but he does what he does by permission. (For more on Satan “roaming” by God’s permission, see *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, “The War Against God”, pp. 55-93.) When God says “scram” to Satan, he cannot get out of there fast enough! With Satan off our backs, sin is much less of a problem.

When we reach surrender, we can “escape corruption” through an extended period of growth. All the things we have been promised will be forthcoming, and we will have divine power for facing temptations. Through fellowship and prayer, and our growing faith, we will reach the point that we will not stumble, but will walk steadily in the power of the Holy Spirit. Sin will never disappear, but we will be able to escape it through the enabling strength that God gives. Sin is addictive in many ways, and the reduced urges to please the flesh will provide great relief from the constant tug of its endless entreaties. (See 2 Pet. 1:3-10.)

The Final Step: Surrender. We have arrived at the time of surrender, because we have followed God’s Word regarding the following:

Confession of sins to be cleansed.

Acknowledgement of God, or God-consciousness.

Prayer, with faith and thanksgiving.

Growth through assimilation of truth and the effects of gifts.

Maintenance of humility before God.

Growth through perseverance and the endurance of tests and trials.

Fear of the Lord (advancing faith).

Drawing near to God and believing His promises.

Walking in the Spirit.

Waiting on God.

Learning the will of God.

Fully understanding the workings of God's love (forgiveness, grace, compassion, mercy, and patience).

When we surrender, it is because we have endured our training in the desert, and are fully equipped to enter the Promised Land. We have the fullness of God; we have entered God's rest; we are operating in God's power; and we are living by faith. We have failed and failed, but we have taken our failures to God, and now we can share in His success. We have known helplessness and gone through "wit's-end" dilemmas and pressures. We have seen that we are weak and incapable of surmounting the supernatural forces that come against us. We have seen that we are *never* enough. We can't do it. We need God. And we have learned that it is not "God plus us" that finally gets the job done...it is God alone who will carry us. God is the one flying; we are merely tethered by faith to Him...and hanging on! We are just along for the ride, surrendered to the sustaining power of His grace.

For a complete study of the things that happen at surrender, please take time to read (or re-read) pages 150-155 in *Killing Sin*. After surrender, there will be contentment, which is the primary point of this book, as we will see next in our last chapter.

Chapter 10

Victorious Life: Contentment

REST AND CONTENTMENT

Why am I Not Content? The greatest disservice we do to new believers, or even those who have entered some kind of spiritual adolescence, is to tell them that contentment and joy and peace are ready-made and easily-accessible. This is false! There is also the lie that says all any believer needs to do is to read the promises out of Scripture and BELIEVE in that moment that any one of them can be had...and that it becomes a sure thing. The only ones this will be (ostensibly) true for are those whom Satan is deceiving by *giving them what God promises...*without their first going through the process of maturing and building their faith. Because it is Satan's world, he can give pretty much what he wants to give.

The truth: For any believer who is not content, or for whom the promises are not truly being fulfilled, the clear assumption is this: He is not there yet! He must grow and advance in his faith BEFORE he will see the full benefits of grace. When he MATURES, he will see grace benefits and will have the peace which passes all understanding. We MUST stop the lies that this is going to happen, strictly on the basis of one's being saved. Maturity precedes contentment. This is why Paul harped so much on the need and urgency for reaching maturity. In 2 Cor. 13:11, he said, "Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." Maturity is the goal! The result will be the ability to "live in peace", which is a harmonious and aligned relationship between God and the believer, and among believers who have achieved fellowship and maturity.

In Col. 1:28, Paul declared again that the maturity of his audience was his goal, saying, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ." He wanted them "rooted and built up" as a result of being "taught", as per Col. 2:7. Likewise, the writer of Hebrews admonished, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity..." (Heb. 6:1) With growth that comes from learning God's Word, accompanied by God's training in the field, we can advance toward maturity.

The message of maturity is for those who have a heart for God...who want more of Him. In 1 Cor. 2:6, Paul stated, "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." The message of wisdom feeds a growing believer, who has the satisfaction of moving ever closer to God. Col. 1:9-10 adds more on the distinction given to maturing believers, as follows:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work; growing in the knowledge of God.

As we are filled with God's wisdom, we will grow in His knowledge, and will mature to a level where we will "live a life worthy of the Lord", so we can learn to "please him in every way".

As we mature, God will "equip us with everything good for doing his will" (Heb. 13:21a). Part of that equipment comes from each other, 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." And when we are fully equipped, we will be able to "fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:18b-19a). This equipment will come through new spiritual awareness, acquired by all the means for growth that we have been given. The result will be a "renewing of our minds" that will cause us to be "transformed" (Rom. 12:2). There is no way to bypass the maturation process and magically enter into instant strength, blessing, wisdom, trust, and divine view-point; we must first grow through instruction and the workouts of God's training. Only then will we realize the privileges of the super-mature. CAUTION: If we are not in this pursuit for the long haul, we will not make it to maturity. That is why it is called "endurance".

So, if a believer finds himself not content with God and life, he should not believe that the fault lies with God or His plan and system; the fault can be found in a spiritual growth-deficiency, which can only be corrected through proper nutrition and masterful pruning.

Contentment vs. Discontentment. The reason for contentment is super-maturity. This means that the absence of maturity will result in discontentment. Dissatisfaction with life and circumstances, and even with God, is the result of not growing. And growing has to be done in a certain way. Growth begins with absorption of the truth, along with prayer, God-consciousness, and endurance of training events. But get this: If what you are hearing concerning the Bible and God are not core truths that honor God, recognize His power, and depend on "faith" rather than "man-deeds", then you are not growing, no matter how much time you spend in "church". You MUST sit at the feet of a gifted pastor-teacher that teaches not only godliness, but the power behind it...and who instructs on ways to access that power. Otherwise, growth will not occur.

Without growth, discontentment is inevitable. Nothing will really satisfy. You may escape dissatisfaction momentarily with forays into the world's cache of entertainment and pleasures, but at some point you will snap back to yourself, and realize that you have only found emptiness and frustration in the world. There are a number of aspects to this notion of discontentment. It can be found, for example, in your view of finances. Is your pay enough? Luke 3:11-14 suggests that the amount of your income is not a legitimate source of contentment, and goes further by declaring that what you have should actually be shared, as we see in the following:

John [the Baptist] answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to,"

he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

The application of this passage should be this: When we stretch our efforts to have more (of anything) beyond that which comes through faith, then the result will be discontentment. Having “more” will not curb our unsettled state of mind. Instead, we must study, grow, pray, trust, and wait. Faith in God and His timing and His care and His provision will provide WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE, in the right amount, delivered in the right way, and received at the time to do the most good. The variable for “receiving” the blessings of grace do not rest with God, so much as they do with the condition of our faith. How much have we grown? How ready are we to receive what God wants to give? (Please remember that maturity also brings a view that *what God gives* is the most important thing we can have, and money and such may not be what we need the most. Remember also that our relationship with God is *spiritual*, and that the most important assets we can acquire are related to our *spiritual walk*!)

When we attempt to find our contentment in the world, we may find distractions and momentary “relief”, such as those found in alcohol or drugs or gambling or illicit sex, but we will not find contentment. Addictions are almost always related to some substance or activity that numbs our discontentment. We think of physical addictions, such as those just named, but there are others that are just as deleterious to our Christian walk, even though they may be considered harmless. A good example of these is the use of social media. By interacting with others online, if you find ways to interact that bring favorable attention to yourself, your sense of belonging and self-worth are nurtured. This satisfies your need to be affirmed, which will last temporarily...until it is cut off. Then you will return to discontentment. And if your online experience is disappointing and causes self-doubt and feelings of inferiority, discontentment is a certainty. The point: Nothing in the world will *sustain* contentment.

There are endless other ways that the world can drag believers into discontentment. For example, television programming and movies can be exciting and seemingly fulfilling, but these will not increase your contentment. Any relief from discontentment that we find in the world will fade quickly and dump us right back into our misery. If we depend on anything *in the world* for our contentment, we will not find permanent satisfaction there, and will be left with the opposite of the thing we are chasing. Frequently, we resolve to *try harder* to find contentment in the world, believing that we are just not making enough effort. With greater exertion, however, come greater disappointments, until we have exhausted all that the world offers, as Solomon did. (See *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, pp. 103-106, for more on Solomon’s experiments in the world.)

The world sings, “Don’t worry. Be happy.” But this will never last. God says to us, “Build your faith, and contentment will come.” And this contentment will last and will sustain us in ways the world never can. Once again, this will not come just because we want it. We must be willing to go through God’s processes for growth that will enable us to participate in His rich blessings and favor.

Back to Meribah. Earlier, we witnessed the discontentment of the Jews at Meribah, where there was no water, and the people complained. We saw that the Jews were denied God’s “rest”, represented by entry into the Promised Land. Believers in the Church Age have an even greater rest than the one the Jews were offered, a land of promise that greatly exceeds theirs, and one which we can enter today.

The condition for entry into the Land, into God's rest, is "faith". Heb. 3:19 says, "So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." Remember, the Promised Land is not the place of salvation and heaven; it is a place where BELIEVERS are invited to go while they are still here on earth, a special place that is reserved for those whose faith is adequate. When our faith is strong enough, we will enter God's rest.

A condition of "little faith" will keep us out of God's rest and His contentment. Refusing to grow is called the "hardening of our hearts". Ps. 95:7b-11 describes it this way:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." So I declared on oath in my anger, "They [this generation of Jews] shall never enter my rest."

Why could this particular generation of adult Jews not enter? Because their "hearts went astray" (they stopped seeking and trusting God) and "they have not known my ways"...they had not grown. The key to their refusal into God's rest was their lack of faith, and that deficiency was the result of not growing. God wants us to grow. He wants us to enter His rest. He wants us to reach super-maturity and receive His fullness, and He wants us to live surrendered lives. He wants us to rest in His love and grace. We see this in Deut. 12:8-10, which says this:

You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit, since you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the Lord your God is giving you. But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety.

What a picture of our entering God's rest! In His rest we will receive an "inheritance", and we will enjoy relief from the attacks of Satan and his minions. And we will live in safety and contentment, and feel at home, at last. Repeating a passage we quoted earlier, Heb. 4:9-11, we see that we can enter this rest today, as follows:

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience [NIV alternate translation: "example of unbelief"; see Heb. 3:18].

Faith is the key to entering God's rest, and that means faith at a certain level. We must GROW ENOUGH to enter God's rest.

Contentment vs. Emotion. We will have more to say about emotions in the next section on "joy", but for now we can say that contentment is NOT an emotion. It may involve or include an emotional response, but contentment itself is a SPIRITUAL condition and not an EMOTIONAL one. Much of church practice revolves around emotion, and is often the basis for determining the validity of a "spiritual" experience. God is experienced SPIRITUALLY, which may or may not be accompanied by emotions. Our experience of God can go on with complete emotional flatness. Emotions have to do

with body comfort, hormonal conditions, nutrition, fatigue, brain-chemical production, health, environmental stimulation, absence of threats, sense of self-worth, conscience, and affirmation from others...but it is granted that strong feelings may accompany spiritual experiences. We must understand this: Our spiritual condition can be positive or negative, regardless of our emotions, and we cannot achieve spirituality *through* our emotions. If we try to rely on emotions to tell us whether we are spiritual or not, we will perpetually chase feelings to validate our faith, and we will be frustrated and hampered in our Christian walk.

Contentment can exist, even when we are inundated with conditions that are unpleasant or demoralizing. Contentment is a steady state of rest in God's care. It is not just *hoping* that He is there, that He cares for us, and that He will take care of us; it is *knowing* that He is the reason and the means for our breath and life, and that our lives are being lived out to honor Him...which we can do by living in His grace.

With contentment, our spiritual eyes are opened, so that we see beyond what our physical eyes see, and distinguish in our vision a God whose care is infinite, and with whom a relationship is infinitely good. New meaning is added to our understanding of life when we reach contentment, so that living is no longer a matter of "worldly" experience, but one that is "heavenly". This is so hard to describe. When we reach super-maturity, we will live *in grace*, and not *in the world*. Values will be determined by divine perspective, and not by world-bound perception.

The problem is that most believers live in two worlds. They live in the "substantial world", the one that is seen, the place where they constantly search for satisfaction and stability. Yet they live forever in union with Christ, which beckons them to move away from the world and toward Him. They are confused and unstable...double-minded. (See James 1:8) They want what the world offers, yet—at some level—they want God. Until we reach a level of maturity that God is everything, we will live with one foot in the world and the other in God's camp. And we will not be able to walk, because these two forces are pulling against each other. When we have grown enough to cross over completely to God's side, we will know what it means to be close to God and to live by His divine strength; and we will live in contentment, rather than discontentment.

CONTENTMENT AND JOY.

What is Joy? The Greek word translated "joy" means just that: "delight", and "happiness". These terms, used to express human emotion, are as close as we can come to describing what we are calling "contentment". The problem with joy as an *emotion* is that emotional states fluctuate quickly, whereas godly "joy" is enduring. We believe that there is, behind the words "delight" and "happiness", an implied *spiritual* state that supersedes and transcends emotion. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, they were emotionally ecstatic. They sang and danced and laughed and praised Moses and God...and joyfully celebrated. But three days later, they were distraught, cursing Moses and questioning God. Their emotional "joy" did not sustain them.

As we saw with contentment, the joy that Scripture describes is something beyond emotions. Emotions are fleeting, while biblical joy is constant. When a believer has achieved great maturity, they will enter

a level of constant happiness that can only be found with the ongoing filling of the Spirit and a consistent view of life from the divine perspective. In a constant state of prayer and submission, the mature believer will find joy, no matter what the circumstances are. A perpetual pleasance in the soul, consisting of a superior kind of lasting joy, sets in when maturity is attained. Our goal is maturity. The outcome is joy (among other things).

I believe the kind of joy that comes with maturity is rarely witnessed, just as surrendered believers are uncommon. Therefore, I think there is a kind of difficulty in describing this. The important thing for us to understand at this point is that joy is not the same as positive emotions, even though strong emotions may accompany joy. Joy is an attitude...the product of faith. Joy is a settled and comfortable state of being that is resting in God's care and delighting in His constant presence.

Joy begins with fellowship; unfortunately, fellowship comes and goes along with the presence of sin and how regularly we are confessing our wrongdoing. With fellowship we have an opportunity to grow, and with growth, we will have more-consistent fellowship. Mature joy is the joy of Christ in which we "remain", as per John 15:9-11, which says this:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love [remain in fellowship]. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love [fellowship], just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

The joy we speak of is whose joy? It is that of Christ. And whose joy will it become? Ours. When will we have it? When we reach maturity. It is then that our joy will be "complete", becoming the finished product of maturity and spirituality. Prior to that time, joy will be intermittent and spotty. Remember that love, joy, and peace are fruits of the Spirit, and will only be produced in us when we are walking by the Spirit. Godly joy will not be experienced through worldly or bodily conditions. Why? Because scriptural joy is joy that belongs to Christ, and neither the world nor anyone in it can produce the actual "joy of Christ". More of this kind of joy will come only with more interaction with the Spirit, and this will only occur when we have reached a sufficient level of growth that we can be said to continually "obey" His commands. And what are His commands? To remain in fellowship with Him and for His words to abide in us. We are commanded to stay in fellowship and keep growing. (See John 15:7.)

Joy with Fellowship and Growth. In 2 Cor. 1:24b, Paul said, "...we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm." A strong connection is seen here between the joy that Paul wants for the Corinthians, and the status of their faith. If they have faith sufficient for them to be "standing firm", then joy will be theirs. In other words, growth brings joy. This is never more true than when we surrender, but joy is also an earmark for fellowship along the growth pathway, and an indicator for advancing maturity. There are many passages that link joy with fellowship/faith (meaning joy with spirituality/maturity). Here are a few of them, with comments:

2 Cor. 2:3—"I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy [fellowship]." Paul "rejoices" when the Corinthians "share his joy", which means "walking in fellowship with

the Spirit”. He ultimately wants them to experience the joy of growth and surrender which comes to mature believers.

Phil. 1:4-11—“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 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 for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” This passage addresses fellowship and the fruit that comes from it. Subsumed within this fruit is “joy”, which Paul said he wanted for the Corinthians. (See 1 Cor. 1:24*b*.)

Phil. 1:25-26—“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.” Paul wants the joy of the Philippians (their fellowship and growth) to overflow through the function of his gift.

Phil. 3:1*a*—“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!” Paul is citing here the source of joy, which is “the Lord”, who brings joy when we are in fellowship with Him.

1 Thess. 1:6—“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” Once again, the source of real joy is the Holy Spirit...even in suffering.

1 John, the entire book—1st John was written to show the method for maintaining fellowship with God and with each other. (See Appendix B, “Analysis of 1st John”.) In the middle of his introduction of fellowship in 1 John 1, John said, “We write this to make your joy [fellowship] complete” (verse 4). John is writing to encourage fellowship and growth, a symbol for which is “joy”, which it is his purpose to promote.

2 John 1:12*b*—“I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our [your] joy may be complete.” John’s mission was to build their joy...or “complete” it. He wanted them to stay in fellowship and to grow.

Joy is an outcome of growth and fellowship. It is a spiritual condition that comes from God, the result of our being close to Him. Self-generated joy is like any other imitation of spiritual conditions: it is, at best, shallow and temporary. There is no substitute for, and no legitimate duplication of, God’s joy.

The Verb form: “Rejoice”. The act of rejoicing springs from a condition of joy, which is what God gives to those believers who are walking in His Spirit. Rejoicing is what we do as mature believers in fellowship. We looked earlier at Phil. 3:1; look now at the two verses following verse 1, which tell us the state of those who are able to receive the message, “Rejoice”. Here is Phil. 3:1-3:

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

Paul is distinguishing those who are “circumcised in the heart” from those who are circumcised only in the flesh. His problem is that many Jews are relying on physical circumcision to secure their spiritual *position* (i.e., to be saved). But even among *believers* (for example, the Galatians), there was an attempt to rely on external accommodations to improve their spiritual *condition* (i.e., to stay in fellowship). They were saved, but—as believers—were counting on legalistic practices to placate and please God. Paul pointed out the real “winners” in the passage just quoted: “...we who are the [true] circumcision [believers], who [also] worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.” This is an obvious reference to believers who are maturing and walking in the Spirit. These are the ones who can “rejoice”. We have been saved, and those of us who have matured now stand and live by grace. Rom. 5:1-2 gives us a description of this life under grace, as follows:

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.

We have been “justified”, meaning that we are now believers, but there is life after salvation, at which time we will move toward God or move away from Him. If we want God and decide to grow so that we can be closer to Him, we will eventually enter a period of “peace”, where we have access to *living grace* through an ongoing relationship of faith with the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we can “stand” in God’s grace and “rejoice” as grace brings God’s best to us...now and always. Verses 3-5 in Rom. 5 tell us that living in peace, standing in grace, and rejoicing in hope (faith) are all related to growth. We quote these verses here to show the connection between living a life of contentment...and the growth that must precede it. Here is what Rom. 5:3-5 says:

Not only so, but we also 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.

With clear reference to God’s training, we know that we will grow through suffering. Through endurance (“perseverance”), our walk (“character”) will improve and our faith (“hope”) will fulfill its work in us (will not disappoint). Rom. 5:11b concludes the outcome: “...we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Our rejoicing is “in God” and is done “through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Is there any question where we must be in order to rejoice? We must be “in God”, meaning “in fellowship”, so that we can “rejoice” in Christ.

No Rejoicing in the Things of the World. Eccl. 5:19-20 tells us that things CAN make us happy, but only conditionally. If we get things in the world WITHOUT communion with the Spirit and a steady pattern of growth, they will not make us happy. But IF we are learning and enduring our training, and praying and walking in the Spirit, we can immensely enjoy the things that God brings! Here is what this passage from Ecclesiastes says:

Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

When we have relied on God for what we need, and are thus accepting of what He gives, He will keep us “occupied with gladness of heart”. This is available to any believer...but GROWTH IS REQUIRED. This is open and free, but it is not easy. And it is not for the merely curious or those who ponder a better life. This is for those who will commit to God’s way and push through, even when all about them is falling apart. This is for those who say, with Walter Mitty: “Damn the torpedoes! We’re going through!” Wealth and possessions can come to anyone, but to those who seek God above all else, and persevere, much more than these will be received, including true “gladness of heart”.

Verses on Rejoicing. Here are some verses that give the perspective on rejoicing, which does not always take place where we might expect it. That is what we see in the following:

Phil. 4:4—Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

1 Thess 5:16—Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

James 1:9—The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride [rejoice] in his high position.

1 Pet. 1:6—In this [heavenly rewards] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

1 Pet. 4:12-13—Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

John 16:33—I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart [rejoice]! I have overcome the world.

Is. 9:2-5--The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

It is surprising how many times we are told in Scripture to “rejoice” in suffering, since the pain of training has such an important end. This is the divine perspective—that suffering is a special and welcome time—because it is a time of great growth. If we have the view of the long haul, we will know that the training God is doing now will bring us into the Promised Land, where unprecedented blessings and divine resources will be poured out. For those who seek immediate gratification from the world, get it while you can! Those turtles you are leaving behind will be waiting for you at the finish line! Perseverance will be rewarded. 1 Pet. 4:19 sums it up this way: “So then, those who suffer

according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." Keep moving. Keep growing. Wait. Trust. And rejoice.

