

*Bible Studies
on Maturity*

*Pathway to the Worthwhile
Life*

Dick Gibbs

Bible Studies on Maturity: Pathway to the Worthwhile Life

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Introduction

Yes. God is within us forever. We are indwelt by God Himself. But He may not control us, simply because He gives us free will to choose whether to follow the steps that offer access to Him, or to go our own way to seek fulfillment through the machinations of humanity. Humanity is weak, looking to the world to justify its existence. But the world cannot satisfy our longings or fill our emptiness, because it leads us away from God, which is not where we belong. In addition, our humanity is dominated by sinful natures that compel us to do things that frustrate God, and separate us from His resources. He doesn't leave us, but He allows us to choose behaviors, thoughts, and aspirations that go against Him, and that remove us from communion with Him.

Our highest goal is to get closer to God, so His Spirit can control us all the time. When He is in control of us, He will be pleased *with* us, He will be able to do His great work *through* us, and we can live the life He plans *for* us. In the place of ongoing fellowship, we will find the ultimate service and joy. But in order to move toward this, and to know and do God's will, we must prepare ourselves. We must build spiritual strength through knowledge, so that we can fight sin. And we must build faith, so that we can find God's rest and God's provision. We must CONSTANTLY confess our sins, pray, study, and focus on God. Meanwhile, God, on His part, will give us training opportunities in the form of experiences that test our faith and make us stronger as we go through them.

This is the process of maturing. A mature Christian will trust God and His Word, and will pay attention to God as he proceeds through each day. His mind will be fixed on God, his eyes glued to Jesus. And he will give thanks in all circumstances and find contentment through all trials. Most importantly, the mature Christian will be productive for God. The fruit produced by the Holy Spirit will be seen in his life: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Lives will be changed as a result of this fruit, seen in the form of believers being edified and strengthened for service, and unbelievers receiving the gospel message and coming to Christ.

We believe in Christ as we walk through this world as Christians, and we trust our heavenly Father. We want to draw near to Him and find His mercy, grace, and power. We want to mature, because—as we have acknowledged—the more we mature, the more our lives will have meaning, and we realize that there is no better life than one close to God. So we must move through this series with a full commitment to absorbing truth and believing what we learn, gratefully partaking of His divine nature to lead us to maturity.

Knowledge and Wisdom

Introduction to Knowledge and Wisdom. 2 Chron.15:2 says, “The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.” The question we want to ask as we begin this study is this: Do we want to find God? Do we want to be close to Him? If we *do* want to find Him, we will search for Him, and when we search, we need to know where to look. We will demonstrate in Scripture that Scripture itself is the place to search for God. It is almost as if we want to study a story book in which the main character of the book jumps off the pages and comes to life. Except the story of God is no fairy tale, and this book—the Bible—is no fantasy. It is the truest, least fictional story ever written, and we are in it. By studying the Bible, we not only find the way to find God, we also find the way to become our best selves, not *from* ourselves, but from Him.

The story of God is rich and deep, and does not come to us without our giving attention to the task of studying. By feeding on the spiritual nutrients that the Bible provides, we grow to become mature believers that God can fill and control for His great purposes. The merit of study is in the effects of our increased understanding of God and His ways, and the good this produces in us through His grace and strength. You’ve heard the saying, “If you can’t run with the big dogs, better stay on the porch.” If you are going to keep up in this “race” (as Paul called it), you have to feed on the word to grow strong and robust for the tasks God has planned for you.

The Word of God is available to every believer. It is not limited to brilliant or gifted or scholarly people, or to those born to “spiritual” advantage. It is for you and me. God has made His way known to us. None of us enjoys an “edge” in learning God’s Word...it depends on our *wanting it*. Do you WANT to know? It is about your volition, your choice, your aspiration...for your life. You can decide that you know best how to live your Christian life...or a life of any sort...and disregard what God holds out His hand to give you. Or you can choose to mine the riches of His Word to equip you for anything and everything you will face, and for all He wants to do through you. The deep and enriching Truth beckons. “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God...for from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:33). We probe the depths of His Word so we can know about His grace, and learn how to access the power that comes from Him.

Wanting Wisdom. We need to wise up. ‘Fess up and wise up...that’s the Christian life. Confess our sins and study the Bible. Then we will “be very careful how we live, not as unwise, but as wise...therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is” (Eph. 5:15-17). Wisdom is knowing God’s will. And don’t forget that our learning what God wants, and our becoming competent in the techniques we studied in our previous

volume, *Getting Closer to God*, depends on our staying in fellowship through confession, so we can be taught the Word by the Spirit and learn the wonderful things that God has placed within our reach.

Prov. 1:5 says, “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning....” Notice that a wise man “will hear”, meaning a wise man is WILLING to hear. The choice is yours. If you want it, you will get it. “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out” (Prov. 18:15). You will SEEK it when you WANT it. You will FIND it when you SEEK it. And to help in your search, you should always ASK for it, saying with the psalmist, “I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes” (Ps. 119:125). Scripture is our spiritual bread and butter, our entrée, our vitamins, our Omega-3, and all else that we need to be sustained in our Christian walk. We must want it. We must learn it. It’s our life-line.

Learning and the Fear of the Lord. When we decide to learn the Bible, we honor Almighty God. We show the “fear of the Lord” that is so big a part of our relating to Him. And by learning Scripture we learn to fear, or revere, Him...more. Regarding fear of the Lord, God said to Moses, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live....” (Deut. 4:10). Then in Ps. 34:11, David said, “Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” By listening and learning, we can learn to fear God, which is coming to recognize how magnificently, indescribably powerful and wonderful He is. Then confession will be natural, since we will see how weak we are and how far below His requirements our paltry standards are. And then we can kneel at the feet of God to learn the things we cannot find out elsewhere, and He will feed us to help us grow into strong and mature representatives for Him...extensions of His power and holiness.

In Job 28:12, Job asks, “...where can wisdom be found?” And then he gives God’s answer in Job 28:28, which is, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom....” (Job 28:28). Wisdom is found in the fear of the Lord. In another place we see that “the fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom” (Prov. 15:33). So fear of the Lord teaches us to be wise. By studying, we increase fear of the Lord; by increasing fear of the Lord, we acquire wisdom. Study feeds fear of the Lord; fear of the Lord feeds understanding.

By fearing God, we can learn divine secrets, as we see in the Psalms, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant” (Psalms 25:14). Prov. 1:7 confirms this, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...”, as does Ps. 111:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....” Fear of the Lord is a trigger for understanding. As we hear, we must fear. Then we will learn.