CONTENTMENT DESPITE OPPOSITION.

What Contentment is Not. The term "contentment" conjures up all kinds of images and ideas. Many of the ideas about contentment view it as something which it is not. Contentment is not the absence of problems or pain, as we shall see. And even with adversity, contentment is not a refusal to see the reality of difficult circumstances. It is not putting on blinders so that we cannot see trouble, or hiding our heads in the sand to avoid awareness of troublesome conditions in our environment. It is not seeing life through "rose-colored" glasses, or living in denial of what we face from day to day, thus living in some kind of "Pollyanna" experience where all is sweetness and light.

Contentment is not a product of self-hypnosis or self-deception, but is an eyes-wide-open response to circumstances, based on recognition of, and faith toward, the grace inherent in God's plan. When things all around are in turmoil, contentment is the view that God has a purpose for these events, and that the ultimate outcome is the best one possible.

What Contentment Really Is. There are two levels of contentment: one is while we are in training; the other is when we have reached super-maturity. Intermittent contentment is available along the way, as we learn to trust God in the middle of events that train us, and then—when we reach maturity—faith is constant and contentment is inevitable. The more we believe, the stronger our commitment will be to God and His program for us. An example of such commitment, regardless of what comes at us, is seen in Hab. 3:16-18, which offers this:

I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Whether we are in training or have reached the Promised Land—which includes the fullness of God, surrender, and victory over sin—an awareness of God sustains us, working to perfect us and/or hold us above the storms that come. By believing that God is working everything for our good, we can know peace by resting in His competence and care, even through the most difficult aspects of training.

What is contentment? It is the peace of knowing God and believing that, as His children, we will receive His attention, His deliverance, and His provision. It is acknowledging that God will always be there to shield and uphold us, and it is knowing that we are ensconced in His love and power. Will our circumstances change when we reach super-maturity? Yes. And we shall see exactly how. But can we be content prior to that time? Yes, if we are committed and if we **STAY FAITHFULLY ON THE TRAIL LEADING TO MATURITY**. So, we can find contentment, even in the middle of intense trials. The secret is to **KEEP MOVING**.

Countermanding the World's View of Contentment. The view promoted by the world is that it

can provide contentment, and that there is only drudgery and duty connected with Christianity. Satan does everything he can to persuade us that answers to our problems and the realization of all our heart's desires can be found in the world. We are inundated with invitations to embrace the world's values and trappings and to incorporate them into our goals and aspirations. The attraction of the world hits us at a visceral level, appealing to our most primal instincts and needs: e.g., the need for food and water, the need for shelter and comfort, the need for mobility, the need for favorable attention, the need to perpetuate the species, and the need for security.

Meanwhile, appeals to spirituality seem ethereal and remote: e.g., the need to be saved, the need to be cleansed, the need to learn about God, the need for spiritual communion with God, the need to grow, and the need to serve and glorify God. These things don't seem urgent to our survival, and appear less pressing than things directly connected to our survival and well-being, i.e., those things seen in the tangible world. It is easy to see then how the appeal of the world's message would easily override that of the gospel; God can wait, after all. We are such easy marks when it comes to the world's seduction, and it is no wonder that so few choose the difficult path of growth and godliness over wealth and a search for happiness in the world.

The question is this: Which will we choose to serve: our appetite for the world and all its opulence, or our hunger for God? This is the most crucial question we will ever face. The world is very much in our face, and its worth surrounds us and smothers us. If our situation is less than desirable, we tend to see the world as the place for it to be improved. If our situation is good, we thank the world and congratulate ourselves on the excellent way in which we have accessed the world's benefits. We are led by our eyes and our appetites, and we see possessions as the purpose of our lives. We are warned against this in Luke 12:15, which says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Life is NOT about what we possess or control. But that is the message of the world all around us.

Swimming against the torrential current of the world is not going to be easy. It goes against our very nature and a "normal" view of life. Life that is really life is made up of more than food and drink (for example), and there is much more than that which meets the eye. So says Rom. 14:17, as follows: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." So what is the kingdom of God, right now, right where we are? It is the production of divine righteousness through fellowship with the Holy Spirit. That is the center of life *away from the world!*

But there is so much we see that we want. And we see so many "bad" and undeserving people immersed in the world's best. Why shouldn't we have that? Ps. 37:16 cautions against this, saying, "Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked..." This is echoed in Pr. 16:8, which says, "Better is a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice." And Pr. 15:16 adds, "Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil." Money seems such a promising prospect...if only we could have more of it. Yet it is the source of greater pain and more trouble than anything else in the world. 1 Tim. 6:10-11 describes this very well in the following:

For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee

from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

Money is what we should NOT chase after, while righteousness, godliness, faith, endurance and gentleness are. Do you see what we are being told to pursue? Here it is:

Righteousness—Divine good produced through our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Godliness—The character and love of Christ expressed through us by the Holy Spirit.

Faith—A growing condition of trust in grace provisions and assets.

Endurance—Faith and hope during training exercises.

Gentleness—An attitude of care toward fellow believers, expressed primarily through gifts.

We can go after the world's "stuff", or we can pursue assets and resources that have *divine* value. We cannot do both. Matt. 6:24 tells us, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." The irony is that having money does not satisfy the need for having "more money", and perceived monetary needs always run ahead of availability. Even if there is plenty of money, the clamor for more never stops. When we can switch our search from one for money to one that is seeking for God, we will find our "true life". 1 Tim. 6:17-19 paints a clear picture of this, as follows:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Not only is the world not the place toward which hope can be directed, it is also a place where "life that is truly life" cannot be found. In other words, the life that the world gives is NOT true life. This means that our spiritual lives, our growth, and our advancement in faith, are more REAL than anything we see around us. But, being honest, we are not likely to understand this completely until we have reached an advanced level of maturity. It is only then that we can become "rich in good deeds" and develop generosity and willingness to share. And it is then that the things of the world become fully and properly discounted.

At some point along our growth trajectory, we will notice that life with God actually enables us to enjoy what we have, suggesting that no matter what we have *without God*, it will *not* satisfy. We will see as we go through this study that—without God—there is no true happiness. We will also understand that—until we reach a higher level of growth—we will not experience the *full* thrust of this happiness, which is contentment.

A Better Choice. We can choose to pursue what the world offers, or we can chase after God. Matt. 6:19-24 describes this choice, and the outlook for each alternative, as follows:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where

thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

That which we value will dominate our thinking and motivate us to acquire more of it. We may not have an inkling or hint of this value when we first begin to grow, but we become aware that there is a certain emptiness that we want to fill. We choose to look in God's direction to fill this void, rather than to the world, with its illusions of profuse profitability. But the dichotomy is clear: We cannot pursue the world and all its attractive trimmings and at the same time pursue godly things. We will not grow or advance spiritually if our attention is aimed at the world. To become godly, we must focus on God. We can *enjoy* what God brings to us in the world, but we must not *cling* to it, as if it had any lasting or great value, and we must not *pursue* it, as though it could become our most important asset. If we are preoccupied with the world, we will have nothing to do with God. It is impossible to split our focus between them. (I know, we live and work in the world; we are talking about the longings of the heart...i.e., what do you want?)

Even the essentials for living cannot preoccupy our attention. Matt. 6:25-26 clarifies this for us, saying, "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" The world is a resource that God can use to supply our needs, but God is our resource for provision. If we bypass God and go directly to the world to get our needs met, we will not succeed or find happiness. On the other hand, if we learn to go through God to get our needs met *while we operate in the world*, we will find in Him and His supplies that which will satisfy us, sustain us, and send us in positive and profitable directions. Matt. 6:28-34 continues this thought, as we see here:

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Today is the day of God's provision. The life of faith is not "all-at-once", but is one day at a time, for which God's grace is always sufficient. When we learn to rest in His faithful care, we have a guarantee for today and a promise for tomorrow. The world, on the other hand, offers no such surety.

We want what God gives. Prov. 30:8-9 gives the right perspective, saying this:

Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my

daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

We want the right amount of what God brings to us from the world, knowing that these provide the means to an end, but are not in themselves an end or goal. The means is “daily bread”; the goal is nearness to God. We want what gives us the physical and material means to move toward God...neither having too much or too little, as either case might prove a distraction from our spiritual quest. (For more on this, see Appendix C, “Equality Among Believers”.)

Paul had the right perspective, knowing that anything beyond the “necessities” is meaningless. He told Timothy, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” (1 Tim. 6:8-9). And he shared this with the Philippians:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (Phil. 3:7-8)

The value of everything not related to our growth and spiritual life is trash, according to Paul. Our relationship with Christ through His Spirit is everything, and everything outside of Him is trash, by comparison. Our greatest and most valuable gains are those we make in our relationship with God.

As Assigned. The life we live as we get closer to God is the one He assigns to us. The gifts He gives for service are not fully operational and effective until we reach maturity. But when we become complete in Him, the service that is rendered has maximum impact, glorifying God and drawing rewards to ourselves. The life we seek is the life He gives, not the life we have imagined. The life we get may not be the life we aspired to, but it is the best life possible, as we shall see. Our role is to find the life He has assigned, and live it to the fullest. 1 Cor. 7:17 says, “Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.” We can design our own lives and play them out according to our own whims. But we will miss out on the abundant life that God offers, and will experience frustration and disappointment in the end.

1 Cor. 7:24 confirms this, saying, “Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.” Once again, God has a plan, which is to give each of His children a great life and to have them doing great things. If we will grow and advance in the life God gives, we will be astounded at what God can do...with, through, around, and in us. The God-assigned life is a life worth living.

GETTING A FIRM HANDLE ON CONTENTMENT

Key Concepts on Contentment. We have made it clear that contentment comes through growth, and growth comes through learning, both through assimilation of the Word and through God’s training. But contentment is an outcome, and not a goal in and of itself. Our goal is God...and godliness. By

searching for God, we will find contentment, which is the outcropping of closeness to Him. When we have matured, contentment is inevitable; the only way a mature believer can view life is through the lenses of contentment. And why is that? Because God brings peace and rest and contentment as a result of faith...it is guaranteed...and the strong faith of a surrendered believer perpetuates the process.

The mind of a mature believer will be on heavenly things...things to do with God. Col. 3:2 commands us, "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." As God's Word fills our minds and God's Spirit fills our hearts, we will increasingly adopt God's point of view, rather than that of the world. Our vision will be vertical, rather than horizontal; our eyes will be on God, rather than on the world.

Paul was a single man, totally free to be occupied with his ministry. But he recognized that many believers are not "gifted" to stay single and live alone and content themselves with nothing more than the ministry that God has chosen for them. So many will marry. This is a time when God's leadership and the clarity of maturity are most essential. Deciding who to be with, when, and how...these are questions best left to God. Rushed choices and frantic actions can be devastating when it comes to relationships. Focus on God must come first, or ANY relationship will not be fruitful. Paul is citing his "aloneness" in 1 Cor. 7:7, as he makes a bigger point. This verse says, "I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that." The larger point he is making is that we must seek, wait for, and eventually find God's assignment, and then we must follow it. Contentment cannot operate where the conditions of one's life bypass or ignore God's plan. If He is not central, we will not be in the right place to receive contentment...and we will end up with the wrong mate, or in other unfruitful relationships.

If we want real prosperity and happiness, we must chase after God, learn to trust Him, and settle all our dreams and aspirations on Him. He must be what we want, and ALL we want. This is the way to joy and contentment. Prov. 28:25-26 confirms this, saying, "A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper. He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe." Safety comes through faith, and with safety, there is peace.

The search for godliness and the fullness of God is unique in its value. Nothing is more important. 1 Tim. 4:8 says, "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." Godliness...god-likeness, the kind that comes only through fellowship with the Spirit, and a growing faith...supersedes anything that can be obtained in the world. Even taking care of our bodies is not of more importance than our growth.

Not only does growth make all the difference in terms of our quality of life, but it also glorifies God. Our fellowship and advancing faith please God, as He loves to see our faith. Rom. 15:5-6 says this:

May the God who gives encouragement give you a spirit of unity [result of fellowship] among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus [grow and walk in the Spirit], so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hearts that follow Christ will glorify God the Father. And when we have reached a stature of faith that allows us to honor and glorify and acknowledge and fear Him, we will see contentment start to flow. In the following passage (2 Cor. 9:8-11), we start to get a taste of what contentment is:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

The “generosity” in giving money that Paul cited leading up to this passage in Corinthians is one of many such occasions for the mature exercise of spiritual gifts. Paul is stating a principle that the loving and giving function of a mature believer will be recognized by God. I believe the generous performance of any gift will generate the same reward as monetary giving. (Not everyone has money to give; many give time, effort, etc., based on Spirit-assigned gifts.) Ponder the following for a moment...this is what we get with maturity, as suggested in the passage just quoted. The list is short, but poignant, as we see here:

Grace abounds to us.

In all things at all times, we have what we need.

Because we have all we need, we “abound” in every good work.

Our supply of “bread for food” will expand to include a “harvest of righteousness”.

We will be made rich in every way.

Money is not our goal, but it sounds as though money, or the equivalent, will no longer be a problem for the mature believer. But as we have said before, if money is the point and goal, money will always be a problem. Regardless, *with* money or *without* it, when we mature, we will be *content* with what God gives. This means *happy*...and our greatest gains, the ones which will end up satisfying us the most...will be *spiritual*.

Heb. 13:5 calls for us to reach a state of contentment as a result of recognizing God’s presence and sufficiency in our lives. This verse says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” We can be content when we realize that there are no substitutes for God, even though Satan tries constantly to convince us that there are. When we mature, we will have a special proximity with God...and special provision...which will always be enough. The world will end up abandoning us, but God will never “leave us or forsake us”.

More on Contentment from Scripture. In a passage we partially reviewed earlier, we see a complete description of our dilemma when we attempt to find contentment in the world. It is hard to discuss contentment without discussing its main impediment: the world. 1 Tim. 6:6-11 gives us the following exhortation on the dangers that exist in the world, and what they can do to our growth and faith:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we

can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

What is the most valuable thing we can pursue? Godliness. And what is godliness? It is the product of maturity and spirituality, namely, the loving character of Christ played out in us as we live in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing in the world to compare with this. So, with God's basic provisions of, as it were, "daily bread", we will be content...because we have the greatest thing in the world: godliness. If, on the other hand, we turn to the world as our source of "good things", we may get more of the world's merchandise, but we fall into spiritual ruin and destruction...and these will eventually spill over into the material and physical world, as well. Attachment to the world is the underlying cause of all kinds of trouble, including sin and loss and perpetual disappointment.

Paul tells Timothy to "flee from all this", and commands him to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness", and to move forward. Paul commands him further in v. 12 to "fight the good fight of faith" (fighting is *trusting*), which is to keep growing; and then tells him in v. 13 to "take hold of the eternal life" that he has been given. He is instructing Timothy to embrace in his temporal *condition* what he already has in his eternal *position*. And how consistent and committed should Timothy be in following his command to grow? Look at verse 14: "...to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ..." Like Timothy, 100% commitment is what is needed for us to reach super-maturity, where there will be "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness". And what goes along with godliness, according to 1 Tim. 6:6? CONTENTMENT! This message is crystal clear.

Another passage which has been partially reviewed that we will see now in more depth is found in Phil. 3:7-10, which says this:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...

When Paul was acquiring "gains" from the world, he was deceived and confused, not realizing that they were actually "losses". Now that he is a believer...and a mature one...he recognizes the truth. He sees the things of the world as rubbish, and sees that his faith, along with his identification and relationship with Jesus Christ, is the source of power for his life. He sees now that true righteousness and all good things come from God, and realizes that anything that is obtained which does not come from God is not worth having. The key is *relationship*, which means *fellowship*, sustained by a growing faith...these are the basis for all spirituality and productivity. When we choose God over the world, we lose only

things of no real value, and we gain things of infinite worth.

When we understand contentment, seeing that it is the product of our spiritual connection with the Almighty God, we will comprehend that our movement toward Him is the most important thing we can do in this life. This is the divine point of view. But notice what Paul said above: In order “to know the power of His resurrection”, meaning the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, there must first be a “participation in his [Christ’s] sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” This suggests that the pain of training must precede the power of surrender. Paul expressed this also in 1 Cor. 12:10, which says, “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” Paul knows that the only real strength is God’s strength, and that our role in the process of spirituality is one of relinquishment and faith...which come through training.

One of the strongest statements from Paul concerning maturity and contentment is found in Philippians 4:10-13, which says the following:

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. 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 all this through him who gives me strength.

The point in this passage is that Paul had found contentment, because he had matured enough to understand grace and its provision. The life of a mature believer becomes one of living according to God’s will, and not his own...living with eyes on God, rather than the world. Notice that Paul said twice, “I have learned”. What does this tell us? That Paul did not start out “knowing”, but had to “learn” what he had not known before. (For a moving message on Paul’s *learning to be content*, see Appendix E: “Contentment”, a Sermon by C.H. Spurgeon.)

Paul did not go blind in a flash of glory on the road to Damascus, receive healing from the blindness soon thereafter, and then head out immediately to preach the gospel (see Gal. 1:16-17). Paul, like many other prominent Bible characters, had to spend some time training in the desert...and that is exactly what he did. He spent three years in the desert of Arabia, returning at some point to Damascus, eventually proceeding to Jerusalem. In the next seven years after that time, Paul did some preaching and teaching, but his actual ministry did not begin until he had completed a total of ten years of intensive preparation and training (starting from the time he met Christ on the road). Incidentally, if you want to know where Paul got his information while he was in the desert for three years, look at Gal. 1:11-12. Hint: It did not come from the Holy Spirit.

Here is the message for us: Paul did not begin his ministry until he was prepared. He had been a believer for at least fourteen years before he embarked on his first missionary journey. And it was a good two years after that before he wrote his first epistle, which was to the Galatians. Look at the other apostles who wrote inspired words given by the Holy Spirit. They did not begin ministering immediately when they decided to follow Christ; and after the ascension of Christ, they did not start

right away recording their testimony for the purpose of evangelism and the teaching of new converts. No. They took decades before they began writing about the things they had seen and learned. They were eye witnesses for the life of Christ, but they still had to be TRAINED before their most important ministries could begin. They were not fully mature when they were with Christ...remember Jesus describing them as having “little faith”, even though many of their gifts were partially operational? (See Matt. 17:19-20.) How much more will we need to receive God’s instruction and training, before the full fruits of maturity come to us? We must not assume that the assets and blessings of grace will come quickly and easily. Before blessings comes training and growth, as we follow the grace procedures that build our faith and strengthen our spiritual connections.

By the time we mature, we will have learned how to be content. We can be rejected in the world, hungry, destitute, and alone, but as maturing believers, we will have the perspective of how valuable it is for us to endure such situations. And where do we get the strength to endure? Through our relationship with the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” When we have completed our training, we will be well-equipped to rely on His strength, not just to get by, but to prosper and serve. When we have His power, we will have His fullness, which opens the gates to surrender, spiritual fruit, and contentment. That, brothers and sisters, is the time of arrival...the time of crossing over into the Promised Land.

(You may observe that we are saying perhaps too little about the “service” and “production” aspects of maturity and surrender. I have the feeling that our next book will be on *service*. For now, we are looking at the “blessings” side of surrender.)

CONTENTMENT FULFILLED

Reviewing what Happens after Surrender. It is nearly impossible to cover everything that happens after super-maturity...i.e., at the time when we reach the fullness of God, surrender, victory over sin, and contentment (and to be added: “service”). We listed earlier in this book some of these, and remind you of them here, since we are adding the new one: contentment. Here is a truncated list of things that are refined or introduced whenever we surrender:

Prayers answered

Satan flees

Faith is full

Walk in the Spirit

Production/fruit of the Spirit

Divine good

Prosperity

Peace, joy, love

Promises are fulfilled

I believe that many wonderful things happen when we surrender. This does not mean that all hardships and suffering will disappear, as God may want to do some refining “in-service” training along the way, or glorify Himself in some way through our exemplary management of pressures. But we will have such a pure view of God’s purpose and love that we will have unwavering confidence in His care, regardless of what happens. We will be rejoicing, giving thanks, not worrying, trusting, resting, loving, serving, and living a blessed life in the power of the Holy Spirit. Maturity can do this; we can have it all!

The only thing stopping us is our own lack of commitment to learn about God and His grace system. Because of evil all around us and a tendency to walk away from God, we have a perpetual reluctance to embrace spiritual things. This needs to be changed to a perpetual willingness to seek God. This is where our choice comes in; *what we want* translates into *who we become*! Do you want God? If so, buckle up...and then buckle down!

Promises fulfilled at Surrender. We saw this principle earlier, in this and previous books, but we hope to extend this concept here, as we see how promises are fulfilled when we pass the line of super-maturity. The promises of God will be satisfied intermittently along the way as we grow, but it is only when we reach the fullness of God and surrender that we fully realize their unlimited and constant fulfillment. Ps. 1:1-3 is a perfect example of what happens with maturity, as follows:

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 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.