One of the best depictions of the link between fear of the Lord and learning the Word is found in Prov. 2:1-11, which says the following:

My son, if you accept my words, and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. . . . Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

By being truly committed to learning the concepts in the Bible, and asking God for clarity in our understanding, we can “understand” the fear of the Lord, which means we will SEE GOD AS HE IS. This will change our perception of Him, ourselves, our lives, and everything around us. Once we see God, as we will if we search for Him in His Word, nothing will look quite the same again.

The War Against the Truth. There is opposition against the truth of God’s Word, and it is seen in the form of false teaching and deception. Spies frequently take on the appearance and demeanor of the people they are spying against. Satan uses spies effectively. They look like us and act like us, but they are not one of us. False teachers move around under the radar, in churches, on television, at the office, in places of leadership and authority, and over the back fence. They are tricky and their message is often appealing, but their teachings are dangerous and destructive. We must be fortified against attacks of WRONG INFORMATION, and challenge every unproven source that claims to have answers. If it matches the Word, we can accept it. If not, we must turn a deaf ear to it and walk away. 1 Jn. 4:1 confirms this, saying, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”

In the Bible, efforts against the truth are seen as “waging war” against it. We must respond forcefully. 2 Cor. 10:3 says, “We do not wage war as the world does.” We wage war differently. Our opponents are powerful and require us to have special equipment to fight them. Verse 4 says, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” The battle we’re in requires that we wield divine-power weapons; this is serious warfare. And what are the “strongholds”? Verse 5a answers this, saying, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. . . .” Arguments against the Bible, or doctrines that do not follow the Bible, are “strongholds” . . . fortresses, set up to oppose the truth. “Pretensions” are seen in people that want to undermine or destroy the truth of God’s Word. They want to take away the salvation message for unbelievers, and remove or weaken the sustaining nutrition of the message in the Word for believers. Kill the tree; kill the fruit. The weapon used to destroy the effectiveness of the Word is “non-truth”, wrong information, distortion, deception, and even “truth” when it is mixed with lies. So what weapon can we use?

Our weapon is Truth...the Word of God. The truth will enable us to demolish anything that “sets itself up against the knowledge of God” and empowers us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (v. 5b). Truth snares, nets, and filters our thoughts. The truth allows us to *control our thoughts* and *chain them*, or take them “captive”, to make them correspond with the truth, in obedience to Christ. The more we know, the more our thoughts meet God’s standards. Then we can fight against the opponents of truth.

Knowledge Puffs Up. Jesus told the Pharisees, “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge” (Luke 11:52). These Pharisees were in trouble due to their pride, thinking that their memorization of the law was a badge that gave them distinction and honor. Luke 11:43 says, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.” The key to knowledge is humility. This begins with confession of sins, of course, our greatest single recognition of God as the perfect and holy God, seeing ourselves in the true light of our helplessness and dependency. This continues with acknowledging God, fearing the Lord, prayer, thanksgiving, God-consciousness, acknowledging that Jesus is alive, trusting God, surrender to God’s will, surrendering our bodies to God’s service, and searching for God’s will (see *Getting Closer to God*). When we do these things, humility is inevitable, and we will be equipped to absorb Scripture and mount the stallion of *righteous living* as mature believers.

1 Cor. 8:1-13 talks about ways that being overconfident in what you know can lead to inconsiderate behavior. Paul reprimanded the Corinthians regarding their use of freedom and knowledge to permit themselves to eat meat offered to idols. In v. 1, Paul says, “Now about food offered to idols:...” He is introducing his topic. Then he continues in the same verse, “We know that we all possess knowledge.” Knowledge about what? About food offered to idols. These believers were well informed when it came to their freedom to eat food offered to idols. They knew there was no “law” against it. Because these believers were comfortable eating the meat, even a little “smug” about it, they proceeded to eat away. So Paul adds, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (v. 1b). By pulling together verses 2-13, we see what Paul means by this. He is saying that misapplied knowledge is harmful, and can do a lot of damage. By eating meat offered to idols, though it was not prohibited, the Corinthians were undermining the walk of weaker believers. Their knowledge became a source of hindrance.

When a stronger believer offends a weaker believer, he commits a sin. By doing what he knows is right he can still do “wrong”. Love trumps knowledge, because *love* shows consideration for the sensibilities of a weaker believer. When knowledge emboldens a stronger believer to ignore the conscience of a weaker one, it is said to be “puffing him up”...making the stronger believer over-confident. This does not mean knowledge is independently destructive or to be avoided. But it must not be misused. When a person misuses knowledge, he “does not yet know as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2). He doesn’t know enough; he knows “just enough to be dangerous”. So what does the stronger believer

need in order to avoid this? More knowledge! Then he will *know* that eating meat offered to idols is a sin *if* a weaker believer is offended in the process. To avoid misusing the knowledge you have, *learn more!*

The Right Knowledge. Knowledge of the law is not bad, of course, but it's not enough. Talking about the Israelites, Paul said the following:

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. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:2-4)

Knowledge of the law needs to be understood in connection with the saving life of Christ, not as a taxonomy of legal requirements *apart* from Christ. The Pharisees knew a lot, but their knowledge was incomplete, and it was separated from the substantive reality and truth of the Savior. Incomplete knowledge can be as bad as *no* knowledge, especially if it *distorts* the truth. And knowing partial truths can be as damaging as knowing things that are completely incorrect. You need CORRECT INFORMATION and you need COMPLETE INFORMATION. You need the right story...and all of it...then you have the *real* story. Prov. 19:2a tells us, "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge...."

Teach Me. We want correct information, so where do we start? When we need to drive to a destination in an unfamiliar area, what do we do? Get correct information...a map, printed directions, a guide. Then we have a better idea how to proceed. But sometimes, even those are not enough, and we have to *ask* for directions. We have the Bible to guide us in our Christian lives, but we still get confused or lost, so we have to *ask* the Teacher for clarity and understanding. We are not the first to do this. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask of God, who gives generously to all...and it will be given to him." Then James qualifies this in verse 6, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt...." Want wisdom, knowledge, understanding, insight, discernment, perspicacity? Ask for it in faith, and you will get it.

There are many examples of believers asking for understanding, divine guidance, God's will, and spiritual leadership. Here are a few of them:

- Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths (Ps. 25:4)
- Teach me your way, O Lord, lead me in a straight path (Ps. 27:11)
- May my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word (Ps. 119:169).
- Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth (Ps. 86:11).
- Send forth your light and your truth; let them guide me (Ps. 43:3).