Notice the blessings in this passage, and who receives them. The man who “delights” in God’s Word...who meditates on it day and night...will be steady and constant in his faith, and will yield great fruit through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Notice also: “Whatever he does prospers.” This suggests success of all kinds, with emphasis on divine good and spiritual fruit.

Another example of the kind of promises that we will see fulfilled is found in another passage from Psalms. Here is what is rendered in Ps. 103:1-5:

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Forgiveness of sins, healing, rescue from disaster, being endowed with God’s love, having desires satisfied with *good* things, and enjoying youthful energy. These are promised to those whose “inmost being” has reached the point of recognizing and knowing God, and living in honor of Him.

The Psalms are loaded with promises. Another is found in Ps. 34:8, which says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” For the person who perpetually takes refuge in God, i.e., who lives within the sheltering protection of God’s love and grace, there will be “blessing”. Close to God, there is full protection and provision, as we see again in Ps. 34, this time in

verse 17, which says, “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.” The righteous are those in fellowship...those who walk in the Spirit and who are growing in Him. They will be delivered from “all troubles”.

When we reach maturity, we will give all that we are and all that we have to God’s service. And when we reach this level of commitment, we will have all our needs met. This is the promise of Phil. 4:19, which says, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” All needs met: How can it get any better than that? But this will not happen for the immature and/or carnal. This is reserved for the mature, who express devotion through mature faith.

For true seekers of God, maturity will occur and blessings (contentment) will flow, as per Matt. 5:6, which says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” This is a promise of spiritual blessing and production for those who really want what God offers. The Holy Spirit will infuse those who are searching for God (those who stay with it until they reach maturity) with His righteousness. They will live with “truthful speech and in the power of God: with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left...” (2 Cor. 6:7). And they will shift all their burdens to the Lord, who will hold them up, as per Ps. 55:22, which says, “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.”

Surrendered believers can expect clarity in their directions from the Lord. He will show them the way and make them happy as they proceed, as we see in Ps. 16:11a: “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.” In nearness to God, there is only certainty and contentment. Pr. 3:6 repeats the concept of God’s GPS for mature believers, saying, “...in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” And who among us fully acknowledges God? It is the mature believer. And his way is clear, both from a standpoint of being able to see where he is going, and from one of seeing obstructions to progress removed.

The mature believer has absolute faith, as instructed in Ps. 37:3-5, which says, “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” For the mature believer, desires have been shaped to match God’s, so that—whatever God wants—the believer will want as well. The mature believer *wants* the right things...and *gets* them. And because he gets what he wants, and is fully aligned with God’s plan and God’s will, he lives in contentment and peace. This is stated in Is. 26:3, which says, “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast [focused on God], because he trusts in you.” This level of trust will only be experienced by the super-mature believer.

The believer who wants to reach this level of maturity, and who truly pursues it, will find it. Matt. 6:33 says, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things [bounties of grace] will be given to you as well.” If finding God and His righteousness are paramount to us, the benefits of grace will be given, along with the privileges of righteousness that come with maturity. Once again, during the “seeking” phase, promises will be fulfilled incrementally, while in the “finding” phase, they will be fulfilled completely. Maturity brings the fulfillment of all promises.

To encapsulate the blessings that come with surrender, we provide a list of verses that delineate these, as follows:

Deut. 28:1—If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth [national promise with personal implications].

Ps. 21:6—Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.

Ps. 128:2—You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

Prov. 11:24-25—One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Prov. 10:6—Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.

Deut. 28:2—All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. [See Deut. 28 for the full list...astounding!]

1 Cor. 9:23—I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Prov. 28:20—A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.

Eph. 1:3—Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

And who gets these blessing? These go to the faithful, those who obey...the righteous and those who are generous in the exercise of their gifts. In short, these blessings go to those who are mature. Also, from promises in the Old Testament, which were obviously not initially directed toward us, we build *principles* to help us see the way God blesses those who please Him. Promises, then, are given as PRINCIPLES of provision. The promises that fit our lives in specific ways can be presumed to apply literally to believers of this age (Age of Grace). The *principle* is that those who want God, who seek Him, and who endure His training to the end, will receive blessings reserved for those who surrender to Him. Variations are minor.

Psalm 91 Applies to Surrendered Believers. Believers who have surrendered have special divine provision and protection. We must understand both parts of this principle: 1) Provision and protection are given by God...but to whom? 2) They are given to those who have surrendered. Ps. 91 cites both the *requirement* for blessing, as well as the *outcome* of meeting this requirement. The following describes believers who will receive the promises of Ps. 91:

Those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High. (v. 1)

Those who can say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress.” (v. 2)

Those who can say God is their “fortress”. (v. 2)

Those who can say that their trust is in God. (v. 2)

Those who take refuge under God's wings. (v. 4)

Those who make the Most High their dwelling. (v. 9)

Those who love God. (v. 14)

Those who call upon God. (v. 15)

Do you see any hints of maturity in Ps. 91? Of course. The qualities shown here *define* maturity. So what will these mature believers receive? Here is what we are given from this psalm:

They will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. And how close do you have to stand to be in someone's shadow? (v. 1)

They will be saved from the fowler's snare. This suggests deliverance from Satan and his crowd. (v. 3)

They will be saved from "pestilence", or delivered from the world. (v. 3)

They will be covered with God's feathers, as they take refuge under His wings, meaning sin will not be able to get to them. (v. 4)

God's faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. God will provide for and protect them through all aspects of training and growth. (v. 4)

They will not be afraid of things that attack from the world or from the world's religions. They will not be cowed by any of Satan's schemes or wiles. (v. 5)

They will not fear the world's attacks against them. (v. 6)

They will be sustained in their spiritual and material lives, regardless of what is happening to those around them. (v. 7)

They will see those who have come against them punished. (v. 8)

No tragedy or disaster will overtake them, because God will command His angels to protect them. (v. 10-13)

They will be rescued from impending danger or harm. (v. 14)

Their prayers will be answered, and they will be delivered. (v. 15)

They will live long, full lives. (v. 16)

These are some of the phenomenal things that happen to believers who reach super-maturity and follow through with surrender. The things that take us down and cause us trouble are removed whenever we receive the fullness of God. We receive special protection at this point, and will not be

overrun with evil impulses and influences. Ps. 91 shows the *protection* which the mature believer receives.

Another aspect of surrender is one we have discussed, and one we can now refine, as we put a cap on the concept of the benefits of surrender. Ps. 23 gives us a good description of God's favor toward surrendered believers. Notice the place of contentment in this favor. We will examine this psalm truth by truth to see the blessings that come from closeness to God.

Ps. 23:1a. "The Lord is my Shepherd". This involves the thought content of someone who is *following* God's leadership...in other words, a mature believer. Only a surrendered believer can say that "the Lord is my Shepherd."

Verse 1b. "I shall not be in want." This is the place of contentment, which means that the believer claiming this provision is super-mature.

Verse 2a. "He makes me lie down in green pastures..." The term, "green pastures", suggests prosperity, where there is always enough of whatever is needed.

Verse 2b. "...he leads me beside quiet waters." Do you see the serenity and contentment that come with surrender? It is possible to find sanity and peace in a maniacal world, when contentment is attained.

Verse 3a. "...he restores my soul." This is the constant spiritual restoration that goes on through fellowship and growth. It involves access to God's mercy and reliance on His grace.

Verse 3b. "He guides me in paths of righteousness..." Here we see the spiritual production of the Holy Spirit through the surrendered believer.

Verse 4a. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me..." By being in fellowship and depending on God's grace, we have faith that none of the calamities mentioned in Ps. 91 will be coming our way. Plus we acknowledge God's power in shielding us from evil forces. "Shadow of death" is a deep, dark valley. There are dark days, even for mature believers, but these will not be faced with fear or faltering, because of faith in God's love and grace.

Verse 4b. "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." God's correction and guidance are comforting to us, as long as we recognize that these are manifestations of God's nurturing care. When we are surrendered to Him, the slightest nudge from God gets our attention and resets our direction on the exact course we are to follow.

Verse 5a. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." The forces of opposition, Satan and the world...and the people who serve these sources of evil...will finally have to stand back in awe as God's blessings and protection flow in to us. They will witness our contentment and will be silenced in the presence of God's care for us.

Verse 5b. "...you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." Oil is a symbol of contentment,

implying fellowship with the Holy Spirit (see Ps. 45:7). Implied is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in behalf of believers, which includes His anointing, or the assignment and function of our gifts. We will do amazing and grand things for God (grand in the spiritual sense, though perhaps invisible to the world), because of the operation of the Holy Spirit within and around us. Our “cup overflowing” reflects the filling of the Spirit, whereby production and contentment are completed. The operation of the Spirit will be seen in the impact we have through His workings in, and from, our relationship with Him. This takes place *within* us, as an experience of fellowship; and *through* us, as an expression of the Spirit’s ministry.

Verse 6a. “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.” When we have surrendered, and are living in contentment in the “rest” which God gives, we will become an endless stream of love and goodness. This is the Christ-likeness that we are predestined to exhibit, as a result of our maturity. God’s love and goodness come to us, and then flow from us.

Verse 6b. “...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” This describes life lived out in the shelter of God’s protection, as we saw in Ps. 91. This is the perpetuation of surrender, where the benefits of surrender continue to flow throughout our lives. This will never stop, as long as we remain in a state of commitment and surrender...and as long as our souls keep on being restored. Otherwise, if we slip back into the world, or into a loss of trust, or into sin, or into self-promotion, or into pride...we will have to begin the process again to get back into a surrendered state.

How can there be any question about the difference between believers who are at some beginning or intermediate stage of growth, and those who have reached maturity. How few there are who reach real maturity and receive all its accoutrements. This is due to a lack of interest in God to begin with, and a resultant refusal to find the right way to get there. But those who find it have unimaginable goodness and blessing in store for their lives. So consider your own heart. What do you want? Do you want to be closer to God? Or are you betting that the world will give you what you want? If you are a believer and uncertain what to do next, you can decide today to follow the grace way to the good life. Learn about confession, humility, prayer, grace, trust, endurance, growth, maturity, and God’s love. See then what comes. Heaven’s bounty and contentment await you. God bless your walk in Him.

Finale

Conclusion to Part Two

Summary. We have seen the contenders and pretenders against maturity, including Satan, his world, our own nature, and the law of sin. And we have seen the need for accessing the gifted services of fellow believers, and our responsibility for exercising our own gifts as contributions to the growth of others. We have given a great deal of attention to the process of growth, and have shown how important it is to follow the right steps to maturity. We described in this “part” the process for advancing toward maturity, and we showed how this maturity can lead to “super-maturity”, where the fullness of God, victory over sin, and surrender are realized. We also explained how a surrendered believer enters a state of rest, which is often referred to in Scripture as “contentment”.

We demonstrated how contentment is a product of surrender, a time when unprecedented blessings and strength become ours as a result of our close and constant communion with God. We mentioned, as a preview, that we anticipate further elaboration on gifts and service in our next book (God willing). We saw that *contentment* is the best form of life on earth, reflecting *our* side of the grace equation, which comes to us because we are paying attention to *God’s* side of it, namely, His love and provision. Because we have grown to understand God’s love and grace, we become eligible for their greatest exhibition, which is the life of Christ being lived out through us. What a privilege!

Conclusion. The real trick to reaching the level of maturity at which surrender can take place—when contentment comes—can be found in two aspects of our preparation for it: 1) intense *learning* of God’s truths for living, and 2) *endurance* of God’s training. But before these can happen, the believer must have a desire to know God better. And before desire, there is a fundamental choice to seek him and know Him. The *responsibility* for moving toward God rests with us, while the *enablement* to move comes from God Himself. When we want Him, and are committed to growth, He will help us and teach us and nurture us so that we can build ourselves up *in Him*. The question becomes this: Do I want God? If I do, then I will learn and grow. I will confess my sins to stay clean, pray as a way to stay connected, study to know all of God’s ways, endure God’s training, and increasingly rely on God’s resources so that He can live His life through me.

Perseverance, or endurance, is a “make-or-break” component in our growth. It is seeing God’s loving hand, even in the worst of circumstances, constantly enlarging our understanding that He is preparing us for the best and most productive lives possible. I believe this is the least understood aspect of Christian living, and a topic about which there is much darkness and confusion in churches today. We talk a lot about what God provides, with great and glowing proclamations of the promises of God, but we have omitted the part about the training we must go through to get them fulfilled in our lives. We leave out the face-in-the-mud, live-fire drills and the rigorous conditioning that we must do in order to be strengthened for God’s service. And that “strength” will be seen as TRUST IN THE STRENGTH OF

THE ONE WHO TRAINS US.

What we train for is to relinquish the work and the battle to the Lord. Ours is to learn one thing: to *trust*. This is the ONE THING that God wants to see in us. The irony then follows that this is when we will work ourselves to the bone in His service, because we will have learned how to be energized, motivated, and directed by Him. The more we “rest”, the more hard work we will do, but not based on our own initiative or ingenuity, but based on the power He gives that brings what we do from the level of “human activity” to that of “divine good”.

When we reach the pinnacle of our training, and finally graduate into the fullness of God and surrender, we then see the full scope of God’s plan for our lives. This is when contentment comes, when we experience the peace and joy of full communion with God, and when we fulfill His purpose. This is when we glorify Him, as He gives us small tastes of His divine nature and permits us to walk with Him. But there is a better way to frame it: When we surrender, we actually permit Him to *carry* us. Is. 46:4b shows God saying to us, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he. I am he who will sustain you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and rescue you.” Who is it that will carry us into the life of plenty-plus? It is He! And—for this to happen—who is it that must want God and His life more than anything else? It is you...and I.

Appendices

Appendix A Fellowship as Seen in 1st John 1

Appendix B Analysis of 1st John

Appendix C Equality Among Believers

Appendix D Eternal Security of the Believer

Appendix E Excerpt from “Contentment”, a Sermon by C. H. Spurgeon

Appendix F Here is How the Christian Life Works

Appendix A

Fellowship as Seen in 1 John 1

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

The first chapter in John’s first epistle presents confession as “naming” our sins, but that does not negate the positive effects of the other legitimate forms of confession: asking for forgiveness, being remorseful for our sins, repenting, and submitting our failures to God. NOTE: A condition of **contriteness** in the heart is the most important component in the confession process.

To reduce the size of this section, we ask you to use your Bible to follow our analysis of this chapter. We used the *Interlinear Bible* (Endnote 26) to study the truths found in this chapter, but almost any translation will serve to unveil the concepts this passage teaches. We will present this epistle with as much conciseness as possible, as we explore it verse-by-verse.

1 Jn. 1:1-3 indicates that John was an eye-witness to the life of Christ, and enjoyed first-hand fellowship with Jesus. He says he is reporting what he had “seen and heard”, and then he presents to them the basis for their fellowship with each other. The fellowship bond they had with each other was predicated on their mutual fellowship with God, and, if either they or John broke their fellowship with God, their fellowship with each other would also be broken. The *prerequisite* for fellowship with each other is fellowship with God. Fellowship with each other is a *byproduct* of our fellowship with God. This is desirable, but the primary objective of fellowship with God is an end in itself, and is the paramount goal of John’s epistle.

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

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

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

can be seen. When we bring our sins to His light, they are **exposed**, so He can forgive them. If we refuse to bring our sins to His light, they will not be forgiven, and *we will not have fellowship with Him!* It is a mistake to “hide” our sins from God (though He sees everything)!

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix B

Analysis of First John

INTRODUCTION. In each of two earlier books, I provided a discussion of 1st John. The books are *Bible Basics on Living by God's Standards: Pathway to Righteousness*, and *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*. I believe I was correct in assessing 1st John as being primarily concerned with fellowship, which is what I did in these two books. Valuable upshots of the doctrine of fellowship include avoidance of sin, confession of sin, and advancement toward maturity. But I have discovered some things lately that have changed my mind about one term from 1st John, and as a result of one simple correction, many other useful truths have surfaced from this epistle.

The term I misinterpreted is “born of God”, which may be expressed as “fathered by God”, and is implied in the term, “children of God”. I used these terms in my former studies to represent the “condition” of a believer, who will—at any given time—be in fellowship...or out of fellowship. I have realized that “born of God” is a reference properly ascribed to a condition of being “born again”, or saved...and does not reflect fellowship. I knew before that “born of God” means “born again” elsewhere in Scripture, but I thought John was stretching this term to fit a believer’s spiritual state, wherein the believer assumes a posture of being symbolically “born of God”...or not...thus identifying his place as being in or out of fellowship. But this is wrong. It seems that I was the one doing the stretching.

Notwithstanding my new view of the phrase, “born of God”, there are terms in 1st John that scholars have associated with one’s being “saved” or “unsaved”, that should be seen as descriptions of fellowship. An example of this is the term “abide”, usually translated “live”, which John connects with fellowship and not salvation. Many students of the Word connect “abide” with our being born again. “Born of God” *does* refer to one’s being saved, while “abide” and certain other terms mean to be in fellowship. My own change of view is not important; what means the most in this reversal is what I have been able to glean from 1st John as a result of the change.

To clarify the usage and meaning of “born of God” and a few other terms that we will discuss, we want to provide a new analysis of 1st John, with a corrected view of its meaning and application. The correction derived from this discussion will more-accurately distinguish the place and application of terms dealing with fellowship, as differentiated from terms related to salvation. It is important to know whether terms in 1st John cite our “position” (saved/unsaved) or our “condition” (spiritual/carnal). Clarity will be provided, we pray.

WE WILL SIN. John was very clear that we will assuredly sin. 1st John 1:8 says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Verse 10 adds, “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” So if we claim that we do

not have a sinful nature, or if we claim that we do not commit specific acts of sin, we are denying the truth. To say we do not sin is a lie.

We sin, but behind this bad news, there is good news, which is that believers have an advocate with the Father. They have the best defense attorney in all existence, and that is Jesus Christ. 1st John 2:1 tells us, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ.” This advocacy applies only to believers who are confessing their sins, as per our discussion in *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*, on pages 102-103.

It is undeniable that we will sin, yet John will later say this:

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.” (1 John 3:9-10)

On the face of this criterion, it seems that no one would be saved, because—as stated before—we all sin. The conflict is over John’s statement that all believers sin in 1 John 1:8 and 10, and his saying here that those “born of God” will NOT sin. Explanations given by scholars who pore over the tenses and moods and cases and genders and so on of the original language of the New Testament have a myriad of explanations as to the apparent contradiction that John has constructed. This all needs to be unraveled. Fortunately, John indicates that we come through all of this with eternal life, as he expressed in 1 John 5:1. This is good to know.

Quite a Symphony. A “symphony”, or some similar classical work, can provide a suitable analogy for 1st John. In classical works, themes and motifs are presented in their turn...linked, repeated, interwoven, and varied throughout a work or movement. Melodies are heard, with harmonies, rhythm, pitch, volume, and so on, integrated into the musical work. These are all woven together so that they emerge as a cohesive musical whole that is pleasing to the ear. These works are complex, and sometimes it is hard to pick out a particular instrument, or hear a particular sub-melody, but it is all there, and it comes out as a euphonious event.

Similarly, John interlaces the parts of 1st John like interlocking fingers, starting and stopping themes, later re-introducing them, tumbling “motifs and melodies” over each other, so that a point can begin in one place, stop abruptly, and resume in unexpected places down the line. What I am saying is that the neat separation Bible scholars like to use to separate sections of a scriptural work into topical units (rightly dividing the Word, no doubt) simply doesn’t work that well for this epistle. But it is all there...the truth...if the student of the Word knows what to “listen” for. You will see what this means by the time we finish “playing” this epistle, recognizing that John’s composition is harmonious and beautiful.

Complexity. While the finished piece is beautiful, 1st John is also complex and hard to decipher. This study has taken literally weeks, yet we leave with a comfortable understanding of what John is saying. Contrary to the understanding of some, this epistle does not provide any basis for an assumption that

Christians are sinless, or that salvation can be lost due to the presence of sin. This epistle gives a solid foundation for grasping the operations of grace, the dangers arising from the world and its messengers, and the security that we have in Christ. It also extols the love of God, and assures us that we can participate in that love, both as recipients and as conduits, if we utilize the assets of grace through the building of our faith.

We feel confident that we have resolved the apparent “dissonance” among the various parts of this epistle, and will give a reasonable correction for our former error.

One thing must be established before we begin: 1st John is written for believers. John uses “dear children” and “dear friends” throughout the epistle, and refers to those who have believed as “we”, “us”, or “you”. On the other hand, whenever John is advancing the gospel message, he is clearly directing his remarks to unbelievers...or to those *other than* his immediate audience. But the basic content of this epistle is addressed to Christians, and is not intended for Jews (as some ministers suggest), or for other groups outside the universal congregation of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1st John 1. We are content with our discussion of 1st John 1 in previous studies. The best analysis of this chapter has already been given in *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*, pages 47-49, and can be seen in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*, in Appendix A, “Fellowship as Seen in 1 John 1. We refer you to that study so you can see in detail what is contained in chapter 1. Basically, 1 John 1 tells us that fellowship between believers is predicated on their fellowship with God; and our fellowship with God is based on our cleanliness, through our having all sins confessed. We all sin, but any sin can be forgiven, if we confess it to the Father. The most important result of confession is “fellowship with the Father”, equated elsewhere in Scripture with the filling of the Holy Spirit. If we sin and do not confess, we are “out of fellowship”, and are thus controlled by the sinful nature.

1st John 2:1-2. The basis for forgiveness when we confess our sins is the completed work of Christ on the cross, which He displays before His Father as our defense against sin. He paid the penalty for sin, which enables forgiveness of sin at salvation, and now makes forgiveness possible for sins committed after salvation. This forgiveness is the result of His intercession for us, which takes place (only) when our sins are confessed. John also makes it clear that salvation is universally available, as intimated in verse 2, which says, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our [believers’] sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

1st John 2:3-6. Verse 3: “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.” Because we have confessed our sins, and are enjoying the intercession of Jesus Christ, we become equipped to “obey his commands”. The commands we obey are those which point to and open up grace operations. These are accessed through grace techniques, such as confession of sins. When we are in fellowship, we “know that we have come to know him”. This means that we are in fellowship with Him and are operating in His power, which will enable us to “obey”.

Verse 4 says, “The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” There are cases where “knowing God” refers to growth through understanding of His Word, but here to “know him” means to know Him intimately through fellowship. Fellowship is always seen as the means for “obeying”, which lends credence to our position that “know” in this verse

means “to be in fellowship with”.

Verse 5a further confirms “know” as referring to fellowship, saying, “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him.” Often, when we see the requirement for believers to produce love, fellowship will be shown as the means for doing it. Verse 5b adds, “This is how we know we are in him...”, which *could* refer to our being in union with Christ, *but does not* in this case, as per verse 6, which says, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” We know we are “in him”, or “live in him”, when we “walk as Jesus did”. No one walks as Jesus did, apart from the Spirit of Jesus being the one doing the walking...which reflects the believer being in fellowship or “walking in the Spirit”. “Living in him”, or “abiding in him”, then, refers to fellowship, not to our being eternally ensconced in Him through salvation.

1st John 2:7-14. Verses 7-11: We will not spend much time on this passage, because it is clear and without controversy. Read this passage. It refers to the “light”, which represents fellowship, and to the “dark” which stands for carnality...or being out of fellowship (these are cited in 1st John 1). The “old” command he is giving is to love God, and to love fellow believers. The “new” command tells how this is done: by *walking in the light*. Walking in the light is walking in fellowship, so that God can produce His love in us. The old command to “love” is overshadowed by the new one: “Stay in fellowship so you CAN love”.

Verses 12-14 show the status of the believers to whom John is writing. They are saved and in fellowship, prompting John to recognize those at any level who have had their sins forgiven through confession, who know God, and who are living in the Word of God. Some have even overcome the evil one through super-maturity.

1st John 2:15-17. Read this passage. In verses 12-14 above, John recognized believers who were walking in the Spirit. Now in 15-17 he cautions against “walking in the world”, either through refusal of God’s truth and training, or through carnality, which is the absence of fellowship. Refusal of the Word is typical of any believer who is not controlled by the Spirit. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit will not “teach” a carnal believer, so the Scripture will seem like nonsense to him. The world is not only Satan’s home, but he controls it, as we have seen in previous studies, and he uses it incessantly to draw believers away from God and into sin. Any believer who is not in fellowship will inevitably be attracted to and attached to...the world. Love for the world indicates a loss of fellowship (as per v. 15, which says, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”).

Verse 16 tells us that the world is filled with elements crafted to corrupt our spiritual lives and send us off into sinful or self-righteous patterns that cause us to refuse what God’s grace offers. This is true for unbelievers and believers. The world’s objective for unbelievers is to prevent them from believing in Christ. The goal for believers is to keep them away from God’s power, which is acquired through confession and faith.

V. 17 discloses that the world is passing away, but “the man who does the will of God lives forever.” What is the will of God for mankind? The answer is found in 2 Pet. 3:9b, which says, “He is patient with you, not wanting [not willing for] anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” He wants everyone to change his mind about the gospel message, and to be saved. Those who believe, who

fulfill this “will” of God, will live forever.

1st John 2:18-27. In this passage, John introduces the antichrist, and begins a theme of warning against false teachers. Much of what he will say from this point through chapter 4 has to do with the difference between the messages, practices, and standards of *false teachers* and those of *spiritual believers*. Read this passage. We will comment only on verses where the content needs explanation.

Verses 20-21 begins to show the contrast between false teachers and believers who are maturing and walking in the Spirit. These believers have the “anointing” of the Holy Spirit, which means they have received the “truth” from Him. John acknowledges their growth and shows how different they are from the false teachers, who are “unbelievers”...denying the Father and the Son (v. 22-23). In verse 24 John cautions them to keep what they have learned close to them, informing them that this will teach them how to “remain in [fellowship with] the Son and the Father”. Then in verse 25, he reminds them that they have eternal life, and adds in verse 26 that those with eternal life are targets for the purveyors of Satan’s lies. In verse 26 he also reminds these believers that they must take the knowledge he cited in verse 21 and use it to resist the taunts of those who would lead them astray.

The anointing they had received from God remained in them, according to verse 27, and they did not require much new information, but they would always need to take care to “remain in him”, or walk in the Spirit; and they would need to process (by faith) what they had learned and be prepared to apply it to their experience. He also wanted them to be open to further teaching, even though they had great knowledge, to refresh their understanding and keep them sharp for the discernment of false messages.

1st John 2:28-30. The “abiding” theme resumes in verse 28, saying, “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” One good reason for remaining in fellowship is so that we will not be embarrassed when He comes for us. We would certainly be ashamed to face Jesus Christ, if—at the time He comes—we are separated from the power and influence of His Spirit, due to the presence of sins on our record. If all sins are confessed and we are walking in the Spirit, we will be fully “confident and unashamed at His coming”.

Verse 29 uses the term “born of him”, which—as we said above—specifies the standing of a person who has believed in Christ. But notice what else the verse says, that can be confusing: “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” John is saying, “Think about it. You know that Jesus Christ is righteous, so look at false teachers; they cannot walk in fellowship, because they do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit within them. They are UNBELIEVERS! The only ones who can be in fellowship and DO WHAT IS RIGHT are *believers*, which the false teachers are not.” So John is circling back to the topic of spotting evil messengers...those false teachers...to warn the “dear children” to be wary of them.

NOTE: When John talks about the false teachers, or their position, he refers to them as “unbelievers”. When he talks about his readers, he designates them as “believers in fellowship” (or at least believers who are capable of attaining fellowship). He is warning them, as we shall verify soon, that false teachers want to put the fellowship of believers into jeopardy.

ALSO NOTE: When John is referring to his audience of believers, he uses personal pronouns in the

first or second person: “you”, “we”, “us”, etc. In *rare* instances, he uses impersonal pronouns for believers, such as “anyone” or “someone”. But observe: He ALWAYS uses either impersonal pronouns (“anyone”, “someone”, “whoever”) or third-person personal pronouns (“they”, “them”) for false teachers, whom he cites as unbelievers. He is reflecting a distinction between believers and unbelievers (especially false teachers), and declaring that his audience is composed of *believers*.

Back to verse 29. Looking at the second part of this verse, we see, “...everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” John cites those who are righteous as having been “born of God”. This begins a contrast between unbelieving false teachers and believers in fellowship. He wants to show the great distance between the *worst* condition—that of being a false-teaching unbeliever—with the *best* condition, which is a believer in fellowship. He did not include carnal believers in this comparison, because they look too much like unbelievers for the distinction to be clear. He is holding the worst and the best side-by-side to accentuate the contrast.

1st John 3:1-10. This section sharpens the contrast between believers in fellowship and unbelieving false teachers. This is broken down, as follows: Verses 1-3 describe believers in fellowship; verses 4-9 describe the behavior of false teachers, simultaneously deepening the contrast of them with believers, while warning against listening to them.

Verses 1-3: John begins this passage by calling his readers, “children of God”, emphatically declaring, “And that is what we are!” We are more than recipients of God’s love...it has been “lavished” upon us, giving us all the privileges of grace. The world cannot understand us, because its population is dominated by unbelievers. They do not know God, and therefore cannot know us. In verse 2 John reiterates the label: “children of God”, and assures them of a future with Christ. Then in verse 3 he encourages these children of God to stay pure, just as Christ is pure. In other words, he is reminding them to confess their sins, so that they will be purified and reinvigorated to “do what is right” (2:29b). This is the status and privilege of believers.

Verses 4-10: John provides a depiction of unbelievers (especially those who are teaching lies) and slips in a note or two on the difference between them and righteous believers. This is one of the trickiest passages in 1st John, and requires careful consideration. It is also rich in meaning, once the fog is cleared (reminiscent of a “7-8 resolution” in a musical work). We will take our time analyzing this passage.

Verse 4. Anyone who violates God’s standards is sinning.

Verse 5. Jesus Christ came to take away “our” sins, meaning the sins of those who accept the work He accomplished by believing in Him...this would apply to believers, but is potential for every human being. Notice the phrase “in him is no sin”. This seems to mean, on the surface, that Christ is without sin, a fact well-established in Scripture. But it would also be true that those who are “in Him”, meaning “in fellowship with Him”, will not have sin on their record (because they have confessed), nor will they be sinning for as long as they are in fellowship. Unfortunately, the simplest negative choice can take us out of fellowship, so we can never be smug about our state. We tend to sin, and it is never far off.

Verse 6. Here is the crux of the problem...the question which this passage evokes is this: Will believers

sin? John has already answered this question unequivocally in chapter 1. We will assuredly sin. Yet this verse clearly says, “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” The first phrase is easy enough: Anyone who stays in fellowship (“lives in him”) will not sin. But then John enfolds false-teaching unbelievers into the discussion by saying, “No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” In context, “continues to sin” means to “sin as the false teachers and/or unbelievers do”. They have never “seen him or known him”, because they are lost and without God in the world. What is this saying? It is telling us that believers cannot sin as believers do. We’ll explain.

Believers commit the same sins as unbelievers. My sin-reminder list that I use to assist me in confession contains most of the sins in the Bible, and my sins are no different from those of unbelievers. But they *are* different. The question is this: “In what way are they different”? To sin as an unbeliever sins, I would have to be an unbeliever. When I became a believer, all my sins were erased; yet I still sin with a fair degree of regularity. My sin, however, takes place in a new arena: I am in the family of God. It is my Father’s role to train me—as His child—through correction and discipline. But my sin will NEVER CONDEMN ME. An unbeliever’s sins, on the other hand, take place outside of God’s family. It is certain that I can never sin, or “continue to sin”, as a non-member of the royal family.

So verse 6b is saying, “No believer continues to sin in the same way and on the same grounds that false teachers do. They have neither seen God nor known Him...they are *unbelievers!*”

Verse 6 cites believers as being in union with Christ, who are also in fellowship with Him. Both their position (saved) and condition (in fellowship) are properly aligned. We are in union with Him, so we cannot sin under the flag of “unbeliever”. And if we are in fellowship, we will not sin because the One who indwells us also controls us, keeping us from sinning (for as long as we are “pure”, which, alas, may be a short time). We will have more to say about “sinning as false teachers (or unbelievers) do” in verse 9 and again in 5:18.

Verse 7. The “false-teaching” crowd is populated by unbelievers. But you can be sure that carnal and apostate believers can also join the fight against God. John says, “Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray.” This would include believers who propagate lies, as well as unbelievers. Who can we trust? Who is right, even in the interpretation of 1st John? Who can we listen to? There are many views and interpretations. How can we know which one is correct? Here is the answer: Correct information and interpretation will come from those who bring to the study a genuine thirst for God and a desire to feature and honor Him.

True teachers would obviously not include those who claim that Jesus is not the Savior. But there are others who subtly weaken believers by building in misleading messages in their teachings. They will make unimportant issues seem important, and ignore the heart of God’s truths for living. Such charlatans would include those that espouse and exalt programs or practices that promote “human righteousness”, rather than divine good. God’s truths points to GOD, so when a “teacher” uses “I” more than He uses “God” or “Christ”, give him a wide berth. When loyalty is demanded to an *institution* or *movement* and not to the true and living God, walk...no, run...away! Causes such as abortion and gay marriage and drug addiction and a myriad of other “moral” concerns, are just that...attempts at morality...efforts to clean up Satan’s world. These are distractions from the real focus, which is GOD

HIMSELF! If we focus on God FIRST, all the other issues will be resolved according to His will (and the volitions of men and women). And any attempts at making the world a better place will be directed by Him.

False teachers lead us into sin and away from God, or into schemes to get us to generate our own righteousness so we can try to impress God (and assuredly fail). False teachers can do a great deal of damage, even from the pulpit, and they must be identified. John is saying, “Let NO ONE lead you astray”! As believers, our role is to do what is right, which is to stay in fellowship and attend our growth by learning God’s truths for living and enduring His training program. If our source for truth emphasizes God, His power, His plan, His will, His mercy and grace, His provision...then we will grow. If it is about grand schemes and programs, the best of human ingenuity, or systems of human betterment, we may find in them ways to “serve” in some fleshly way, but we will not grow, and our fruit will be minimal, if there is any at all.

Verse 8. “He who does what is sinful is of the devil.” This applies to believers and unbelievers. Those who sin are serving Satan. (Hopefully, you have read the complete treatise on sin: *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*.) He is the Father of sin, and his messengers are leading us into sinful behavior, often in the name of morality. Human good, if you have read previous studies, is always bad! Sin, we can see clearly, but human good is attractive and harder to spot, which makes recognizing false teachers very difficult. Watch for sinful behavior from the teacher and watch for any lack of focus on God...these will help to discern any lies. We MUST evaluate our teachers, perhaps even severely, because lies will lead us into sin and carnality.

The last part of verse 8 tells us that Jesus came to destroy Satan’s work in all its iterations. When we engage Him to do this work, He will use His power to confront the supernatural power and genius that Satan brings to the fight. We better leave the heavy lifting to God.

Verse 9. “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” Here is the second time we are hearing that those who continue to sin are not “born of God”. This does not mean that believers will never sin, as we have seen. It simply means that those who “continue to sin” in the way unbelievers do...e.g., not believing in Christ and conducting lives that are without God, are not “born of God”. Those who are “born of God”...believers...cannot sin the way unbelievers do, because “God’s seed remains” in them. God’s seed is the Holy Spirit, who indwells us permanently at salvation. The sins of those who are born of God are different from those of unbelievers, because the Holy Spirit is present within those who have believed.

Once again, John is trying to isolate false teachers, and using various means to identify them, such as crass or persistent sin patterns. Even if the teacher is correct in some of his premises, we would not want to listen to someone who is not following his own advice. Standards for teachers are high and inflexible. If they are believers, they must be *mature* ones, walking in the Spirit, as they should be instructing others to do. On the other hand, unbelieving teachers, or even carnal teachers who have walked away from God, will be against faith, against godly love (as opposed to humanistic love), and against attention to God...placing the focus on man.

Verse 10 provides a little more insight into the criteria for identifying false teachers. John says that unbelieving false teachers will not “do what is right”. They are not children of God, and love neither God nor His children. If a teacher is haughty or hostile, avoid him. If he is behaving sinfully, do not listen to him. Keep searching for the gifted and spiritually-qualified teacher that God has equipped to dig the truth out of Scripture, who can then explain it to you.

1st John 3:11-15. This passage treats the subject of love, and shows the contrast between believers in fellowship and unbelieving false teachers. This comparison is *not* between believers-in-general and unbelievers, but between *believers in fellowship* and unbelievers. John is focusing on the differences between believers who are walking in the Spirit and unbelievers: Unbelievers are interminably dominated by Satan, the world, and their sinful nature, whereas a believer in fellowship is controlled by the Spirit. Unbelievers vs. believers in fellowship is where the greatest dissimilarities exist.

Verse 11 says, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” The message that John gave in the beginning (chapter 1) is love. But the word “love” does not appear, as such, in chapter 1. So why is John saying here that love was the topic in “the beginning”? This is because love and fellowship are *equated* throughout the New Testament. To mention love is to imply fellowship; fellowship is the prerequisite for love. Undoubtedly, godly love can only be created through fellowship. This is because fellowship puts the Holy Spirit in charge of our hearts, and He is the one who produces divine love *through us*. Love is a *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. 5:22-23). So John’s message, with its roots in fellowship, is this: “Love one another.” In effect, he is saying: “Stay in fellowship.”

Verse 12-15. Read this passage. John is contrasting the attitude/posture of a believer in fellowship with that of an unbeliever. Where is wrong done? It is done by unbelievers or believers out of fellowship. But John is comparing true “righteousness”, which can only be done by a believer *in fellowship*, with the “unrighteousness” of unbelievers. In this passage, he wants to isolate and target a specific group of highly-destructive unbelievers: false teachers. And he wants to show the difference between them and righteous believers.

Verse 12 begins the passage with this: “Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.”

Cain was an unbeliever, and his brother was a “righteous” believer (translated to us as a believer “in fellowship”). Verse 13 discloses that the unrighteous, including believers out of fellowship (though the latter is not John’s emphasis here), hate the righteous. This is why he says, “Do not be surprised if the world hates you.” The world represents the unrighteous—unbelievers—who hate believers in fellowship (as can believers out of fellowship, but—again—this is not the point here). And how are believers in fellowship identified? Verse 14 answers, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.” Eph. 5:8-18 gives a vivid picture of “death” of this kind, and makes it clear that it represents the condition of a believer *out of fellowship*. “Life”, then, would be a condition of being *in fellowship*. Record this: “Anyone who does not love remains in death”...meaning he is carnal and remains that way until he returns to fellowship. Incidentally, hailing back to former studies, we remind you that the primary means for expressing divine love is through the exercise of our gifts. (See *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of*

God, pp. 2-4, for more on gifted service and love.)

Verse 15 then describes unbelievers, among whom are the false teachers, and says of them, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” “Brother” here would not be a “Christian brother”; because the reference is to an “unbelieving murderer” who has no eternal life...is not saved...and is certainly no brother to believers. Such a person is condemned, and without possession of the Spirit. And their posture is clear: Unbelievers have an abiding hatred for believers in fellowship. The converse is likely true as well: they will get along fine with believers out of fellowship, who may look and act just like them.

John is contrasting unbelievers, who can ONLY sin, with believers in fellowship, who WILL NOT sin (...for as long as they remain in fellowship. Keep in mind that the purpose of GROWTH is to enable us to sustain fellowship for longer periods as our faith strengthens, which increases our ability to deal with sin. Greater maturity enables greater spirituality! You MUST read *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*.)

1st John 3:16-20. Please read these verses. In verse 16 John gives us the model for love, which is Jesus Christ. Understanding this love is the basis for super-maturity, and love is the greatest doctrine we can learn. God’s love is central to His plan for mankind, as well as to His plan for each believer, and is the *modus operandi* of His relationship with His children. The final step in growth is knowing God’s love (Eph. 3:16-19). (See *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, especially the chapter, “Getting the Fullness of God”, beginning on p. 32. Note particularly pages 40-53.)

Here in verse 16, John tells his readers that our objective should be to have the same kind of love that Jesus has, and be willing to sacrifice our lives for other believers. But what does this mean? As we have discussed in previous studies, the greatest expression of a believer’s love is the exercise of his gift. These are the God-supplied media for love and service. Verses 17-18 reflects the operation of these gifts, as we will see.

Verses 17-20. In verse 17 “giving” is provided as an example of “gifted functioning”. Someone with the gift of making money should be exercising this gift by supporting and sustaining fellow-believers who need it. Whatever our gifts are, if we are not exercising them, we are not “loving”. Gifted service expresses love, and is the way in which we “lay down our lives for our brothers”. Verse 18 prompts us to “action”, motivated and guided by the truth of God’s Word. Talk is cheap, but God-directed service is valuable and fruitful. The term “with actions” refers to the fruit of the Spirit, which is derived from fellowship. Love comes from the Holy Spirit. The term “in truth” points to love coming through maturity, which occurs through understanding of God’s Word and endurance of the training God puts us through.

Verse 19 indicates that fellowship and maturity are possible, because we “belong to the truth”. False teachers want us to embrace their lies, but if we truly seek God and find and receive the truth...and walk in it...we will grow and become productive through our closer relationship with God. Those who truly “belong to the truth” are rare. These represent believers who truly want God and search for His *truths for living* with devoted consistency. Believers who belong to the truth are usually seen as weird and maladjusted, because the world does not have the same view of life and reality that they do. The

lives of those who truly embrace God's truth are likely to be arduous and difficult, until they reach the pinnacle of maturity, when the gates of heaven's bounty will open to them. (See *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*, pp. 150-155.)

The second part of verse 19, along with verse 20, continues by saying that those belonging to the truth (spiritual and maturing believers) are at ease in God's presence, because they are forgiven and growing, instead of standing before Him with low confidence because there are sins on their records. When John says that our hearts "condemn us", he is not talking about self-judgment for sins we have committed (called "confession"), but about the condition of an uncleansed heart that is stained by sin. As long as this heart holds on to sins, without confession, we will not be at ease before God. This is the uneasy feeling that we know we are being observed while we are doing something wrong. On the other hand, if our hearts are clean, we will have, as we see in verses 21-22, "confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him."