We can ask freely, and He will give freely. I believe God will lavish truth on any of us that really want to know it. It doesn't matter who we are, or how we have failed, or anything else that characterizes this thing we call "self"; God wants us to know, and He is standing by to teach us. He hears His crying children, and He wants to feed us and hold us in the strength and safety of His arms. He wants to nourish us as we develop, and instruct us on ways to grow up to be like Him. Ps. 32:8 says, "I will instruct you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." David is qualified for this instruction because he confessed his sins, as we see in verse 5 of Psalms 32, where he said, "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."

To get instruction when you ask for it, you must be in fellowship. Return is possible, no matter how long you have been out of fellowship, or how long you have been away from His Word. The opportunity to "turn it around" is always available. 2 Chron. 15:2-4 illustrates this in the following:

He [Azariah] went out to meet Asa and said to him, 'Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. FOR A LONG TIME, Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, and HE WAS FOUND BY THEM. (Emphasis mine.)

Being out of fellowship is a terrible and distressing thing, especially when this goes on for a "long time". One of the worst things about this condition is that you cannot learn the Bible. Stay in fellowship, so you can learn. Then learn, so your fellowship will stay more constant.

There are also examples of *mature* believers *in fellowship* who asked for wisdom. Here are a couple:

1. In Psalms 119:26-27, David asked to be taught, as follows:

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

2. In 2 Chron. 1:10-12, Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge to lead his people. Here was the reply:

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

Have you heard about the “wisdom of Solomon”? Wisdom is worth wanting...and worth asking for. Do you want it? Do you want to know the full story? Are you committed? Or are you pre-occupied with wealth or honors or beating the competition or whatever? Will you ask? Do you believe? It will come.

Confession Enables Study. 1 Kings 8:35-36 tell us this:

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live....

Turning from sin, or confessing our sins for what they are, opens the instructional links so we can learn “the right way to live”. Sin gets in the way of learning, and cuts off the vital nutrients we get from studying Scripture. Eccl. 2:26 says, “To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness.” We want wisdom and knowledge (and happiness, of course), and we will get these when we please God. To please God, we must be free of sin, and—since we do indeed sin—we must confess, so we will be in a position to get the knowledge we need to live the Christian life.

By the way, the cleansing we receive at confession is not an ethereal abstraction. It is a real event. When sins are forgiven, radical change is taking place. The Holy Spirit takes over and produces His fruit in us, for as long as we do not sin. Sin is nearby, however...and spring-loaded...always ready to engage and put the sinful nature back in charge.

But there is another change that we want to emphasize. When we confess and return to fellowship, we become receptive to God’s Word. The lens through which we receive Scripture is cleaned. Confession followed by study begins a recursive cycle: We confess to enable the Holy Spirit to teach us, which he does as long as we are in fellowship; and the more we learn, the longer and more productive our times in fellowship become. By extending our periods of fellowship, we increase the amount of our learning, which strengthens us to resist sin and extends the time still further. This is the “building” process. Confess, learn, grow, get stronger; confess more-consistently, learn more, grow more, get ever-stronger, and walk “in the Spirit” more and more, which takes us to the place where we become totally conscious of God and where we can learn His will. The result of all this is FRUIT, production...from and for...God.

The Word of God Helps Us See Our Sin. The fourth chapter of Hebrews is in the middle of a discussion about faith in God and His promises (His Word) as a way to enter His rest. In Heb. 4:11, Paul admonishes his readers to enter God’s rest by exercising faith for living, which is achieved by believing His Word. Those that did not do this would “fail” because of their disobedience, which is specified as “unbelief”. Verses 12-13 are interjected parenthetically to elaborate on this ‘failure’. Verse 12 sets it up this way, “The Word of God is living and active [powerful].” It is also “sharper than any double-edged sword”, and it slices

through the “soul and spirit, joints and marrow”. It also “judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” So the Word is alive and powerful, and slices through our spiritual parts and our fleshly parts, and it also evaluates the contents of our heart.

We will see shortly that the slicing that is going on and the evaluation that is taking place is exposing our sins. This will not become completely clear until we get to verse 13.

We see three main areas under the “MRI” of God’s word in v. 12; these are actually areas of sin, seen in three categories: 1) the soul/spirit sins, such as disobedience through unbelief; 2) the joints/marrow sins—or sins of the body—enumerated throughout the Bible; and 3) the heart (or mental) sins. Verse 13 then makes this clear: God *sees* these sins. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything [all sin] is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” God uncovers it; we give account for it. We give account—or answer for—our sins, by confessing.

God has dissected it for us by His Word. The Word EXPOSES our sins so we can confess them and keep growing. When we get this right, rather than committing the kinds of sins we see described in Heb. 4:12, we will do just the opposite. Instead of committing soul sins (of unbelief, Heb. 3:12), we will be trusting God and His Word; instead of perpetrating body sins, we will “honor God” with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:20); and instead of being guilty of mental sins, we will bring “every thought into captivity in obedience to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). The process of sin reversal begins with our giving account for the things God has laid bare, and continues by our studying His penetrating and energizing Word while we are in fellowship.

Devote Yourself to Learning God’s Word. Prov. 23:12 says, “Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.” Focus your mind like a laser beam on the Word of God. Read, listen, watch, learn. Prov. 4:4-9 confirms the importance of wisdom and knowledge for us. This passage gives us the words of a son, who was repeating the words of his wise father, as follows:

Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you.

This applies to us. For believers, wisdom is God’s Word. We must get it, keep it, live it. We must not forget it. Learn the Word. Understand it. Believe it. Apply it. When we embrace it and regard it highly, it will protect us and sustain us. This is not magic. It is the power of God through His Word. It gives life to us. Paul reinforces this in his writing to the Ephesians:

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I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious father, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope on which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. The power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead... (Eph. 1:16-20a).

Do you see? We get the spirit of wisdom and revelation so we can learn about God and His marvelous Son, to know Him better, to enable us to access the “mighty strength” of God in our lives, so that we will not be spinning around like some Dervish, exerting energy, but not going anywhere. Without this wisdom we will be guessing our way through life, living by trial and error, and never understanding why it is that, even when things go well, somehow they don’t seem quite right or complete. And even worse, when we don’t know the Bible, we can’t possibly please God, which means we will stay on the hot seat...until we do.