The confidence of verses 21-22 is not just a comfort with oneself or one's state before God, although it is that. It is also confidence *in* God, which enables us to pray effectively. We get what we ask when we pray the "prayer of faith", because it matches God's will. We are praying for what He wants to provide. This kind of faith comes from "obeying" (by using grace techniques) and "pleasing Him" (by walking in His Spirit).

1st John 3:23-24. Verse 23 says, "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." This is actually two commands: one for unbelievers and one for believers. The commandment for unbelievers is to believe in Jesus Christ and be born again. The commandment for believers is to "love", which is a call for them to "stay in fellowship"...where—and only where—love can be produced.

Verse 24 tells us that those who obey both of these commands "live in him and he in them", which refers to "abiding" in Him, or staying in fellowship, which we are qualified to do because we have "believed" in Him. We are in union with Him forever as a result of salvation, and now we can walk in fellowship with Him. When we "obey" the command to confess our sins, and follow His pathway to maturity, we will walk in fellowship, walk by faith, and walk in the truth. Otherwise, even though the Holy Spirit will always be in us, He may not always be "at home" there. The implication of His "living" in us is that He will also control us.

In previous studies, we showed that His "living" in us is different from His "indwelling" us. "Living" includes controlling the space where He lives, which He does NOT do when we are out of fellowship. How do we know He controls us when we are in fellowship? "We know it by the Spirit he gave us." We know it because He says it is so. The Spirit is our source for all divine knowledge, and He has made it easy for us to access this knowledge by giving it to us in a book...the Bible. We know that we can have fellowship, because the Bible says so. When the Bible speaks, and we listen, we are hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, and we should listen.

1st John 4:1-6. Verse 1. "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." John again reminds his audience that the presence of false teachers necessitates a sifting, not only of teachers, but of the

information they bring. We will recognize false teachers first of all by their behavior (as per chapter 3), and also by their messages, or the “spirit” of what they say. If the spirit points to God and His power and provision, we can embrace it. If it points to man’s ability and ingenuity and achievement and programs, and/or if it leads to sin, we must reject it.

Verses 2-6. This passage describes true and false messages, and shows us that those who are “from God” (believers who are in fellowship and maturing) are listening to the Word and seeking truth. They want to be close to God. John distinguishes mature and spiritual believers from unbelievers, saying that believers who want the truth are the ones who will get it, and those who have it recognize the Giver of truth. Read through this passage. The meaning is clear, I believe.

1st John 4:7-21. In this passage, John takes a breather from the work of evaluating false teachers, to extol and celebrate the love of God. What a rich topic this is, and much deserving of our attention. This passage tells us that love is a product of fellowship, and that this love comes from God. When we understand and believe God’s love, I believe we will open doors of grace that will propel us to new heights spiritually. By understanding God’s love...or the love of Christ...we can acquire the fullness of God (See *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*). But knowledge of this love is not mastered in a single lesson. It is the result of extensive growth and training, and takes sustained commitment, based on a true desire for God.

By participating in God’s love through fellowship and growth, we develop love for each other. Those who love others get this love from God. Verse 7 says the following:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God [is a believer] and knows God [has learned the truth and understands God’s love].

Love is the outcropping of our relationship with God. If we are in harmony with Him, and are aligned with His will, we will have His love flowing from the well-spring of His Spirit within us. And when we love others, we will serve them. This means that the gifts that we have come to recognize within ourselves will be operating as an expression of our love for others. When we exercise our gifts in service for fellow believers, we will be loving them. (Satan would like for us to “generalize” love, to downplay functioning in our specific gifted areas. Don’t be misled. Stay with *your* gift and use it enthusiastically and faithfully.)

Watch for fellowship messages in this passage, such as that given in verses 16b and 17, which says, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us...” Be aware that our objective is not to try to push ourselves to love, but to understand *God’s* love, which is the impetus for *our* love. And remember that, “Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (v. 21b). If we are loving our Christian brothers and sisters, as evidenced by the operation of our gifts, then we can know that we are loving God as well. And note the message that “love is complete” for a believer “living in love”, which is equated with “living in God”. This is speaking of “living in God” *conditionally*, which means *living in fellowship*.

The only part of this passage that might need clarification is found in verses 13-15. Verse 13a says, “We know that we live in him...” Notice the use of the first-person, personal pronoun, “we”. This indicates

that this message refers to believers. Believers live in God *positionally*. Verse 14 adds, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” Believers are aware that Jesus Christ is the Savior.

But then look at verse 15, where John shifts from a focus on those who have *already* believed, to those who *can* believe. This verse says, “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.” Note the third-person, impersonal pronoun, “anyone”, which refers to *homo sapiens* at large. In other words, if anyone who has not yet believed acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God will come to “live in him”, meaning that the Holy Spirit will come to indwell him. “Anyone” can become a believer! It is a matter of personal choice.

We have to be careful, because “live in him” can be used in two ways: 1) for salvation or 2) for fellowship. Context will determine which usage applies. In verses 13-15, it refers to salvation.

1st John 5:1-5. This passage is easier to understand, in my opinion, when it is taken from last to first...or in reverse order. The conclusion is that only believers can overcome the world (v. 5), which occurs as a result of everything that is described in verses 1-4. We begin with the conclusion.

Verse 5. This is the conclusion, which is, “Who is he that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” This excludes unbelievers and includes believers. We know that overcoming the world is possible only for believers in fellowship, but we’ll get to that. The conclusion in verse 5 matches the introduction in verse 1, which says, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.” Unbelievers who believe in Christ will be born again and saved. Everyone who accepts God accepts His Son, as well. By believing, an unbeliever becomes a child of God, who is qualified to become, as well, a lover of the Father and the Son.

Working backwards: Verse 4b says, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” Faith is the key to salvation, and after that it is the key to the victorious Christian life. Confession gets us into fellowship; the operation of a maturing faith keeps us there...i.e., time in fellowship is commensurate with the strength of our faith. When we are in fellowship and growing, we are moving toward victory while we are alive in this world. In a long-range sense, victory over the world is guaranteed when Jesus returns. But we are concerned about life as we are currently living it. We look forward to the ultimate victory, but that is not yet.

Verse 4a says, “...for everyone born of God overcomes the world.” On its face, this would be saying that all believers overcome the world, but this is not so. Sometimes the world overpowers believers. Confusion at this point is not with the scripture itself, but with the translation. This part of verse 4 is not referring to a “person”. The problem is with the translation of “everyone”, which is actually “everything”. This passage is saying that everything that is invented or introduced by God (“born of God”) “overcomes the world”. That which God causes (v. 4a) brings victory (v. 4b). But we don’t always participate, do we?

Backing up another step to verse 3b, we see that “his commands are not burdensome”. This is because He provides for their fulfillment. This is part of “everything born of God” that we saw in verse 4. Jesus

said, "...my yoke is easy" (Matt. 11:30), meaning that any cross we bear is light IF IT IS HIS, because we relinquish it to Him by faith. This is the victory which HE brings...over Satan, over circumstances, over fear, over sin, over our own nature. As Prov. 21:31 says, "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord." Our battle is giving the battle to Him, which is much harder than it sounds, as we discovered in *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*. To have this kind of victory takes profuse training and growth.

Verse 3a says, "This is love for God: to obey his commands." Love for God is constructed on the foundation of "obeying his commands". Commands must be seen in the light of our present Age—which is that of grace and the Spirit. These commands are not laws or prohibitions; they are part of the grace era, and can be summarized in the following way: "Stay in fellowship and keep growing. Use all the grace assets and methods to move closer to God and live in His power." Love for God is built on these commands...on fellowship and maturity. Without them, no love for God will happen, because we are left with only the "flesh" to generate it. Godly love must originate with God.

Verse 2 complements the point of verse 3a, saying, "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands." We fulfill our "love" requirements by following grace commands.

Verse 1 tells us that only believers can love other believers with godly love, which is the result of following His commands to stay clean and grow (as per v. 2). As we mature and walk in the Spirit, we love God more, and therefore receive spiritual impetus to love His children more, as well.

1st John 5:6-15. These verses give a description of the gospel...the good news that Jesus Christ came to complete the work of satisfying the justice of His Father, to allow those who believe in Him and His work to become members of His family as children of God. The result of this is eternal life (v. 11), which John assures his readers that they have. Verse 13 gives the conclusion for verses 1-12, saying, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." He is saying, "I want you to know—my *purpose* is that you *know*—that you have eternal life. There is no question or doubt about it!"

So we have come full circle regarding sin and our eternal position. Chapter 1 told us that we will sin, but we may confess it and be restored to fellowship. The beginning of chapter 2 informed us that we have the best defense attorney in all existence speaking on our behalf, even though we sin. Chapters 3 and 4 elaborate on the question of whether believers *can* sin, which was settled in the affirmative, here and back in Chapter 1. Now in Chapter 5 we will receive firm word that we have eternal life, even though we sin. We have *temporal* life, wherein sin is taken care of by confession, and we have *eternal* life, which is ours regardless of what happens in our temporal life after salvation. Eternal life belongs to all believers.

1st John 5:14-15. Not only do we have confidence for eternity, but we can have confidence in time, as well. Verse 14-15 says the following:

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.

When we 1) have faith enough to pray the prayer of faith, as per James 5:15, which means we are in fellowship and current in our studies; and 2) pray according to His will, which requires the perspicacity of great maturity...we will get what we ask for. We get what we request, because we know what God wants to give us, and that is what we ask for. (See *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer: Pathway to the Throne*, pages 55-67 for more on the prayer of faith and praying according to God's will.) This privilege applies to super-mature believers, in my opinion, but I also believe that any of us can reach this level.

1st John 5:16-18. Once again, we are taken into difficult terrain in verses 16-18. What is God telling us? Verses 16-17 help us distinguish sins committed by believers from those of unbelievers. Verse 16 says this:

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those [brothers] whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin [by non-brothers, or unbelievers] that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.

This passage seems to be an “open-range” for interpretation, and many scholars have ridden its reaches. But I am comfortable with one particular interpretation, because it aligns with a concept introduced by John earlier, which is that there are two categories of sin: one for sins committed by unbelievers, the other for the sins of believers. Here is our assumption: Sin resulting in death is that of unbelief, committed by unbelievers. (They commit other sins, also, but the sin referenced here is that of rejection of Christ as Savior.) The death they experience is eternal condemnation.

The sin that John is saying we can pray for is in the category of sins committed by believers, which are quite different from those of unbelievers. Believers sin *within* the family; unbelievers sin *apart from* the family, since they are not children of God. Each of them has a different field of operation. We must record for posterity, therefore, that there is a difference between sins committed by believers and those committed by unbelievers; this is important to a correct interpretation of verse 18, coming up.

When John says, “There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that”, in v. 16, he is saying that we cannot pray for the sin of *unbelievers*, because they are sold out to the devil, and God gives them the freedom to operate without interference, except as it may affect His plan for believers (who are protected). And certainly, their rejection of Christ is a very personal decision, well beyond the reach of our prayers. On the other hand, we can and should pray for *believers* who are sinning, with the prospect that God will correct them, so they will confess and be restored to fellowship (or spiritual “life”). The main point here is the difference between the sins of believers, and those of unbelievers.

Verse 18 says, “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.” I have seen a number of translations and interpretations of this verse, and believe that the one which makes the most sense is this: The term “one”, not really in the original language, fits an insertion of “One”, meaning Jesus Christ, who is contrasted with the “evil one” (seen here as one who wants to do us harm). Jesus protects us; Satan

tries to destroy us. “Anyone born of God” is the obvious designation for a believer. This “one” does not “continue” to sin. But which kind of sin is this talking about, since John has said before that believers DO sin? Obviously, this refers to the kind of sin that only *unbelievers* can commit, beginning with the sin of unbelief toward Christ, and proceeding with personal sins of all kinds...sins quite different in their frame of operation from those of believers.

The point of verse 18: A believer cannot “continue to sin” the same way that unbelievers do, especially the “false prophets” of 4:1. It is impossible for them. And because they are believers, they have certain protections from God. For example, their eternal life is protected. The main point established in this verse is that believers can sin, but not the same as unbelievers. They are “born of God”, yet they are not perfect. Recall: Sins executed by the children of God will be handled *in the family*.

1st John 5:19-20. Verse 19-20 gives us the following:

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

V. 19 begins by telling us that we KNOW we are children of God, living in a world controlled by Satan. Verse 20 adds a dimension by saying that believers who are in fellowship and growing are that way because they have received UNDERSTANDING, and have therefore come to KNOW the One who is true...who is Himself eternal life. Once we have settled that we are believers and that we have eternal life, we can focus our energies and attentions on seeing and knowing who it is that has provided this for us. “We are in him” means that we are in union with Jesus Christ forever, and that we can potentially walk in fellowship with Him.

1st John 5:21. “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.” This is John’s final appeal: for his readers to avoid anything or anyone who distracts them from their faith or that retards their growth. Idols are anything that pulls us away from God, even things that are seemingly innocuous. If we want God and seek Him with all our hearts, there will be nothing more important than Him...without exception. This is where the goats are separated from the sheep.

Conclusion. John’s hope was to acquaint us with forgiveness, fellowship, the love of God, and the eternal security of every believer. He dissected the types of sin and showed the extreme distance between “evil” and “righteousness”, as exhibited respectively by unbelievers (representing evil), and believers in fellowship (representing righteousness). He also wanted us to recognize and guard against false teachers, and this may have been his greatest concern. He knew the damage that can be done by those who deceive, confuse, and manipulate people through their lies. We must watch messengers closely and evaluate their messages carefully, so as not to be misled by false prophets. Test the spirits.

Appendix C

Equality Among Believers

In a free society, where there is free enterprise and economic competition, there is a counter-conversation involving equality and parity. Free enterprise depends on ambition, initiative, and ability, qualities that don't exist in equal quantities, so some will achieve more and acquire more than others. The counter to this is to take from those who have accumulated wealth and property, and give it to those who have not. The evolving arbiter and coordinator for any such distribution of wealth and resources can only be the government. A good example of this was witnessed in the Soviet Union, in which the state took over the receipt and redistribution of resources from those who "had" to those who were "without". The problem that evolved quickly, however, was the loss of freedom for those to whom state provisions were being given. Equality in society requires management by some force to see that equality is observed, which can lead easily to a totalitarian style of government.

Those who want greater enforcement of equality want bigger government. Others want smaller government and believe that free enterprise will meet individual needs better than big government. The tug of war between these two factions is an ancient one, and I have no interest in sorting out all the differences between them. I will only say, without elaborating, that Scripture supports free enterprise, which means the less that government is involved in controlling the economy, the better. So does the Bible support equality?

We can say, unequivocally, that there is no such thing as equality in the world. This will shock you, but you will understand it shortly. There are two races in the world. One race is superior, and the other is inferior. You see, one race belongs to a "royal family", and the other can be characterized as belonging to the "huddled masses". But get this: the two races that we will discuss have nothing to do with skin color, ethnicity, or national origin. The two races consist of *believers* and *unbelievers*. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a member of a superior race. I cannot distinguish height, weight, I.Q., wealth, skin color, national origin, beauty, taste in fashion, gender, age, natural ability, or anything else about you that will make you eligible for membership in my race...only that you have been saved. If you are a believer, we are not only members of the same race, but we are in the same family. And NO unbeliever can belong!

So, we begin with inequality in the human race. The unusual thing about our superior race is that we want all people to join us. Our club is not exclusive or prohibitive. All have an open invitation to become members. Those who accept the invitation will become sons of God, and they will join the collection of humans who can now claim royalty as members of God's family. Gal. 3:26-28 says this:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male

nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

“Human” qualities go out the window, when it comes to God’s family. If we are sons, then we are in the family. Rom. 8:15 says, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.” As members of the family of God, we are part of a superior race...so there is no equality between the two “races”.

Now, equality is very much called for in Scripture, in spite of everything we have just said about economic inequalities in society, or about the absolute inequality between the two races in the world. Equality is commanded *among believers*. The scriptural *ideal* is one that calls for equality in all ways. And I will contend that the “church” is the place where equality and redistribution of resources can legitimately be practiced. Satan wants to discredit God’s plan for believers’ care for one another, which is the church. He does this by influencing or even creating counterfeit “churches”, meaning secular governments that control its citizens in the name of “taking care of them”. Unfortunately, those whom governments claim to care for always end up suffering more as a result of the governments’ control of their lives. Basically, the job of government is to provide safety and protection for its citizens, and to preserve the integrity of its borders. Otherwise, the watchword for societal structure is “freedom” and “privacy”. Even so, it is certain that humane care for those not able to care for themselves should be provided.

We want to explain what we mean by “equality” in the church. Oddly enough, the communist maxim of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” fits well in the relationships that go on in the royal family (though they are not effective in Satan’s world). And who is it that administers the distribution of resources in the church? It is the Holy Spirit. Here is how it works: When a maximum number of believers achieve maturity, with each member functioning under the control of the Spirit in the exercise of his/her gifts, the needs of all church members will be met. The mutual exchange of gifted services results in each member getting what he needs to function effectively with his or her gifts. Each supports the other, as they build each other up, edify each other, and help each other in every way.

Our primary job as believers is not to evangelize...that will get done...it is to HELP EACH OTHER!! As each of us grows, we will help others, and as *more believers* grow, *more help* is available to all of us. Believers who are “helped” will grow more, thus serving more and glorifying God to a greater degree. There should never be a need of any kind that is not met by members of the family of God. Once again, gifted services are primarily for *believers*, though some gifts may reach out to the world at large, with food distribution, medical assistance, and child care standing out as examples. But the central purpose of gifts is to strengthen each other, because this is the way the war is won. The greatest damage we can do to the cause of Satan, and the greatest way that we can glorify God, is to *feed His family!!* That means taking care of fellow believers in *every way*.

Taking care of each other in ways that advance maturity is very important; we have covered all of these in the past, and will have more to say about them in the upcoming book on “service”. But there are physical and material needs as well, that must be taken care of. Fortunately, when things work like they are supposed to, there are *gifts* to cover every need. The thing that promotes the greatest success in gifted operations is the correct teaching of truth, so that believers can grow in understanding and

wisdom. As believers grow, they will master the concepts and methods of grace that enable them to enter advanced levels of training; these, in turn, lead to maturity and the enhanced function of spiritual gifts. The reason too little is being done with spiritual giftedness is that there are too few mature believers to carry it out.

Once the hurdle of maturity has been negotiated (no small leap), then the arrangement of gifted operations can start to congeal. And once gifts are operating freely in the power and love of the Holy Spirit, then all believers will be elevated, and equality among them can become a reality.

One of the most obvious ways in which there is inequality among believers is in the area of financial capability and personal care. Some believers do not have enough basic resources to take care of themselves, which means gifts are not operating to take care of them. When it comes to gifts, both the receiver and the giver must be in fellowship for the exchange to be meaningful. For gifts to have their intended effect, the Holy Spirit must be the one directing their operation. Once again, we see the need for spirituality and maturity. God uses *believers* to *meet the needs* of believers. There are other ways He can get things done, but one way for sure is through the operation of gifts.

We need to take a look now at some scriptures that define and govern the operation of gifts, especially those that pertain to equality. In Ex. 16:17-18, we see the process for gathering manna each day that was used by the Jews during their time in the desert. This passage says the following:

The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer [about two quarts], he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.

Each person was to have the *same amount* as everyone else. This is the divine principle for equality among believers. Everyone is to have roughly the same as everyone else. Gifts are designed to bring about two things: 1) edification, and 2) equality. In 2 Cor. 8:10-15, we see equality called for by Paul, where he included the quote from Exodus just given (“no one has too much or too little”). He is discussing the giving done by the Corinthians to support other churches. Here is what he told them:

And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

First of all, notice that giving is to be done “according to what one has”...with “willingness”. (Notice also that *anyone* can give money or resources, not just those with the gift of giving (see the “gift of giving” in Rom. 12:6-7). This is true of most gifts. Just because we do not have the gift of encouragement does not mean we cannot be encouraging. And just because we are not gifted in

showing mercy does not mean we should not be ready to show mercy...under the leadership, and at a time determined by, the Holy Spirit. By the same token, just because we do not have the gift of “giving” does not mean that we should not give generously, as led and prompted by the Holy Spirit. (Though care should be taken not to attempt to usurp gifts belonging to others.) But giving by anyone, gifted or not, does not need to “give until it hurts”; Paul says we should not give until we are “hard pressed”, but IF WE HAVE IT, especially if we HAVE THE GIFT OF GIVING, we should assume that much of what we have must be labeled as *aid for specific believers in need*.

“But my granddaddy and my daddy and now I...worked hard for this money, and you want me to just give it away?” 1 Cor. 4:6-7 answers this questions, as follows:

Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

What do you have that God did not give you? It is yours to use in service; if you redirect what you receive into selfish pursuits, rather than sharing it with those in need, then you are living for the world and yourself, and not for God. You should not be hard-pressed in your giving, so that your “lifestyle” is completely disrupted, but you must make sure you are giving what God asks. Your focus must be on the needs of fellow-believers, and not on ever-grander schemes to provide yourself with excesses in the world, such as increasing non-essential properties, or adding optional privileges in the world...things that have nothing to do with your function in God’s work.

1 Tim. 6:17-19 gives the correct posture and practice of believers with wealth. This passage says this:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

It is easy for those with large sums of money to put their faith in what their accountants tell them they are worth. There is an enormous pull that draws them into believing that what they have in the world is real and reliable...and really theirs. God’s eternal resources for accomplishing His superior purposes get downplayed, when this distorted view sets in. But when a believer with money is moving steadily toward maturity, a great deal of good can be done through the assets of his gift.

Perhaps the giving of the rich will not create true economic “equality”, but their giving will alleviate problems for many believers that prevent them from studying and praying and exercising their own gifts. By the wealthy giving, the wheels of a group of believers are oiled and the church machine can function smoothly, with each believer contributing according to his gift. This was so important that the only thing that Peter, James, and John wanted to make sure of as Paul branched out into service to the Gentiles is seen in this: “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very

thing I was eager to do” (Gal. 2:10). This applies to *believers* who are without material resources, a major concern to Paul.

I am going to say something else about such gifted giving. Most gifted functions take place between one individual believer and another. (I know, you and I can think of exceptions.) A committee does not have to meet to decide that John (a gifted “prayer warrior”) should pray for Elizabeth. Done properly, it will come to John’s attention that Elizabeth needs prayer for something, and John will pray for her regarding her need, without some group decision (this is actually laughable). When someone needs encouraging, deacons don’t gather to see if Mary (a gifted encourager) should meet with Matthew (a discouraged believer) to offer her services to him. She becomes aware of Matthew’s discouragement, and avails herself of the first opportunity to provide encouragement to him. When wealthy believer Schmidt discovers that believer Smith is down and out, he goes straight to him to address the need. This allows the Spirit to privately meet the needs of Smith, while providing Schmidt with the opportunity to exercise his gift. (He may need to take Jones, who has the gift of exhortation, along with him, in case laziness or some such condition is the reason Smith is without resources.) God’s children are thus served, God is glorified, the function of the church is enhanced, and everyone benefits. Pastors and “elders” are legitimate leaders, but many spiritual operations go on outside their micro-management. Gifts are not often “positions”; they are simply the special ability to help others in special ways.

Obviously, the “church” has certain institutional needs, for which corporate collections become useful. This is to be directed by God through individual giving according to personal fund availability and not through some tail-twisting system for fleecing the flock (to mix a metaphor). Providing opportunities for giving is fine, but there should be no pressure exerted to give, especially among those who simply do not have it to give. Do not listen to preachers that demand money through cajoling, demagoguery, shaming, dangling immediate prosperity, legalistic tithing, or the use of Madison Avenue techniques to part you from your money. So what should you do? Grow in grace and knowledge, and follow God’s lead! If you have it, and want to give, God will bless this. But never give just because someone is prodding you, trying to get you to turn loose of what God has provided so that you can live and perform your own functions within His system of gifted operations.

On the other hand, if you can be considered “wealthy” by common standards, you should look closely into opportunities to use what you have accumulated to assist believers who need it (quickly discounting hustlers, as per 2 Thess. 3:10). There should not be a believer who is hungry or destitute or homeless with a wealthy believer nearby. Earning a lot of money is a GIFT designed for sharing. You can keep it all, but don’t cinch up your tie on Sunday morning and expect to go and stand among the congregation or before God with a clear conscience or any sense that you are operating in God’s will. If you value God, grow and build your faith and learn to operate in the Spirit, so that you can give and serve freely, according to His direction. Applied more generally, when we *all* follow Him, *all* needs of *all* kinds will be met for *all* believers!

Appendix D

Eternal Security of the Believer

Introduction to Eternal Security. The question is this: Once we have been saved, can we at some subsequent point lose that salvation? We become children of God when we believe in the work of Jesus Christ, so is it possible for us to be “disowned” by our Heavenly Father?

We have established in our minds the assurance that God saves us “knowingly” and that He does so because His Son finished all the work to qualify us to be saved. The condition for salvation is our believing in the person and work of the One who completed it. It is a matter of saying “yes” to Christ, who is God, and who removed the sin barrier between us and the Father by paying the penalty for our sins while He was on the cross. All we have to do is believe that He is, and that He did what the Bible declares that He did. Faith is unequivocally the criterion for our being saved, which is made valid, not on its own merits, but based on the merits and efficacy of its object, Jesus Christ.

The notion that God will save us and then turn His back on us when we fail at some point (as we all will do) is ludicrous. We will prove this in Scripture, and demonstrate that, once we have been saved, there is no force in the universe that can invalidate this act of faith, which has resulted in divine acts of eternal redemption and irrevocable adoption. Once we have been saved, we will always be saved. And there is nothing we can do to undo it.

Many believe, going back to Jacob Arminius, and especially those who followed him, that the qualification for our staying saved comes through our personal achievement of a quality of life that demonstrates our devotion to God. They believe that “works” must kick in to keep us saved. In Scripture, this is known as “keeping the law”, which brings no pleasure to God when we do it, and envisions a god small enough to be impressed by something we do. Those who believe we must “keep” salvation through our own efforts want us to rely on ourselves to maintain eternal life. What a grand view we have of ourselves! What they refuse to acknowledge is that we are saved by grace through faith...not because of our “works”. Some of them may even acknowledge that salvation is by grace through faith, but then they reject the truth that the same grace that *saves* also *preserves*.

There are many arguments launched against eternal security. We cannot discuss them all. But we do intend to show in this study the reality of the permanence of salvation, and will demonstrate that any other conclusion is baseless and unwarranted.

Challenges to the Notion of Eternal Security. Most of the verses used to deny eternal security are easily dismissed, given the application and context of the Scripture. Many times, passages are dealing with believers, when they are taken to apply to unbelievers; or apply to unbelievers, when they are seen as targeting believers. We will see some examples of these as we go through this study; most of the time, confusion in the interpretation of a passage can be dispelled simply by determining who it

is talking about...or to. Also, the setting for a passage, or the context, will clear up misunderstanding by simply determining what is being discussed. Scriptures taken out of context can be distorted quickly, and it is important to get a bigger picture of what a passage is disclosing or teaching before concluding what it means or how it is applied. We will see examples of these later.

But there are some real “head-scratchers” that are difficult to explain, which seem to imply that salvation can be lost. We will look at a few of these, and suggest a feasible explanation for their meaning. The important thing to remember is that Scripture is a unified whole, consisting of larger principles of truth, rather than disjointed or disparate truths seen in isolation. In other words, if the bulk of Scripture says one thing, and we find passages here or there that appear to contradict what the whole of Scripture clearly states, then there must be an explanation for the confusing passages...but the larger truth is not thrown out, just because of a smattering of problem passages. The problem is not with the larger truth that Scripture presents, but with isolated contradictions implied in remote passages.

We want to see some of these more difficult passages, to show that these are not sufficient to disprove the larger truth of eternal security, as described in Scripture. First, though, I want to establish that I rely on writers of the *epistles* to divulge and explain truths for living. Many of the things that Jesus said are applicable to us today, but much of it pertains either to his work on earth, or to His future thousand-year reign. He knew when He was teaching His disciples that He was leaving many blanks empty, and anticipated that these would be filled in when He ascended and the Holy Spirit came to reveal truths (for living) to the apostles. Here is what He told the disciples they could look forward to after He was gone:

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. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

So, when we look at Jesus’ words, care must be taken not to superimpose all that He says onto this Age. For complete truths regarding eternal security, we must look to the inspired writers of the epistles, such as Paul, Peter, James, and John. This is very important: Jesus’ words must always be seen through the PRISM OF THE EPISTLES! The Gospels, then, will not be assessed as to their confirmation or denial of the doctrine of eternal security, even though the concept is replete throughout, such as John 3:16b, which says, “...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” We will rely on the epistles to teach us truths about our assurance of salvation; they leave little question concerning the duration of the “saved” life.

Challenging Passages Often Used to Show that We can Lose our Salvation. Here are several difficult passages from the epistles that are often used to show that salvation can be lost:

Col. 1:21-23—“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of

which I, Paul, have become a servant.” Note that these believers have been reconciled, or saved, and—beyond salvation—they can also become “holy” and “blemish-free”, if they “continue in their faith”. Actually, the original language says “continue in THE faith”, indicating that what they are continuing in is the *truths* that they have learned. Because they have been taught, they are *living* by grace, the same way that they were *saved* by grace. As they are learning, they are growing, and they are better able to achieve the purity they aspire to. Since they are saved, they have received the righteousness of Christ in their eternal position, while their condition is not “without blemish”. “Continuing”, then, is related to one’s CONDITION IN TIME, rather than one’s ETERNAL STATUS. The goal: purity; the method: continuing to grow in grace and truth. This passage does NOT suggest that we must continue in OUR faith, but in THE faith. We can slip in every possible way, and still not be “unsaved”.

1 Tim. 4:1-2—“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith [spiritual teachings] and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” To “depart from the faith” is to quit learning the Word, causing a cessation of growth, and a decline into carnality. Any time we abandon the truth, deceit moves in to fill the vacuum, and regression is inevitable. But back-sliding is not the same as losing salvation. Believers can follow Satan, the world, and their own proclivities for evil, the same as unbelievers.

1 Cor. 8:11—“So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.” This is Paul’s conclusion of a discourse on the impact of eating certain foods that may cause a sensitive fellow believer to stumble, even though there is nothing inherently wrong with eating the food. The result of not considering the weaker believer is that he might be “destroyed”. What this means is that he may be emboldened to commit other sins he is not sure about. Or he may think the believer he saw eating the food is not faithful to certain standards, so why should he be? But this is important: The “destruction” of the weaker believer is not eternal damnation, but just a less-steady walk in his faith.

Gal. 5:21b—“I warn you, as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Paul has just listed all kinds of sins in a sweep that catches all believers at some point. If it is true that anyone who “sins” will not inherit the kingdom of God, and if “inheriting the kingdom” means being saved and going to heaven, then NO ONE will go to heaven. “Inherit” often suggests a “reward system”, whereby believers who depend on the Spirit will see divine good produced through them, thus qualifying them for divine recognition and rewards. But I propose another meaning for “inherit the kingdom”, which I presented in *Bible Basics on Sin and Mercy: Pathway to Forgiveness* (p. 58). In that study, I explained that “kingdom” simply means “power”, and “inherit” means “to receive”. What can be concluded from this is that “inheriting the kingdom” means, “receiving the power”. This is what happens when we confess our sins as believers, and thereby enjoy fellowship and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Just because we are not operating in the power of the Holy Spirit does not mean that we have lost our salvation and will not be allowed into heaven. It just means that we are believers being led by the sinful nature.

1 Cor. 9:27—“No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” Those who reject eternal security believe that the “prize” is salvation or heaven. There is no justification for this conclusion. The believer who does not “run” so well according to grace standards may not get prizes and rewards, but that does not mean he will be shot (condemned to an eternity in hell) for not winning the race!

1 Cor. 10:12—“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” The term “fall” does not mean “lose salvation”. It means “drop out of fellowship”, due to unconfessed sin. Even “falling from grace”, as per Gal. 5:4, does not mean losing salvation. This verse says, “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” “Falling from grace” does not mean eternal condemnation, but rather means that a believer who is practicing legalism is “failing grace”. When we refuse grace and choose our own system or method for salvation or righteousness, we “disappoint” the purpose and proper use of grace.

1 Cor. 15:1-2—“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” “Saved” means “delivered”, but from what? From Satan, the world, and on own carnal nature. “If you hold firmly” is linked to spirituality and maturity (fellowship and growth). Without the leading of the Spirit, we will not “hold firmly” and we will fall prey to sin. If this happens, the faith that got us saved will do us no good in our “walk with the Lord”. “Believing in vain” means that carnality blocks, for the time being, any benefit we have from having been born again. We are still “saved”, but our *eternal position* will not help our *temporal condition*, unless we are living by the grace that saved us. Paul said his condition matched his position, because he “lived by grace” (see 1 Cor. 15:10). Those who spurn eternal security assume that “believing in vain” means that a believer loses his salvation if there is any slippage in the “firm hold” he has on his Christian connection. The truth is this: He will lose fellowship and privilege, but not salvation.

2 Cor. 13:5—“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless of course you fail the test?” Here, “in the faith” means “in the family of God”, or saved. Paul’s assumption, as per v. 6, is that he is addressing “believers”. He is suggesting that they examine themselves, to make sure they have been born again, as he himself is confident that he would pass such a test. If, on the outside chance they should fail such a test, then they are in need of being saved. There is no suggestion here that believers have to check their status frequently to see if they are “still saved”; in context, Paul wants them to be assured they *are* saved, so they can go on to the next step, which is to live in the power of the Spirit.

2 Tim. 2:11-12—“If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us...” Dying and living with Christ has to do with our eternal position *in Him*, because we have believed, and are thus born again and saved. Enduring always has to do with maintaining our faith through conditions of suffering, as these are meant to train us and help us mature. By enduring and maturing, we will have victory

over sin and enjoy freedom from the forces of evil. In the term “reign” there are certain connections with the millennial rule of Jesus Christ implied that we will not make here, but will reserve for a later study. What we want to glean from “reign” is that we will be living, walking, performing, and succeeding with Jesus Christ *when we mature!* Now, the tricky part: “If we disown him, he will also disown us.” “Disown” is a poor choice of words to translate a word in the original language that means “deny”. Deny implies stepping back or pulling away from Christ, which is exactly what we do when we fall from fellowship with Him and enter carnality. When we “step back” from God, He “steps back” from us. He does not forsake us or “disown” us, but He steps back. Remember that if we draw nearer to Him, He will draw nearer to us, as per James 4:8. The same is true of our stepping away from Him. If we create distance, He steps back from us. But there is no implication in this verse that our pulling back from God, which we all do at some point, sometimes extensively, will result in His undoing all the things He did to save us.

Heb. 6:4-6—“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away [if that were possible] to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.” The key to understanding this passage, in my view, is found in the interpretation of the phrase “fall away”. I believe this refers to believers “walking away from God, with the result that their salvation is lost”. They LOSE their salvation! But then, the shock comes: It is IMPOSSIBLE for those who “fall away” to be restored, or to be resaved, because this would require the application of “new-blood sacrifice”, or the re-crucifixion of Christ. This is not going to happen; therefore “re-salvation” cannot occur. If you ever lose your salvation, it is lost forever. It’s over! Here’s the rub: If the “fall” could come from sinning or stepping back from God, or losing trust, then no one could prevent the fall, because we ALL FAIL...over and over again! We would all lose our salvation, and no one could ever get it back, so no one could make it to heaven. What the writer of Hebrews is saying, in my opinion, is explained, as follows: The audience for this writing is being told that they are immature (verses 1-3), but that they are still saved (verse 9). And they are being assured that it is impossible for someone who has been saved to be unsaved again, because if the original salvation, once completed, did not “take”, the sacrifice of Christ has been spent, and another one cannot be loaded up to cover re-salvation. Trying to be re-saved would negate the original sacrifice of Christ, and necessitate His doing it all over again. We are, therefore, assured of permanent salvation, because re-salvation (like un-salvation) is *impossible*, and the work of Christ in dying for us and *saving* us is eternally efficacious. It is as impossible for us to lose and regain salvation as it is for Christ to re-do the cross. This is a powerful case for our never losing it in the first place!

Heb. 10:26-27—“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” This verse shows how far believers can go in violating God’s standards and living in perpetual carnality. They can expect fierce discipline when they sustain a pattern of sin and faithlessness (see verse 28), a condition that will continue until all sins are genuinely confessed and they are restored to fellowship. God’s administration

of discipline is always to prompt repentance and restoration. The tricky phrase for some is “no sacrifice for sins is left”. Some interpret this to mean that a continuous and heinous pattern of sin on the part of a believer will at some point in his life be judged, with the result that no covering of grace and mercy will remain for him. These sins, as it were, cannot be forgiven, because there is no sacrifice to cover them. The result of this would be eternal condemnation. But this is not what “no sacrifice for sins is left” means. This phrase refers to Old Testament sacrifices (see Heb. 10:18), which were ineffective to cover “presumptive” or “willful” sins. A correct translation of the phrase, “if we deliberately keep on sinning” is “if we willingly sin”. If we sin willingly, there is no Old Testament sacrifice that will cover it...the only sacrifice that *will* cover our sins is the one offered by Jesus Christ. But note—when we sin, we are spurning His sacrifice, which leaves our sins exposed. The result is loss of fellowship, which results in “severe discipline”, as is seen in verses 29-30. But the consequence is NOT loss of salvation! That is why verse 30 says, “The Lord will judge his people”, spoken to the Jews in Deuteronomy, but applied to believers in the Church Age. We are “judged” and “disciplined” by God as His children, so we will not be “condemned” as unbelievers are (clearly confirmed in 1 Cor. 11:32).

Heb. 12:14—“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” The object of this command is to become “holy”, which is the *cleanliness* that comes from confession of sins, leading to the filling of the Spirit and real peace with God and man. But can we still be saved, even if we do not happen to be “holy” at the time of Christ’s calling us into the clouds, or at the end of our lives? The key to the answer is found in the word “see”, which is a condition of fellowship, and not a prediction of our not seeing God in eternity. If we are not in fellowship, we cannot “see” God, because our eyes are filled with sin, self trust, and the world’s surplus. If we are focused on being holy for “the day of reckoning”, we will “bypass the grace of God” for today (v. 15), and miss what it can mean for us in terms of our service for God here and now.

1st John, the entire epistle—Please see Appendix B, “Analysis of 1st John”, in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*, for a complete discussion of this oft-confused, but powerful, epistle that deals with cleanliness, fellowship, sin, and the danger of false teachers. Many passages from this epistle are incorrectly used to disprove eternal security. These passages are covered and explained in this study.

Things that Must be Undone in Order for us to Lose our Salvation. Forty things happen to us at salvation. Thirty-nine of these are irrevocable, and one is revocable. To think that these things would be implemented by a knowing God, only to be reversed on the basis of unspecified criteria, seems ridiculous. Read through the following actions of God that occur at the time we are saved, and contemplate the notion that these are temporary conditions set up by God and later reversed. This would be a waste of Christ’s blood! Remember that God has foreknowledge, which no one can deny. *The following is from Lewis Sperry Chafer, revised by R.B. Thieme, Jr. (Endnote 27)*

THIRTY-NINE IRREVOCABLE ABSOLUTES AND ONE REVOCABLE ABSOLUTE

IRREVOCABLE ABSOLUTES

1. The believer resides in the eternal plan of God and shares the destiny of Christ. He is:
 - A. Foreknown (**Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2**).
 - B. Elected (**Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:2**).
 - C. Predestinated (**Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:5, 11**).
 - D. Chosen (**Matt. 22:14; 1 Pet. 2:4**).
 - E. Called (**1 Thess. 5:24**).
2. The believer is reconciled (removal of the barrier between man and God):
 - A. By God (**2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:20**).
 - B. To God (**Rom 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 2:14-17**).
3. The believer is redeemed, purchased from the slave market of sin (**Rom. 3:24; Col. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:18**).
4. The believer's condemnation, or eternal judgment, is removed (**John 3:18; 5:24; Rom. 8:1**).
5. The substitutionary spiritual death of Christ on the cross paid the penalty for all sins (**Rom 4:25; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:24**).
6. Every believer receives propitiation for sins; God is satisfied with the work of His son (**Rom. 3:25-26; 1 John 2:2; 4:10**).
7. The believer is dead to old life, the sin nature, but alive to God, retroactive positional truth [i.e., applied to his or her eternal position in union with Christ]. He is:
 - A. Crucified with Christ (**Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20**).
 - B. Dead with Christ (**Rom. 6:8; Col. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:24**).
 - C. Buried with Christ (**Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12**).
 - D. Raised with Christ, current positional truth (**Rom. 6:4; 7:4; Col. 2:12; 3:1**).
8. The believer is free from the Mosaic Law. He is:
 - A. Dead to the Law (**Rom. 7:4**).

- B. Delivered (**Rom. 6:14; 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:25**).
9. The believer is regenerated (**John 13:10; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5**). He is:
- A. Born again (**John 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:23**).
- B. A child of God (**Rom. 8:16; Gal. 3:26**).
- C. A son of God (**John 1:12; 2 Cor. 6:18; 1 John 3:2**).
- D. A new creation (**2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10**).
10. The believer is adopted by God, placed as an adult son because of positional truth (**Rom. 8:15, 23 at resurrection; Eph. 1:5**).
11. The believer is made acceptable to God (**Eph. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5**). He is:
- A. Made righteous by imputation (**Rom. 3:22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9**).
- B. Sanctified positionally (**1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11**).
- C. Perfected forever (**Heb. 10:14**).
- D. Qualified for inheritance (**Col. 1:12**).
12. The believer is justified, declared righteous (**Rom. 3:24; 5:1, 9; 8:30; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:7**).
13. The believer receives the unique availability of divine power (**2 Pet. 1:3**).
14. The believer is guaranteed a heavenly citizenship based on reconciliation (**Luke 10:20; Eph. 2:14-19; Phil. 3:20**).
15. The believer is delivered from the kingdom of Satan (**Col. 1:13a; 2:15**).
16. The believer is transferred into the kingdom of God (**Col. 1:13b**).
17. The believer is now on a secure foundation (**1 Cor. 3:11; 10:4; Eph. 2:20**).
18. Every believer is a gift from God the Father to Christ (**John 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 11-12, 24**).
19. The believer is delivered positionally from the power of the sin nature (**Rom. 8:2; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11**).
20. Every believer is appointed a priest unto God. We are:
- A. A holy priesthood (**1 Pet. 2:5, 9**).
- B. A royal priesthood (**1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6**).