Study or Pay the Price. If we do not choose to study the Word, or ask to be taught, or commit ourselves to knowing the will and ways of God, we will be pressured by God for as long as we persist in stubborn ignorance. When we stop learning, or learn sporadically, we cannot stay on the track that leads to maturity. Prov. 19:27 says, “Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.” We must not stop...or slow down. This is not a hobby. This is not an optional activity. This is not a recreational diversion. This is your life. We must stay in the Word each and every day. Give up sleep. Give up meals. Give up anything in order to study the Bible. It is paramount...nothing is more important.

This is exemplified in Jeremiah 26:4-6, which says this:

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

He says that “if you do not listen”, and “if you do not listen to my words”, you will become an object of cursing. This is not good. Better listen. Pay attention. Stay in the Word. Hosea 4 echoes this outcome. In Hosea 4:1, we see God’s charge against the Israelites: “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land.” These departures from God and His ways will result in calamity for these people (verses 2-3), and then in verse 6 we see why, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Lack of knowledge will inevitably lead to bad behavior which always leads to God’s displeasure and the need for Him to shake us by the shoulders to get our attention and convince us to get back on the right track. The

equivalent of “destruction” will happen to us. No good thing can come from ignoring YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDY GOD’S WORD. Decide to do this TODAY...AND EVERY DAY.

The Holy Spirit Teaches Us. John 14:26 tell us, “...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” The Holy Spirit is our private teacher, but not only that, He will remind us of the things in the Scripture. When Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would “remind you”, He meant, of course, that the Spirit would remind Jesus’ disciples of all He had told them; but there is an application here that we should not miss. The Holy Spirit will *remind* us of the things we have learned *at the time* we need it. The right word, the right expression, the right gesture, the right attitude, the right decision...these will come to us when we need them, if we are in fellowship and the Holy Spirit is in control. The Holy Spirit teaches us, and then reminds us.

The following passage is about knowing and understanding Scripture, and tells us the role of the Holy Spirit in imparting truth to us. 1 Cor 2, verses 6-14 says the following:

...God has revealed it [the gospel] to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned....

The Holy Spirit is within us, ready to teach us. These verses are rich, and we have a tendency to try to wring out all the truths they hold right away, but we will save some of these for later studies. In the very next chapter, we will say much more about the “location” of the Spirit inside of us, and see very specific things that we can do because of His being there. But for now, suffice it to say that God is in us, wanting to teach us and lead us—and will—when we keep our sins confessed and continue to attend His Word.

Knowledge Related to Our Savior Jesus Christ. The implications of knowledge about Jesus Christ, including the *effects* of that knowledge, and His place and role in our knowing about Him, are abundant in Scripture. Here are a few references to Christ as He relates to our knowledge:

- Christ is the source of truth. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).
- We are to grow in this grace and this truth. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

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- Grace and peace will be increased if we acquire knowledge about God and Christ, and we will be fortified against sin, as we see in the following:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 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 (2 Pet. 1:2-4).

- Paul wanted the Colossians to have all the knowledge that is resident in Christ. “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3).
- The truth that Christ provides lodges inside of us and moves us toward wisdom. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...” (Col. 3:16).
- Christ becomes “wisdom” for us. “It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God...” (1 Cor. 1:30).
- God shines the light of knowledge about Jesus into our hearts, and we see this light within us as the face of Jesus. “God who said, ‘Let the light shine out of darkness’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

Scriptures That Tell Us Knowledge Works. The effects of knowledge are compelling and rich. We see the results of our getting this knowledge in the following powerful scriptures:

- Psalms 119:130. “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”
- Col. 3:10. We have “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”
- Phil. 1:9-10. “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...”
- Rom. 15:14. “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”

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- Isaiah 33:6. “He will be the sure foundation of your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.”
- Prov. 3:13. “Blessed [happy] is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding.”
- Col. 1:9-12. Paul wanted the Colossians to be filled with knowledge of God, as we see in these verses:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

This list of scriptures is by no means exhaustive. The importance of Scripture and the good effects it creates is seen throughout the Bible, beginning with Gen. 1:3, which says, “and God said ‘Let there be light’”; and running all the way through to the 22nd chapter of Revelation, where we see the words of Jesus, “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book” (v. 7). The Bible is effective. And it is complete. It is what we need—and all we need—to point us to God and His power and His will and His greatness. We frequently say, “There are simply no words to describe God”, but there are, and they are given to us, which makes them ours. But they are God’s words, freely shared. Why would we ever try to function without them?

The Role of Pastor/Teachers. God provides pastor/teachers to help us learn scripture and mature as believers. Eph. 4:11 says the following:

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

God gave gifts to enable believers to bolster and strengthen each other. These gifts prepare us for service. The gift of pastor/teacher is the gift we are most interested in, because this is the gift of “instruction”. Our objective, our prayer, is that we will be taught. We recognize that the Holy Spirit teaches us, but we are talking about an aspect of His teaching that comes through the gifts that He has given, especially the gift of teaching. Pastors are saddled with

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this ability and this responsibility, and it is to *them* that we turn to be taught the Word of God. If your pastor is not teaching the Word, he is not a pastor.

Peter said he would keep reminding believers of the truth, saying, “I will always remind you of these things [truths], even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body” (2 Pet. 1:12-13). Peter saw the value of repetition. That’s how we learn. That’s how knowledge is built. Begin with basic concepts and graduate to those that are more complex, milk to meat, as we have seen many times. And *repeat* concepts so they are well established and will not be forgotten.

The object of our training is not just so we can become “knowledgeable”. We are training for service. We are preparing to bear fruit, to love, to do good works, and to become wise and mature in every way. Study that results in knowledge and wisdom is the way we will achieve this, so that we can understand progressively that it is *God* that works, and not us; yet we will see ourselves working harder than we ever have before, because we are energized by the Holy Spirit that dwells in us.

So what are we doing? Why aren’t we teaching more? Why are we not hearing over and over the principles of Godly living (which is much more than observing a list of taboos)? *Teachers* must be mobilized! Knowing is not an end in itself...it is a means to an end...and that end is loving, serving, and reflecting the light of Christ in our lives. *Inspiration* from pastors is fine, but we need more *information*! Dear Fellow Believer, find a Bible class. They should be available every single day or night. Pastors should be teaching EVERY DAY.

This is no time for pastors to occupy their time with counseling, weddings, funerals, and hospital visitations...give those tasks to leaders with other gifts...this is the time for teaching the Word! It is also time for believers within the flock to make Christianity the center of their lives by devoting themselves to learning the Word through all means available. This is no time to pull back and shrivel up! Ring the bell! Sound the trumpet! Strike the tents! Rally the troops! It’s time to train.