21. The believer receives eternal security (**John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:32, 38-39; Gal. 3:26; 2 Tim. 2:13**).
22. The believer is given access to God (**Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; Heb. 4:16; 10:19-20**).
23. Every believer is within the “much more” grace care of God (**Rom. 5:9-10**). We are:
 - A. Objects of His love (**Eph. 2:4; 5:2**).
 - B. Objects of His grace.
 - i. For salvation (**Eph. 2:8-9**)
 - ii. For keeping (**Rom. 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:5**)
 - iii. For service (**John 17:18; Eph. 4:7**).
 - iv. For instruction (**Titus 2:12**).
 - C. Objects of His power (**Eph. 1:19; Phil. 2:13**).
 - D. Objects of His faithfulness (**Phil. 1:6; Heb. 13:5b**).
 - E. Objects of His peace (**John 14:27**).
 - F. Objects of His consolation (**2 Thess. 2:16**).
 - G. Objects of His intercession (**Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24**).
24. The believer is the beneficiary of an inheritance as an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ (**Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:14, 18; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4**).
25. Every believer has a new position in Christ (**Eph. 2:6**). We are:
 - A. Partners with Christ in life (**Col. 3:4**).
 - B. Partners with Christ in service (**1 Cor. 1:9**).
 - i. Workers together with God (**1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1**).
 - ii. Servants of the New Covenant (**2 Cor. 3:6**).
 - iii. Ambassadors (**2 Cor. 5:20**).
 - iv. Living epistles (**2 Cor. 3:3**).
 - v. Servants of God (**2 Cor. 6:4**).
26. Believers are recipients of eternal life (**John 3:15; 10:28; 20:31; 1 John 5:11-12**).
27. The believer is created a new spiritual species (**2 Cor. 5:17**).

28. The believer is a light in the Lord, part of the angelic conflict (**Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:4-5**).
29. The believer is united with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are:
- A. In God (**1 Thess. 1:1; cf., “God in you,” Eph. 4:6**);
 - B. In Christ (**John 14:20; cf., “Christ in you,” Col. 1:27**);
 - i. A member in His body (**1 Cor. 12:13**).
 - ii. A branch in the Vine (**John 15:5**).
 - iii. A stone in the Building (**Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Pet. 2:5**).
 - iv. A sheep in the Flock (**John 10:27-29**).
 - v. A portion of His Bride (**Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:6-8; 21:9**).
 - vi. A priest of the kingdom of priests (**1 Pet. 2:9**).
 - C. In the Holy Spirit (**Rom. 8:9; “the spirit in you”**).
30. Every believer is the recipient of the ministries of the Holy Spirit. He is:
- A. Born of the Spirit (**John 3:5-8**)
 - B. Baptized with the Spirit (**Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13**).
 - C. Indwelt by the Spirit (**John 7:39; Rom. 5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:24**).
 - D. Sealed by the Spirit (**2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 4:30**).
 - E. Given spiritual gifts (**1 Cor. 12:11, 27-31; 13:1-2**).
31. The believer is glorified (**Rom. 8:30**).
32. The believer is complete in Christ (**Col. 2:10**).
33. The believer is possessor of every spiritual blessing granted in eternity past (**Eph 1:3**).
34. The believer receives a human spirit along with the Holy Spirit (**Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 7:13; 1 Thess. 5:23**).
35. The believer has all sins and transgressions blotted out (**Isa. 43:25; 44:22**).
36. The believer is the recipient of efficacious grace (**Eph. 1:13**).
37. The believer is guaranteed a resurrection body forever (**1 Cor. 15:40-54**).
38. The believer is the beneficiary of unlimited atonement (**2 Cor. 5:14-15, 19; 1 Tim. 2:6**).

4:10; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 2:2).

39. The believer has equal privilege and equal opportunity under election and predestination **(Rom. 12:3; Eph. 3:16-19).**

REVOCABLE ABSOLUTE

40. The believer is filled with the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation **(Gal. 3:3)**. The filling of the Holy Spirit received at salvation is revoked when the believer sins. The filling of the Holy Spirit is recovered when the believer rebounds [confesses his sins].

It is hard to imagine all these things being completed by God, who would know when He does them that they will not last. Is it even remotely feasible that God would apply the work of His Son to a new believer, knowing that the believer's ultimate destiny would be to walk away and be condemned to an eternity apart from God? Why would God complete this exercise to bring a person into His family, only to turn a blind eye to the outcome of that person's life, which might be his removal? And once removed, can that person ever come back? How often, or how many times? Questions just keep mounting! Can a person live as a saved person for ninety-nine percent of his life, and then at the last minute slip up and be tossed out? Those who reject eternal security have some serious issues to resolve. We'll have others. We believe unequivocally that—when we are brought into the family of God—God builds a fence around us. We may move away from Him on the “range” of our lives, but we will never leave the family “spread”.

Who Does the Saving? We cannot save ourselves. If we could, why would Christ have needed to die for us? Salvation is the work of Christ. He completed it when He died physically and spiritually on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and rose from the dead on the third day to reign over sin and death. Forty days later, He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father to intercede for believers in the Church Age. Our “part”, if we can call it that, is to accept the work He did by simply believing that He is God, that He removed the impediments to His Father's acceptance of us, and that He is alive today. Believing is “non-meritorious”, which means that we get no “credit” for it; it is not a “deed” that we do. Faith carries no merit, but rather is based on 1) our wanting to know God and 2) our decision to receive the benefits of His Son's work by *believing what He said about Himself!*

When we believe, forty things happen to us in an instant, as we saw above. One of these is that we are united with Christ. This is where we are placed into “union with Christ”. Regarding this, Eph. 2:6 says, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...” Col. 3:1-3 adds the following about this position in Christ:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Our “death and resurrection” are not figurative or symbolic. They are actual. But these are “eternal, positional” truths, not part of our current experience in time. We are “positionally” in Christ, seated with Him at the right hand of the Father. But we can see very well that we are still in the world, where our contact with Christ is currently through His Spirit, as we see in 1 Cor. 6:19-20, which says

this:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Note that we honor God with our bodies *because* we are saved; we are not saved by attempting to honor God with our bodies. Sequence is important...socks first, then shoes. Salvation first, then honoring. Without salvation, we will never honor God; and we will never be saved by simply deciding that our bodies should be honoring God. We are saved, BEFORE we do any honoring, so salvation does not DEPEND on honoring. And how do we honor God after we are saved? By the Holy Spirit, who is in us. We are in a “position” with Christ in the *eternal* realm, and we “honor” Him through the ministry of His Spirit in the *temporal* realm. “Position” is permanent and unchanging; “honoring”, which is our “condition”, comes and goes, depending on our communion with the Spirit. The point is that our *condition* can change, without altering the unalterable, which is our *position*.

After all, believers, who are always in union with Christ, can look exactly like unbelievers, as we see in 1 Cor. 3:1-4, which says this:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly [fleshly]—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. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?”

Our condition can be worldly, characterized by ignorance and sin, but our position remains constant throughout all eternity. This cannot be changed, so the believer must learn to honor God *because he has been saved*, not *so he can avoid eternal condemnation*. Eternal security depends on *position*, not *condition*, because salvation depends on God and not on us. We *believe* (which Paul said is the opposite of “work”)...and God does the *saving* and *securing*. 2 Tim. 2:13 says, “...if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” We are part of Him, so He cannot disown us.

Perseverance and Loss of Salvation vs. Perseverance and Loss of Rewards. Many verses that talk about our *loss of rewards* for not persevering in our use of grace assets are interpreted to mean that we lose salvation by not “persevering”. We want to examine a number of scriptures that cite the requirement for perseverance, and show that we do not lose salvation, just because we slip in our faith and our walk. Bob Wilkin provided some useful studies on the topic of losing rewards; his ideas are integrated with ours in the following passages and comments:

1 Cor. 9:25-27—“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” We saw this verse earlier, and determined that the “prize” was some sort of reward, and not salvation. The prize could be rewards given in heaven for worthy service

during our time on earth, or perhaps blessings or privileges while we are still alive; or perhaps even reaching a higher level of maturity, where service opportunities and all kinds of blessings open up to us.

2 Tim. 4:8—“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” The “crown” is not relief from eternal damnation, but a reward which will be given to those who “long for his appearing”, which designates those who have reached maturity. Rewards will be given to believers who have learned how to walk in God’s strength, and have thereby produced great things through His enablement. These will be passed out at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which will evaluate the “deeds” of all believers.

James 1:12—“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” The “crown” is, once again, a specific reward to be awarded to those who endure God’s training, reach super-maturity, and achieve great things through the power of the Spirit. (Remember that some “great things” might be invisible to other human beings, but—because angels see them—God is glorified.)

1 Pet. 5:4—“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” The “crown” is for service done, as seen in verses 1-3. The crown is *not* salvation.

Phil. 3:14—“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” The “prize” is fruit from Paul’s ministry, as seen in 1 Thess. 2:19-20, where Paul asks, “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” His prize and crown are the fruits of his walk in the Holy Spirit, not salvation. (Endnote 28)

Loss of rewards does not mean the loss of salvation. Rewards are based on the quality of our lives, as determined in our evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ. After we leave our bodies, all judgment is directed toward our performance as believers. Unbelievers, on the other hand, will face the Great White Throne Judgment, at which time they will be sentenced to an eternity in hell. Continuation of our salvation is not based on perseverance, which is seen by some as perfection. If this were true, no one could stay saved, as all falter at some point, even though they may be blind to their own wrongdoings. Scripturally, perseverance is constancy in using grace techniques to grow and increasingly serve, by which we will get rewards that will benefit us and glorify God.

Other Assurances of Eternal Security. Paul knew that his rewards were distinguished from his eternal security, as reflected in a number of verses that demonstrate how secure he was in his possession of eternal life. Here are some verses reflecting Paul’s assurance of his being saved forever:

Rom. 8:35—“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”

Rom. 8:38-39—“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,

neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Gal. 2:16—“Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law [living perfectly] no one will be justified.”

Col. 1:12-13—“...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

2 Tim. 1:12—“That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”

Titus 3:5-7—“...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope eternal life.”

Rom. 4:22-24—“This is why ‘it [faith] was credited to him [Abraham] as righteousness [the righteousness of Christ].’ The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit [positionally impute] righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Like Paul, we have the righteousness of Christ imputed for all eternity, even though our temporal lives are characterized by a mixture of the products of our flesh (sin, self-preoccupation, lack of faith, etc.) and the fruit of the Spirit (service, goodness, character of Christ, etc.). And like Paul, we will receive rewards, some now and some later, for acts that are done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Eternal rewards, or the loss of them, will be the output of the Judgment Seat of Christ, which we have mentioned. Here are a couple of passages that tell us more about this time of evaluation (with comments):

1 Cor. 3:12-15—“If any man builds on this foundation [Jesus Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” The “quality of each man’s work” will be determined by its source. If the work comes from the Holy Spirit, it will survive the fire and will qualify for rewards. If it is burned up, then rewards that could have been obtained if the work had come from the right source, will be lost. But notice what happens to the believer, even the one who loses major portions of his potential rewards: “...he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping the flames”. He will go to heaven, and heaven will still be heaven for him, but it will not be the same for this one, whose “works” are all burned up, as it

will be for those whose works have been produced by the Spirit and thus survive the fire.

2 Cor. 5:7-10—“We live by faith, not by sight [we are maturing believers]. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” The “good” things we can do in the body are those things done in the power of the Spirit. “Bad” things are those which are done in the flesh. While we are living as believers in the world, our objective should be to “please Him” by staying in fellowship and growing, so that we can walk in His Spirit and have His divine good produced through us. Good things will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ; bad things will cause a loss of rewards. This judgment, conducted by Jesus Christ, will not be to determine eternal destiny, but to see what rewards we get. Incidentally, sins will not even be mentioned at this “hearing”, because believers have the sins for their entire lives “forgiven” positionally...forever. Sins during their lives *as believers in time*, will have to get clearance of their sins through the Father, which is done by confessing the sins to Him. Of this, Keathley quoted Chafer, revised by Walvoord, as saying the following:

With reference to sin, Scripture teaches that the child of God under grace shall not come into judgment (John 3:18; 5:24; 6:37; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; 1 Cor. 11:32); in his standing before God, and on the ground that the penalty for all sin—past present, and future (Col. 2:13)—has been borne by Christ as the perfect Substitute, the believer is not only placed beyond condemnation, but being in Christ is accepted in the perfection of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:10; Heb. 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23). (Endnote 29)

Here are some additional “inheritance” passages that are frequently misinterpreted:

1 Pet. 1:3-5 and 9—“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, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time...for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” This time, “inheritance” is not talking about rewards, but eternal life, which is kept in heaven for us and can never diminish in any way. The quality of our spiritual lives may come and go, but our eternal state before God will always be perfectly preserved.

Gal. 5:7-9—“The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” The obvious reference in this passage is to the kind of living we do, which involves the dilemma we have seen many times in the past that exists between the “flesh”, or sinful nature and the “Spirit”, which is the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit. The flesh leads to sin and the Spirit leads to righteousness. The problem is found in the phrase “eternal life”. To explain the difference between the usage of this phrase as it is used here, and its usage in John

3:16, is not easy, because they are linguistically identical to each other. The difference, I believe, is that Jesus Christ referred to positional truth, whereas Paul was referring to conditional truth. The first applies to eternity, the second applies to time. I take the position that “eternal life” applied to our “condition” refers to an *application* of our positional eternal life to our temporal life, giving our temporal experience an “eternal” quality. Life lived in the Spirit has a connection with His “eternal life”. Some have referred to such life as the “resurrection” life, which is the life of Christ portrayed through us...in time. If this is true, then we can rest easy that we can retain our heavenly “eternal life”, even when we are not “pleasing the Lord”.

Confusion, once again, over position and condition can mislead believers into thinking that a change in condition due to sin may impact one’s position, which—as we are seeing—has no basis in Scripture.

The Case for Eternal Security from J. Hampton Keathley, III. We gleaned some helpful arguments regarding eternal security from Keathley’s *ABC’s for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*. His discussion of this topic is the product of careful examination and gifted explanation. J. Hampton Keathley was one of the most deliberate and thoughtful students of Scripture during his lifetime. We have learned much from him and heartily recommend his book (*ABC’s*) and other studies as excellent resources for spiritual growth and advancement. Here are some of the things he laid out in *ABC’s* to confirm our eternal security:

- **The Trinity Approach.** All three persons of the trinity are involved in our salvation.
 - The Son of God. Rom. 8:32-34—He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.
 - The Father. 1 Pet. 1:3-5—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, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.
 - The Spirit. Titus 3:5-7—...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.
- **Positional Approach.** We are placed into union with Christ at salvation.
 - Col. 3:3-4—For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

- Eph. 2:5-6--...made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.
- **The Logical Approach.** If God did so much for us while we were sinners, how much more will He do for us now that we have been reconciled to Him, justified by Him, and declared righteous in Christ?
 - Rom. 5:8-10—But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!
 - Rom. 8:32—He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?
- **The Tense Approach.** The use of the perfect tense to emphasize the present state of the believer demonstrates the ongoing nature of our salvation. The perfect tense of a verb refers to an action in the past, with results that continue on, as seen in numerous passages. For example, the perfect tense is used in the following:
 - John 5:24—I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.
 - 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.
- **The Grace Approach.** Since we are saved by grace through faith, and assuredly not by works, must we then continue being saved by works, or sustaining our salvation based on what we do?
 - 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.
 - Titus 3:5--...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...
- **What Sin Approach.** What sin is it that causes us to lose our salvation? Sin is sin, and we all—even the most mature among us—still sin. So will sin take us out? Where is the line drawn?
 - 1 John 1:8-10—If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our

sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

- Prov. 6:16-19—There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. (Endnote 30)

Keathley also discussed difficult or problem passages, but we have already dealt with many of these, and will not duplicate them here. We will proceed now to our final thoughts on eternal security.

Final Thoughts on Eternal Security. As we wrap up our discussion on eternal security, there are some “loose-end” arguments that further confirm the permanence of our salvation. We will look at several of these, and then close with a list of verses that promise our security. Here are some final points that we can add to what we have already seen:

- The Holy Spirit wraps us up and seals us for delivery, as we see in the following:
 - The Holy Spirit seals us. Eph. 1:13-14 says, “And you were also included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” It does not get more definite than this. We believed, we were “marked” in Him with a seal, and we have a divine “guarantee” for our salvation. The permanence of our salvation depends on Him, not us. It seems we are in good hands.
 - The Holy Spirit is our deposit. 2 Cor. 5:5 tells us, “Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” The placement of the Holy Spirit within us is, once again, God’s guarantee that we have eternal life.
 - Eph. 4:30—And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- We have a heavenly body already waiting for us in heaven. This is what we see in 2 Cor. 5:1, which says, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in [our bodies] is destroyed, we have a building from God [our heavenly bodies], an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” This body is ETERNAL...built by God. But if we “lost” our salvation, the new body being kept for us would *not* be eternal...it would be of no use and would be destroyed. And if we could be “resaved”, this would mean another body would have to be “built”. This will not happen, because the body that awaits our arrival into heaven is, once again, *eternal*. This is the outcome of our once-for-all salvation, one which cannot be dismissed or explained away.

- Satan loves it when believers worry about “keeping” their salvation, and waste their time trying to “stay saved”. When we are preoccupied with things that do not matter, we ignore our greatest responsibility/opportunity, which is to grow and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- What causes the loss of salvation? Is it sin? If so, how many sins does it take? How long do we have to sin? How severe will our sins need to be? How often can we sin? Will even *one* sin condemn us? What is the moment of “unsalvation”, compared with the moment of “salvation”? And can the timing of our death determine our eternal destiny (we just happen to be “unsaved” at the moment we die)?
- What is the *specific* metric...the test...for “falling from grace”? Show me in Scripture! There are no specific criteria given for the loss of salvation. The requirement for “salvation” is clear, which is to believe in Christ. But the method for becoming “unsaved” is not given, even though those believing in “intermittent” salvation use muddled arguments to prove that salvation can be lost, quoting unclear or problem passages, especially from Heb. 6 and 10, twisting them to have them suggest the possibility of losing salvation. Their problem is this: The overwhelming bulk of Scripture proves otherwise.
- God has foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29-30). This is unequivocal. So why would He save someone momentarily, knowing they would eventually be lost? What would the advantage be for a person to spend a second or two (by God’s time) as someone reconciled to God, and then screw up and spend an eternity in hell? Would Christ have died so believers could spend a moment or two in blissful connection with God, only to be dumped later...forever...because they did not somehow measure up? They did not measure up when they were saved, and now they have to measure up to stay saved?
- It seems those who reject eternal security put such little stock in the salvation experience, and refuse to believe that a simple act of faith can have eternal consequences. They tend to say, “But I didn’t DO enough.” This is because they exaggerate their own importance, and discount the importance of God’s foreknowledge, power, and plan. They will not acknowledge the infinite importance of the cross, and insist that keeping salvation is a synergistic experience...a joint venture in which their part is as significant as God’s. What arrogance! The cross is everything! Our faith is nothing...but it still gets us saved.
- We cannot save ourselves, so what makes us think that we can “keep” ourselves saved? Thinking that WE contribute to our salvation is evidence of pride and self-trust, not faith in the one who truly saves. Oddly enough, those who have once believed in Christ, even if they believe their salvation can be lost, or think that maybe they are already condemned because of some “besetting” sin, are nonetheless eternally saved. They are saved, even though they may not accept it. The criterion for salvation, after all, is not a process of believing in eternal salvation, but an *act of faith in Jesus Christ*. Like it or not, they are secure, if they once believed.

Believers who deny eternal security completely misunderstand God's plan, the angelic conflict (or war against God), God's love, and the purpose for our being here in the first place. Those who want to know more about these should read *Bible Basics on Living in God's Plan: Pathway to Purpose*, "The War Against God" in *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, and "The Fullness of God" in *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*. In other words, once we understand God, we will know indubitably that God saves us knowingly and deliberately, knowing fully well every failing thought or action we will ever do. He can save us with imperfections because we have obeyed the saving command: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Acts 16:31a) Those who reject eternal security cannot stand the simplicity and completeness of God's grace, and the inclusive (and conclusive) nature of the work of Jesus Christ. He has done it all, which is why it is so easy to be saved, and why it is so impossible be lost thereafter.