God Within Us

Introduction. Our relationship with God is not conducted long-distance. When we pray, we often look up into the sky (if we have the good fortune to be outdoors), and feature God as some abstract Person, very powerful and all that, but remote...outside our galaxy somewhere...tuned in and aware of us, but somehow impersonally administering the affairs of man and the world and the universe. He is “out there”, observing and moving the pieces on the board in front of Him, but not seen as Someone close. Sometimes, we bring Him a little closer, and give Him the space “beside us”, and picture Him walking with us through our trying days on this planet and in these bodies, and it is a comfort for us to see Him as being handy to protect us and provide for us. But “beside us” is not where God “lives”.

Most believers have no trouble viewing God as a live being, but He is “alive and apart”, so as not to say “aloof”. What we often overlook is the intimate place God plays in the lives of believers. He is, of course, omnipresent (pervasive and existing “everywhere”), but we somehow don’t see Him as an actual part of US, attached and life-giving, filling and moving us. He is in our hearts, alternately waiting, or empowering, depending on our availability to Him...or our disregard. We can draw near, or we can turn our backs on Him. He is always there, and always the same. Any difference comes from us.

God is in you...inside of you. He is of course, not confined to you, but He is big enough to fill you and all other believers at the same time, and still keep the universe together and functioning, from the tiniest quantum particles to clusters of galaxies. Sometimes we wonder how He can be present *in us*, and everywhere else at the same time. Keep in mind that God created space and time. He is not limited to a “place”, or to the sequential progression of time the way we experience it. He can come and go, in or out of space and time, so He can spend the span of our lifetimes attending to us personally, and to everyone else, while He simultaneously cares for the birds in the air and the flowers in the field, and not steal a molecule or a second from His eternity. So we don’t need to think that we are taxing God’s schedule by taking up His time...He has an infinite supply of it. He can love, and look at, and plan for, and guide, and teach me personally, as if I were the only person He ever noticed or cared for. I am right when I say He loves me in a special way, but I’m not the only one. He loves you the same way...as He loves us all.

The Holy Spirit Dwells Within. God is in us. That is our topic...maybe the thing we need to remember the most and the thing we most tend to forget. God is *inside* us as a unique occupant, but He’s inside all other believers as well, even though His presence and power are literally everywhere. Gal. 4:6 tells us, “Because you are sons [believers], God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit that calls out, ‘Abba, Father’”. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He fulfilled a promise by sending His Spirit, our Comforter, our Teacher, the Holy Spirit, the One Who empowers us and lives in us, fulfilling God’s will

through us. Eph. 3:16 confirms this. Paul prayed, "...that out of the glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." God is not just "there"...He is in our inner-most part, deeply embedded...and dynamic. His power enables us, for example, to be filled with joy and peace when we trust in God. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

We have learned in previous studies that the *power* of the Holy Spirit is in effect when we are in fellowship with God, having all our sins confessed so that nothing is standing between us and our communion with Him. When we are in fellowship, we "walk in the Spirit", and we do not sin. We *can* sin, of course, and many forces coax us to sin, but while we are walking in the Spirit, we will not sin. Gal. 5:16-18 says,

...live [literal translation is "walk"] in the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. (Endnote 1)

If we walk in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, we will not be controlled by the sinful nature. The object is to STAY in fellowship, by not sinning. And as we mature by learning God's Word, we will do this more consistently. On the other hand, as we have seen so clearly in Scripture, if we are *out* of fellowship, we must "repent", or *confess our sins to God*, to have them forgiven. Gal. 5:24 says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit [literal translation]." (Endnote 2) We are instructed, "Do not get drunk on wine....Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Then we will be "led by the Spirit", and we will not be "under the law" (Gal. 5:18). This means we will not be sinning if we are led by the Spirit, because there is no law against anything we do by the Spirit's power and leadership (Gal. 5:23). There will only be fruits generated by the Spirit, and these fruits will glorify God, as we see in the following:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Our transformation, our reflection of God's glory, our likeness to Him...all come FROM Him, the Spirit.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was not featured the way He is in the New Testament. He was there, but not available the way He is during the Church Age. There was no permanent "indwelling" of the Holy Spirit, as we have now. God was "located", as witnessed by the Israelites, in the desert, in the tabernacle...and later in the temple in Jerusalem. God was seen by the Israelites as being "with us", whereas now we see God as "in

us”. Earlier God did His work “for us” and “around us”, but now He does much of His work “through us”.

We Are the Temple of God. 1 Cor. 3:16 asks us, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” This is new. The temple of the Old Testament was a physical structure that mirrored God’s “dwelling place” in heaven. The idea of the temple residing within us is hard to grasp, but we will try in this study to understand the implications of this for our lives and what it means regarding our relationship with God.

The existence of the temple within us is confirmed in several places. 2 Cor. 6:16 says, “What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.” Imagine. The living God, Creator of the universe, Fabricator of time, Maker of everything, the Infinite God...is inside of us. Staggering! But we are to realize and fathom this: “Do you now know [realize] that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19). Incidentally, this is why we must honor God with our bodies (v. 20) and why, when a man commits a sexual sin, the sin is “against his own body” (v.18).

God resides within us the way He dwelled in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. The Most Holy Place was the focal point of worship for the Israelites. This is the place we want to know more about, to discover its significance and meaning for us, since it is now inside of us.

Day of Atonement. In the tabernacle, the “Holy Place” was behind a curtain. This is where the priests conducted rituals, sacrifices, and ceremonies on a daily basis to seek God’s forgiveness for the sins they and the people committed. Beyond the Holy Place was another place, behind another curtain, called the Most Holy Place. This is where the glory (light) of God actually resided. This place was off-limits to the worshippers (believers) in the desert during their 40-year delay, as they awaited entry into the Promised Land. The only person who could enter the Most Holy Place was the high priest, and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

There were many steps and schedules and dress codes and procedural protocols surrounding all the sacrifices, and these all depicted the work of Christ *and* His place now under the “New Covenant”, but it is not our purpose to provide a study of these sacrifices *per se*. However, since we now have the tabernacle inside of us, we need to know a few things about the guidelines and conditions surrounding sacrificial practices under the Old Covenant.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest prepared himself and entered the Most Holy Place to get forgiveness for his sins and the sins of all the people. He was “purified” for this entry, which enabled him to survive being in God’s “presence”. The purpose of the high priest being inside the Most Holy Place was to offer blood sacrifices to satisfy God’s justice

in dealing with sin. This blood was a covering for the sins of the people during the previous year, including the high priest and all his under-studies.

Leviticus 16 and following describes the Day of Atonement. By conducting the sacrifices and performing the ceremonies delineated there, the sins of the people were cleansed. Leviticus 16:30 says, "...because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins." Sacrifices were conducted both daily and annually to remove the sins of the people. Observe: A great deal of effort went into this removal of transgressions, and the need for it pertained to everyone, and we do mean, "everyone", because sin is universal. We all sin.

Important Side-Note: It's as though the only thing that stands between God and us is our sins...our nature...our tendency to act selfishly, pridefully, or hatefully. God disdains this behavior. So it is natural that much of our lives as Christians, much of our growth as believers, and the process for our getting closer to God as we grow, has to do with the processing of sin. Those who teach that we are somehow "holy" in our daily walk, or that we are naturally "pure" in our hearts, or that we have no tendency to sin...JUST BECAUSE WE ARE SAVED...are doing a great disservice to the believers who listen to them. They are WRONG. The first chapter of 1st John, verse 10, tells us that we (believers) are "liars" if we say we have no sin. So why would ministers and others make their congregations feel that sin will not be seen in their lives?

When the reality of the sinful nature, the world, and the devil hits believers who think they are "safe from sin" because they have become Christians, they are going to be blind-sided. They will ultimately conclude that the Christian life does not work for them. They MUST be told what God has provided for them...the way that Christians can process and defeat sin...or they will give up and disengage. They must know about confession of sins FOR FORGIVENESS, and they must commit to learning and understanding and believing God's Word, or they will be "walking in darkness" for the duration of their lives here on earth. This is a tragedy that must be avoided.

The Blood of Jesus. The sacrificial blood of bulls and goats was used on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, to depict the way Christ would shed His blood for us, to cover our sins and make us "righteous". Hebrews 9:12 says that Christ did not enter the Most Holy Place "by means of [the blood of] goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." His sacrifice is superior. The sacrifices under the Old Covenant served to atone for the sins of the Israelites from year to year, but the effects of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ are permanent...eternal. By His sacrifice, He has provided for us "eternal redemption". He has made the way for mankind to be saved by accepting the blood sacrifice that He has made.

The Veil. A curtain, or “veil”, in front of the Most Holy Place prevented “worshippers” from entering. Heb. 9:8 says “the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.” The “believers” under the Old Covenant were not able to go in because the sacrifices that were being offered in their behalf were inadequate to cleanse them sufficiently to stand in God’s presence in the Most Holy Place. But Jesus entered that place, because He was sinless, and the sacrifice of his blood...of His life...bridged the gap between perfect God and sinful man, and left the door open for us to access God directly.

Matt. 27:50-51 says the following:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

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

So the curtain has been torn apart and the way into the Most Holy Place is opened to us. Heb. 10:19 above tells us that we can have confidence to enter because of the blood of Jesus. We claimed that blood and became believers...eternally atoned, justified, and made righteous before God...when we were saved. Our eternal status, then, is secure, and that status makes us card-carrying members of God’s club. That status qualifies us to enter the Most Holy Place. What a privilege! We are free to go *with confidence* into the place where God is.

But not so fast...we have a problem. This problem may be downplayed or denied or ignored, but only to our peril. The problem is our *condition*. We still have a sinful nature and WE STILL SIN. Regarding *eternity*, we are secure. But regarding *life*, our condition may be one stained by sin. If sin is in us, we will not be able to enter the Most Holy Place.

When you go to the airport with a ticket for a flight, you feel sure you are eligible to get on the plane. But when you enter the area where you will board the plane, you must pass through a security check. You must be screened. If you have anything that is not allowed on the plane, you will have to discard it before you can board. If you insist on keeping whatever it is that won’t “fly”, you must stay off the plane. This is true of us in relation to the Most Holy Place. We are believers. We want to have the benefits of being close to God. We want His favor. But we must be screened before we can come close to Him, and if we have sin in our lives, we will not be able to approach Him. We are excluded from fellowship and communion with Him. Sin prevents progress, production, and growth, and, what’s more, puts us in line for divine discipline.

Sin Brings Punishment. We might say, “That’s okay. I didn’t want to go in there, anyway [into the Most Holy Place]. I’ll just wait outside.” You may change your mind.

Hebrews 10:26-30 tells what happens to believers who stay outside the Most Holy Place. It sounds like “hell”. “Raging fire” will happen to these people. They have been “sanctified”, but now they “insult the Spirit of grace”. There is no animal sacrifice that will remove their sin...all they will get is punishment, and they will face the reality that “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). We better keep looking for a way to get in.

Redemption and Forgiveness for Sin. As we saw above, in Heb. 9:12, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ provides “eternal redemption” for us. This makes it possible for us to become children of God, and provides us with relief from eternal punishment. We are “redeemed”, or bought and paid for. We have been made “perfect” by His sacrifice (Heb. 10:14). But we are still in the world, and we are still carnal beings, so what does the sacrifice of Jesus Christ have to do with us TODAY...in our lives? How can He help me NOW, in this body, as well as in eternity? Hebrews 9:13 tells us this:

The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from [dead works], so that we may serve the living God. (Endnote 3)

When we did the study on “Drawing Near to God” in *Getting Closer to God*, we discussed in some detail the role of blood in purifying our hearts and cleansing our consciences as believers so that we can draw near to God. We will have more to say about this later in this study, but for now we want to call attention to the term “conscience”. This is the part of ourselves that flashes red whenever sin is present, to alert us to acknowledge and vacate the sin. In the passage just quoted, Heb. 9:13, we see this word, “conscience”. It must be “cleansed”. Cleansing the conscience is removing sin. For believers this means having sins that we commit forgiven, and having our hearts purified. This is where the sacrifice of Jesus comes into play in our daily lives. The blood of Jesus is effective in cleansing our consciences.

So this is the second thing that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross does for us. When we first believe, it enables us to be saved for all eternity, but now it allows us to have our sins forgiven *in time*, in our lives as faulty and defective “human” Christians. The most important thing we do, outside of being saved, is having our sins forgiven as believers, so we can grow and become effective. (This needs more emphasis in Bible-instruction sessions.) Then notice God’s reason for doing this, in Heb. 9:14 above, “...so that we can serve the living God!” If we do not have our sins forgiven as believers, we will only be punished in life, and we will NOT SERVE GOD.