Promises of Eternal Security. We close our study on eternal security with a list of promises from Scripture that ascertain our eternal life, as follows:

John 10:27-30—My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them from out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

1 John 2:1-2a—My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins...

Rom. 8:37-39—No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rom. 5:9-11—Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation.

Heb. 7:25—Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

John 3:36—Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

Rom. 8:35—Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

From so many angles, eternal life for one who has believed in Jesus Christ is unequivocal and undeniable. And how do we know this? "And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the

Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:24). The Holy Spirit assures us in our hearts and through His Word that we belong to God, because we have obeyed his command. And what is His command? “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ...” (1 John 3:22*a*) The one thing we can be most certain about, with uncertainty surrounding us on all sides in the world, is this: When we are saved, we are saved forever.

Appendix E

Excerpt from “Contentment”, a Sermon

by C.H. Spurgeon

Excerpt from a Sermon: “Contentment” (No. 320)

Obtained from The Spurgeon Archive

www.spurgeon.org

Delivered on Sabbath Evening, March 25th, 1860, by the
REV. C. H. Spurgeon
At New Park Street Chapel, Southwark.

"For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Philippians 4:11.

THE APOSTLE Paul was a very learned man, but not the least among his manifold acquisitions in science was this—he had learned to be content. Such learning is far better than much that is acquired in the schools. Their learning may look studiously back on the past, but too often those who cull the relics of antiquity with enthusiasm, are thoughtless about the present, and neglect the practical duties of daily life. Their learning may open up dead languages to those who will never derive any living benefit from them. Far better the learning of the apostle. It was a thing of ever-present utility, and alike serviceable for all generations, one of the rarest, but one of the most desirable accomplishments. I put the senior wrangler, and the most learned of our Cambridge men in the lowest form, compared with this learned apostle; for this surely is the highest degree in *humanities* to which a man can possibly attain, to have learned in whatsoever state he is, to be content. You will see at once from reading the text, upon the very surface, that contentment in all states is not a natural propensity of man. Ill weeds grow apace; covetousness, discontent, and murmuring, are as natural to man as thorns are to the soil. You have no need to sow thistles and brambles; they come up naturally enough, because they are indigenous to earth, upon which rests the curse; so you have no need to teach men to complain, they complain fast enough without any education. But the precious things of the earth must be cultivated. If we would have wheat, we must plough and sow; if we want flowers, there must be the garden, and all the gardener's care. Now, contentment is one of the flowers of heaven, and if we would have it, it must be cultivated. It will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature alone that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the grace which God has sown in it. Paul says, "I have *learned* to be content;" as much as to say he did not know how at one time. It cost him some pains to attain to the mystery of that great truth. No doubt he sometimes

thought he had learned, and then broke down. Frequently too, like boys at school, he had his knuckles rapped; frequently he found that it was not easy learning this task, and when at last he had attained unto it, and could say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," he was an old grey-headed man upon the borders of the grave, a poor prisoner shut up in Nero's dungeon at Rome.

We, my brethren, might well be willing to endure Paul's infirmities, and share the cold dungeon with him, if we too might by any means attain unto such a degree of contentment. Do not indulge, any of you, the silly notion that you can be contented without *learning*, or learn without discipline. It is not a power that may be exercised naturally, but a science to be acquired gradually. The very words of the next text might suggest this, even if we did not know it from experience. We need not be taught to murmur, but we must be taught to acquiesce in the will and good pleasure of the Lord our God.

When the apostle had uttered these words, he immediately gave a commentary upon them. Read the 12th verse, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

Notice first, that the apostle said he knew how to be *abased*. A wonderful knowledge this. When all men honour us, then we may very well be content; but when the finger of scorn is pointed, at us, when our character is held in ill repute, and men hiss us by the wayside, it requires much gospel knowledge to be able to endure that with patience and with cheerfulness. When we are increasing, and growing in rank, and honour, and human esteem, it is easy work to be contented; but when we have to say with John the Baptist, "*I must decrease*," or when we see some other servant advanced to our place, and another man bearing the palm we all had longed to hold, it is not easy to sit still, and without an envious feeling cry with Moses, "Would to God that all the Lord's servants were prophets." To hear another man praised at your own expense, to find your own virtues made as a foil to set forth the superior excellence of some new rival—this, I say, is beyond human nature, to be able to bear it with joy and thankfulness, and to bless God. There must be something noble in the heart of the man who is able to lay all his honours down as willingly as he took them up, when he can as cheerfully submit himself to Christ to humble him, as to lift him up and seat him upon a throne. And yet, my brethren, we have not any one of us learned what the apostle knew, if we are not as ready to glorify Christ by shame, by ignominy and by reproach, as by honour and by esteem among men. We must be ready to give up everything for him. We must be willing to go downwards, in order that Christ's name may ascend upwards, and be the better known and glorified among men. "I know how to be abased," says the apostle.

His second piece of knowledge is equally valuable, "I know how to *abound*." There are a great many men that know *a little* how to be abased, that do not know *at all* how to abound. When they are put down in the pit with Joseph, they look up and see the starry promise, and the hope for an escape. But when they are put on the top of a pinnacle, their heads grow dizzy, and they are ready to fall. When they were poor they used to battle it, as one of our great national poets has said—

"Yet many things, impossible to thought,
Have been by Need to full perfection brought.
The daring of the soul proceeds from thence,

Sharpness of Wit, and active Diligence;
Prudence at once and Fortitude it gives;
And, if in patience taken, mends our lives."

But mark the same men after success has crowned their struggles. Their troubles are over; they are rich and increased with goods. And have you not often seen a man who has sprung up from nothing to wealth, how purse-proud he becomes, how vain, how intolerant? Nobody would have thought that man ever kept a shop; you would not believe that man at any time ever used to sell a pound of candles, would you? He is so great in his own eyes, that one would have thought the blood of all the Caesars must flow in his veins. He does not know his old acquaintances. The familiar friend of other days he now passes by with scarce a nod of recognition. The man does not know how to abound; he has grown proud; he is exalted above measure. There have been men who have been lifted up for a season to popularity in the Church. They have preached successfully, and done some mighty work. For this the people have honoured them, and rightly so. But then they have become tyrants; they have lusted after authority; they have looked down contemptuously upon everybody else, as if other men were small pigmies, and they were huge giants. Their conduct has been intolerable, and they have soon been cast down from their high places, because they did not know how to abound. There was once a square piece of paper put up into George Whitfield's pulpit, by way of a notice, to this effect:—"A young man who has lately inherited a large fortune, requests the prayers of the congregation." Right well was the prayer asked, for when we go up the hill we need prayer that we may be kept steady. Going down the hill of fortune there is not half the fear of stumbling. The Christian far oftener disgraces his profession in prosperity than when he is being abased. There is another danger—the danger of growing *worldly*. When a man finds that his wealth increases, it is wonderful how gold will stick to the fingers. The man who had just enough, thought if he had more than he required he would be exceedingly liberal. With a shilling purse he had a guinea heart, but now with a guinea purse he has a shilling heart. He finds that the money adheres, and he cannot get it off. You have heard of the spider that is called a "money spinner," I do not know why it is called so, except that it is one of the sort of spiders you cannot get off your fingers; it gets on one hand, then on the other hand, then on your sleeve; it is here and there; you cannot get rid of it unless you crush it outright: so it is with many who *abound*. Gold is a good thing when put to use—the strength, the sinews of commerce and of charity—but it is a bad thing in the heart, and begets "foul-cankering rust." Gold is a good thing to stand on, but a bad thing to have about one's loins, or over one's head. It matters not, though it be precious earth with which a man is buried alive. Oh, how many Christians have there been who seemed as if they were destroyed by their wealth! What leanness of soul and neglect of spiritual things have been brought on through the very mercies and bounties of God! Yet this is not a matter of necessity, for the apostle Paul tells us that he knew how to abound. When he had much, he knew how to use it. He had asked of God that he might be kept humble—that when he had a full sail he might have plenty of ballast—that when his cup ran over he might not let it run to waste—that in his time of plenty he might be ready to give to those that needed—and that as a faithful steward he might hold all he had at the disposal of his Lord. This is divine learning. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound." The apostle goes on to say, "everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry." It is a divine lesson, let me say, to know how to be full; for the Israelites were full once, and while the flesh was yet in their mouth the wrath of God came upon them. And there have been many that have asked for

mercies, that they might satisfy their own heart's lust; as it is written, "the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Fullness of bread has often made fullness of blood, and that has brought on wantonness of spirit. When men have too much of God's mercies—strange that we should have to say this, and yet it is a great fact—when men have much of God's providential mercies, it often happens that they have but little of God's grace, and little gratitude for the bounties they have received. They are full, and they forget God; satisfied with earth, they are content to do without heaven. Rest assured, my dear hearers, it is harder to know how to be full than it is to know how to be hungry. To know how to be hungry is a sharp lesson, but to know how to be full is the harder lesson after all. So desperate is the tendency of human nature to pride and forgetfulness of God! As soon as ever we have a double stock of manna, and begin to hoard it, it breeds worms and becomes a stench in the nostrils of God. Take care that you ask in your prayers that God would teach you how to be full.

The apostle knew still further how to experience the two extremes of fullness and hunger. What a trial that is! To have one day a path strewn with mercies, and the next day to find the soil beneath you barren of every comfort. I can readily imagine the poor man being contented in his poverty, for he has been inured to it. He is like a bird that has been born in a cage, and does not know what liberty means. But for a man who has had much of this world's goods, and thus has been full, to be brought to absolute penury, he is like the bird that once soared on highest wing but is now encaged. Those poor larks you sometimes see in the shops, always seem as if they would be looking up, and they are constantly pecking at the wires, fluttering their wings, and wanting to fly away. So will it be with you unless grace prevent it. If you have been rich and are brought down to be poor, you will find it hard to know "how to be hungry." Indeed, my brethren, it must be a sharp lesson. We complain sometimes of the poor, that they murmur. Ah! We should murmur a great deal more than they do, if their lot fell to us. To sit down at the table, where there is nothing to eat, and five or six little children crying for bread, were enough to break the father's heart. Or for the mother, when her husband has been carried to the tomb, to gaze round on the gloom-stricken home, press her new-born infant to her bosom, and look upon the others, with widowed heart remembering that they are without a father to seek their livelihood. Oh! It must need much grace to know how to be hungry. And for the man who has lost a situation, and has been walking all over London—perhaps a thousand miles—to get a place, and he cannot get one, to come home, and know that when he faces his wife, her first question will be "Have you brought home any bread?" "Have you found anything to do?" and to have to tell her "No; there have been no doors open to me." It is hard to prove hunger, and bear it patiently. I have had to admire, and look with a sort of reverence on some of the members of this Church, when I have happened to hear afterwards of their privations. They would not tell anyone, and they would not come to me; but they endured their pangs in secret, struggled heroically through all their difficulties and dangers, and came out more than conquerors. Ah! Brothers and sisters, it looks an easy lesson when you come to see it in a book, but it is not quite so easy when you come to put it in practice. It is hard to know how to be full, but it is a sharp thing to know how to be hungry. Our apostle had learned both—both how to abound, and to suffer need. (Endnote 31)

Appendix F

Here is How the Christian Life Works

This brief study encapsulates the essential steps and/or components of the Christian life, summarizing meaningful events in the life of believers, from infancy to full maturity. This synopsis gives a thumbnail sketch of the truth, as we have seen it and taught it. Here, in essence, is how the Christian life works:

1. Every human being with consciousness has an awareness of God, as elicited by observation of the created world. But not everyone wants to pursue God, and hell itself would not convince human beings who are negative toward God to seek Him. Some, however, have an interest in God, and are open to truths about Him.
2. Those who have “positive volition” toward God will get the gospel message that Christ has paid for the sins of mankind, removing the sin barrier between man and God. Those who want the truth...get it. All that remains is for them to believe that the work of Christ was actually done for them, and that He is alive today—*as* God and *with* God—to receive those who believe in Him, placing them into the royal family of God. When any human being believes in Jesus Christ, he is instantly and eternally saved, and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
3. Immediately following salvation, the infant believer must feed on the Word of God to grow. As he grows, he learns how the Christian life is lived, and begins to implement the techniques he acquires, which accelerate his (or her) growth.
4. Unfortunately, salvation does not remove the sinful nature, which, from birth, has a love for sin and a resistance toward God. The result is that sins occur frequently in the life of a new believer, even though his “zeal” for godly things is evident.
5. One of the techniques a new believer should learn is *confession of sins*. Hiding sins from God keeps them on our sin record, which God has a clear view of. He wants us to have the humility to recognize that we are weak, but He is strong, and confession shows that we trust Him to remove our sins and help us toward improvement. Confession brings God’s forgiveness.
6. When we sin, we lose fellowship, or communion, with God. The result of this is not the loss of salvation, but our being cut off from the positive influences of the Holy Spirit within us. Instead of the Holy Spirit controlling us, our sinful nature takes over. But when we *confess our sins*, we are forgiven and the Holy Spirit resumes control. As new or intermediate believers, we must confess constantly to stay afloat, since, if we are not in fellowship, we will not be able to move forward spiritually. Fellowship only lasts, after all, until we sin again.
7. Satan, his world, and our sinful nature combine with the “law of sin” to conspire against us and

take us down spiritually in order to move us away from God. They know that if we can be kept at a distance from God and His strength, we will be powerless to resist sin or self-made righteousness. The forces of evil are supernatural and we cannot stop them, apart from the power of God. Fellowship with God strengthens us against them. Unfortunately, very few believers follow a consistent pattern of confession that would enable them to STAY in fellowship and thus resist evil. We must confess and return to God when we sin, which is often. (If we do not, God will correct us through discipline to prompt us to confess and be restored.)

8. As we are confessing, we must also be *learning more about God* and His systems. This means we must become familiar with God's grace techniques and assets, which are designed to enable us to access God's strength. God's grace systems will enable us to live in the power of His Spirit. When we are faithful in our confession and our learning, we will spend more and more time in fellowship, which facilitates our growth.
9. We will learn along the way to pray effectively, think about God constantly, give thanks consistently, and—most importantly—trust incessantly. These will help us grow to the point that we can stay in fellowship so faithfully that we can live in the strength of the Holy Spirit.
10. If we continue learning and applying what we know, fellowship and learning will converge, beginning a symbiotic exchange in which each aids the other. The result is *advanced* growth. In other words, if we are confessing often to stay in fellowship, and are absorbing God's truths, we will be advancing rapidly in our spiritual capacity for communion and service.
11. What is it that grows when we confess often and spend time learning God's ways? It is our faith. As faith strengthens, our perspective of life and God evolve to look more like His, and faith underpins our "walk by the Spirit", which is perpetual dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.
12. By growing our faith, we advance toward maturity, which is our goal. But growth has a price...a cross we must bear.
13. An unavoidable aspect of growth is *training*. This is seen in Scripture as tests and trials, or—put simply—as pressures and suffering. Believers often ask why things seem to keep happening to them, even when they have been seeking God and doing all the right things. If they are "doing right", why does suffering still come? This is the answer: God is testing them to advance their faith and promote their growth.
14. By learning the Word and enduring God's training, we move toward the completion, or "perfection", of our faith. This requires enormous commitment to God's program, because—as much trouble as I had accepting this at first—the road to maturity is painful and difficult.

15. If we grow enough, we can actually reach super-maturity.
16. As super-mature believers, we can understand God and His love, and fully comprehend and implement His grace methods. This will give us the “fullness of God”, and prepare us for the final step in our spiritual growth.
17. Ultimately, super-mature believers can *surrender* to God, thus reaching the highest level of spiritual functioning and communion with God. This is the ultimate Christian life!
18. Victory over sin occurs when we surrender, because God puts Satan back on his heels, and permits us to live without his unrestrained evil influence.
19. Contentment, which is the “blessing” aspect of surrender, fills our lives as we live in a state of yieldedness to God’s will. This is the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, where God’s promises are fulfilled and our lives consist of godly joy and happiness.
20. Service to God and His children is maximized when we surrender, resulting in great fruit and the accumulation of rewards in heaven.

This is the Christian life, with its struggles and victories. For details and scriptures on the steps and/or components of this life, see the following books:

Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations (This is a comprehensive, step-by-step course, providing essential knowledge for Christian living.)

God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living

Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God

Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide

Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last

These can be downloaded for free, or purchased, at the following website:

www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com

Endnotes

1. *Ecclesiastes*, a series of sermons by Robert R. McLaughlin. Available at www.gbm.org. Also a book, *Ecclesiastes*. Published by Robert McLaughlin Bible Ministries, Cranston, RI, 2012.
2. *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, by Andrew Murray, p. 112. Bridge-Logos, Alachua, FL, 1999.
3. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, pp. 96-100. Biblical Studies Press, Dallas, 1996-2002. This book is available at www.bible.org.
3. "The Total Abstinence of the Gospel", by Bishop Handley Moule, p. 55. Published in *Kenswick's Authenticated Voice*, edited by Herbert Stevenson, through Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. Found at www.oChristian.com, a website for *The Online Christian*, where it was published as "Christ Keeps us from Sinning".
4. "The Total Abstinence of the Gospel", by Bishop Handley Moule, p. 55.
5. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 21.
6. Taken from *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*, by William Gibbs, p. 121. The reference for this quote is, "Conceptual Outline of John Owen's Mortification of Sin", compiled by John Thune, lead pastor of Coram Deo Church Community, Omaha, NE. Published in 2009. Available at www.cdomaha.com.
7. Poem by Theodore Monod, published in *Kenswick's Authentic Voice* (see Endnote 4), in Chapter 1, as "Sin in the Believer"
8. Specific reference for this quote is unknown. Andrew Murray was born in 1828 and died in 1917. He pastored a number of churches in South Africa and founded organizations supporting evangelism. He wrote 240 books and numerous articles, almost all of which are in the public domain. Any references to Andrew Murray in this study were taken from his books and articles, which are available (for example) at the following websites:
Andrew Murray Books—Books can be found at Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org.
Andrew Murray Articles—Articles are available at www.biblestudytools.com.
10. *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, by Andrew Murray, p. 110.
11. "Waiting on the Lord", a series of sermons by J. Hampton Keathley, III. This series has been published as a single article and is available at www.bible.org, under the author's name.
12. *Authorized King James Version of the Bible*, Psalm 39:7. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1983.
13. *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, by Andrew Murray, pp. 133-134.
14. *Reflections for Ragamuffins*, by Brennan Manning, p. 310. Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 1998.
15. *He That is Spiritual: A Classical Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, by Lewis Sperry

- Chafer, p. 97. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1967. Published originally by Lewis Sperry Chafer in 1918.
16. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 100.
 17. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 100-101.
 18. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 101.
 19. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 96.
 20. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 126-127.
 21. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 127.
 22. “One Another Commands”, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, an article available at www.bible.org.
 23. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 87.
 24. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 95.
 25. *He That is Spiritual*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 138, a quote from Handley Moule’s *Outline of Christian Doctrine*, p. 199.
 26. *A Literal Translation of the Bible*, edited and translated by Jay P. Green, Sr, 1 John 1. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody Massachusetts, 1987.
 27. “Thirty-Nine Irrevocable Absolutes and One Revocable Absolute”, compiled originally by Lewis Sperry Chafer, and revised by R. B. Thieme, Jr. Taken from *Plan of God*, by R. B. Thieme, Jr., pp. 29-33. Published by R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, Houston, TX.
 28. “The Biblical Distinction Between Eternal Salvation and Eternal Rewards: A Key to Proper Exegesis”, by Bob Wilkin. Taken from the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring, 1996, Vol. 9:16. This article is available at www.faithalone.org/journal/1996i/Wilkin.html.
 29. *ABC’s for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundations*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 91. Quote by Keathley is taken from *Major Bible Themes: 52 Vital Doctrines of the Scripture Simplified and Explained*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, revised by John F. Walvoord, p. 282. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1974.
 30. *ABC’s for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundations*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, pp. 31-39.
 31. “Contentment”, Sermon No. 320, by C. H. Spurgeon, delivered on March 25, 1860, at New Park Chapel, Southwark. This sermon is available at www.spurgeon.org, under “Spurgeon Archives”.

Books by W. D. Gibbs

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: Paul said, "I am nothing." Jesus said, "You are nothing." It is not false modesty for me to say, "I am nothing." I have it on good authority. Yet God is everything, and He has shared His truth with us in His Word. To the degree that the writings in this book accurately reflect that truth, I commend them to seeking believers everywhere. Where my nothingness has over-ridden God's truth because of my ignorance or pride, I admit my weakness and failure, and warn you to be cautious. I am neither qualified for nor deserving of the privilege of explaining God's truths, so I offer this treatise only with great humility and a sense of undeserved honor. If you do not find the truth here, keep searching. I am confident that God will reward your quest for His wisdom...and His fullness.

My name is William "Dick" Gibbs; I am a retired educator living in Dallas, Texas. And I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Footnote: My greatest—almost singular—hope is that you see reflected in my words the greatness of God's power and the beauty of His love; and that you understand how helpless we are to achieve what He expects—without His enablement. Only God can produce divine good; our job is to find out how to have Him do this...through us.

Yours in Christ,

W. D. Gibbs

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