We Can Enter the Most Holy Place. We want to enter the Most Holy Place, because that is where we can be intimate with God, and draw on His power and holiness to enable us

to perform the loving acts that represent service for Him. For the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place, he had to be purified. Part of the sacrifices done in the Most Holy Place depicted the blood of Christ being applied to us to provide us with atonement and salvation through faith in His work. Other parts anticipated the way believers on earth could have their sins removed...by that same blood. We are “under the blood” for purposes of eternity, but the inevitable sins we commit put our “temporal” relationship with God (our relationship *in time*) in jeopardy, and keep us from entering the Most Holy Place. Like the high priest, we have to be purified to enter, and we do that by applying 1 Jn. 1:9 (KJV), which says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This is setting us up to go into the Most Holy Place.

We discussed above the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. If our bodies are the places where God has located His temple, and the Most Holy Place is *in the temple*, then where would we find the Most Holy Place, so we can go in? The answer is clear: the Most Holy Place is *within us*, in our “inner parts”. The temple within us, just like the temple and tabernacle under the Old Covenant, follows the blueprint of God’s “temple” in heaven. The tabernacle and later the temple served the “people”, the “worshippers” among the Israelites. But the temple within us, even though it is the same architecture as all others, is personalized for each of us. It is the special meeting place for each of us to meet with God in a unique and intimate way. But we cannot enter this special place and do the things God wants to do with us, if we are not clean.

This means that there are places inside of us where we can go only if certain conditions are met. We must be purified by confession of our sins in order to enter the Most Holy Place. This is the place where darkness cannot go...the place of God’s light, or glory. If we have unconfessed sin stored up, we are “walking in darkness” and are controlled by the sinful nature, so we are stopped at the gate because of contraband...our sin.

The Throne of Grace. Hebrews 4:14-15 says the following:

Therefore since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Jesus was subjected to every temptation that we are, and—as a man—used the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain Him to avoid every single one of them. He did not succumb, but He knows what it feels like to be in the flesh. So our High Priest is perfect, yet He *understands* how hard it is to be in these bodies and in this world, and how hard Satan tries to get us off track and keep us from accessing the power God makes available to us.

The next verse in Heb. 4 (v. 16) is extremely important: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” What is the throne of grace? It is the Most Holy Place...the innermost part of the

temple within us...the place we cannot go without being cleansed. Notice that we can “approach” the throne of grace, but we cannot go in because of sin. When we “approach”, or draw near to the Most Holy Place, what are we looking for? We are looking to “receive mercy”. And what is mercy? It is the source for “forgiveness”. We come to the threshold of the Most Holy Place “with confidence”, looking for forgiveness. We know that the New Covenant way of getting forgiveness is to confess our sins...applying the sacrifice of Christ to our failures time after time. When we do this, we are pure. This is how we are wiped clean so we can enter the Most Holy Place.

Notice what happens after we are purified and can go inside: We “find grace to help us in our time of need.” This is where the benefits of being in the Most Holy Place kick in. We are restored to fellowship and life takes on new meaning because we are now led by the Spirit, rather than our sinful nature. We are in the Most Holy Place! Come on in...there’s a party inside!

At the threshold of the Most Holy Place, we receive mercy (get forgiveness) so we can enter. It is then that we can take the next step, which is to “draw near to God”. Step 1 is to draw near to the throne (the Most Holy Place), where we receive mercy; Step 2 is to draw near to God, Who is waiting in the Most Holy Place to dispense His amazing grace.

Drawing Near to God. We cited Heb. 10:19-20 previously to establish that believers could enter the Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus; he opened the curtain for us by His body and His sacrifice. Verse 21 continues this discussion by saying this, “...we have a high priest over the house of God...” Jesus Christ is our High Priest and Advocate and Intercessor. This is why we have confidence that we can enter the Most Holy Place.

Then verse 22 explodes with good news. Since we have this High Priest acting in our behalf, and since this gives us confidence to enter the Most Holy Place...here it comes...”let us draw near to God”. That’s it! When we enter the Most Holy Place, we DRAW NEAR TO GOD. What an astounding honor...to be invited to draw near to the infinite and most-holy God!

And why are we able to draw near to God? Here’s v. 22 in its entirety:

...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

These are generally the things that the high priest under the Old Covenant had to do to be purified so he could enter the Most Holy Place. And this is what we do to enable *us* to enter. We are able to enter because our hearts are full of faith as a result of their being sprinkled (with the blood of Jesus), and because our consciences are *freed from guilt* (real “guilt”, not just a feeling of regret...we are truly no longer guilty, because we are forgiven). We are washed, cleansed, sin-free, pure, forgiven, covered...the New Covenant way...by

confessing our sins, so that we can draw near to God. (Once again, see the study, “Drawing Near to God” in *Getting Closer to God*.)

What We Can Do in the Most Holy Place. We want to see what we can do INSIDE the Most Holy Place, but first we need to look at options available to us OUTSIDE. Let’s see...we can do...oh, yeah...NOTHING. Except admit how sorry we are (really sorry, not apologetic or remorseful...but “sorry” as in *sorry beings* with sinful natures...really rotten). All we can do is seek God’s mercy to get forgiveness. Otherwise, it’s bleak and desolate outside the Most Holy Place, sort of the Antarctica of the Christian life...cold and unfruitful. And what can we do on the inside? EVERYTHING. This is where the good times roll. This is our vacation spot. This is the place of plenty. This is where we can rest. And we have tickets for the show.

When we are in the Most Holy Place, we can do all the things we described in *Getting Closer to God*. We can, for example, learn Scripture. Ps. 51:6a depicts our being taught by God, “...you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.” Under the New Covenant, the “inmost place” for us is the Most Holy Place. This is where the Holy Spirit teaches us the Word of God, to equip us for moral and productive lives.

There is so much that we can do in the Most Holy Place. We can pray, and the Holy Spirit prays with us and for us. We can give thanks, because we see life from the perspective of the One who plans our lives for our good. We can acknowledge God, because we see Him before us in the Most Holy Place, where we view His glory. We show fear of the Lord, or become consumed with reverence for His great and holy Self. We are led by the Holy Spirit, Who directs us and performs God’s work through us, giving us divine strength and power as we walk in Him. We are conscious of God so that our hearts are filled with Him, and sin is crowded out. We are trusting in Him, His plan, and His Word, knowing that He will care for us and bring us safely home. We surrender to His will, saying to Him, “Your will be done.” We submit our bodies to Him, because within each of our bodies is the temple of God, and we want these bodies to honor Him. We learn God’s will for believers and for all of mankind by knowing the standards and techniques He has declared in His Word. We seek out His will for each of us as individuals, and submit to His plan. And we learn to be still and know that He is God.

Finish. Sin destroys our wonderful communion with God, and jerks us out of the Most Holy Place at the speed of a sinful thought. We have to stay on top of sin by continually confessing, and then by growing in the Word while we are in fellowship. And each time we confess and go back in, we become stronger and more adept at avoiding sin.

So let us keep on entering the Most Holy Place, saying with David, “But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple” (Ps. 5:7). This temple is not far away, or hard to find. You don’t need a Google map to help you locate it. The GPS coordinates are wherever you are. He is near. James 4:8b says,

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“Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” There’s the cleansing. And, sure enough, in the same verse, James says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” (Endnote 4) When we are near, we can “worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe” (Heb. 12:28).

Humility

Introduction. The subject of humility sounds common, almost pedestrian. But when we look closer, we see one of the most important conditions of our Christian walk. Without humility, we will not get close to God or please Him. Everything we do is predicated on the condition of humility, from salvation to confession to prayer to learning the Word. With humility before God, we can fulfill all the commandments and requirements of the Bible. We can do all that God requires, and He can do all He intends through us, IF we are able to get a proper perspective of ourselves as related to and compared with the Great Creator.

Sin has its origin and strength in the absence of humility, and we are at the mercy of the world, the devil, and our sinful natures, if we do not find a way to assess ourselves as we really are. There is no getting around it...without humility, we will perpetually substitute our will, our strength, our achievement, for that of God. Nothing worthwhile will get done, and we will be miserable in the process.

The effects of humility are surprising, and they are the opposite of what you might intuitively expect. We will see these effects, and will look at God's response to us when He sees humility in us. When we are humble before Him, we are "real", and we see God as He is. On the other hand, when we assume a sense of self as independently viable or self-sufficient, we are playing out a fantasy in which we try to make ourselves the heroes of our own stories, while relegating God to irrelevancy.

But *only God* is relevant. When we learn this, we will abandon our pride and embrace humility. There is more to this than we have heard. It is time to know the value of our true selves, and what that awareness can do for us in our service to God.

Definition of Humility. *Holman's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines "humility" as "the personal quality of being free from arrogance and pride and having an accurate estimate of one's worth." (Endnote 5) Humility is seen in this quote as the non-existence of things related to pride, and an assessment of our actual worth (especially as seen in the larger context of God's creation). Humility can be understood best, it seems, by comparing the true natures of God and man, and measuring the infinite difference between them. Humility is a true awareness of God in all His eternal greatness, and ourselves as His helpless and pitiful creatures. This is a start.

Humility offers powerful and meaningful spiritual implications for our lives. It is not self-effacement or keeping the eyes pointed at the ground or feigning some kind of helplessness. It is, on the contrary, the true image of ourselves as seen on the grand scale of God's values. This image sees us on one hand as despicable enough that God Himself, in the form of Jesus, had to die a painful and humiliating death to compensate for our failure. On the other hand it views us as valuable enough to God that He considered us worth the cost. The worth we

now have is not in ourselves...it is in the quality that comes from His life *within us*. Starting with this panorama, we can begin to explore the landscape of a universe in which God is God, and we are not.

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit. Matt. 5:3 quotes Jesus, who said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The term “poor in spirit” means having a perspective of our poverty, as contrasted with God’s riches. The universe is His. *We* are His. And we are “blessed”, or “happy”, even though we are “poor in spirit”. We are blessed when we see the reality of God, because we can see and acknowledge that He is the source of everything good...now and forever.

Our being humble relieves us of many of the consequences that come to those who are not. Prov. 16:18-19 says, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.” Everything, as we shall see, is flipped. The oppressed are actually “better off”. The successful (as measured by world standards) are “falling”. The poles are reversed. North becomes south and south becomes north. The “lowest” become the “highest”. We will see clearly that humility causes us to avoid the bad things that come to the proud, while it brings good things to us, when we assume an appropriate posture of humility that God can bless.

Jesus Was Humble. It sounds odd to say that Jesus was humble...the God of the universe willingly subjecting Himself to treatment as a despised criminal. But He loved us and wanted to rescue us from our own folly. Paul said to the Philippians in the following that they should have the mindset of Christ, Who humbled Himself:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:3-8)

Talk about a drop...from heaven with His Father...to a cross where he was hated by those who tortured and killed him. He dropped, but God the Father has now “exalted him to the highest place and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...” (Phil. 2:9-10).

Paul gives the practical upshot of his call to humility in verses 3 and 4 of this same chapter (Phil. 2), saying the following:

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.

Christ looked to OUR interests when He gave Himself for us on the cross. He is our example. Christ loved us. And we are called to love as well. When we see ourselves in the

true light of God's viewpoint, and we get close to him through the techniques we are learning, we will have His love working in us. In the process of loving, humility will increase, and we will see others as better than we are. This sounds risky, because of our fragile ego, but we will see how humility keeps us intact, rather than destroying us.

Humility Produces Love. Our egos are needy. They are ravenous, looking always to devour any morsel of approbation that comes along. We feed our egos by comparing ourselves to others in every possible way. We assuage our egos by emphasizing our areas of strength when we look at others, while ignoring our own areas of weakness. Paul said that comparisons are not a good idea. "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12). When we have to sustain ourselves psychologically or emotionally by "winning out" over others, or when we elevate ourselves by lowering others, we are operating in the arena of human viewpoint, not God's, and our fleeting sense of superiority will not hold us up for long. Pride and ego are leaky boats. The caveat is this: honest competition is good. It is when hatred and greed and pure self-service enter the process that it becomes bad. Winning any competition can never substitute for the victories we gain through our relationship with Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, if our focus is on Christ, meaning that we are showing "fear of the Lord", and if we are in fellowship and have been studying faithfully, we will be empowered to love others and have the freedom psychologically to "give" love without "giving up" anything. We will be able to "submit" to others without losing our own sense of identity, which is anchored in Jesus Christ. In Eph. 5:21, Paul admonished, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." When we fear Him (show "reverence"), we will be operating in a divine perspective under His power, and we will be able to yield the right of way to others without the sweaty beads of irritation forming on our foreheads.

As maturing believers, we are to grow in love and consideration for each other, as the following commands from Col. 3:12-14 tell us:

- Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
- Bear with each other.
- Forgive grievances you may have with each other.
- Put on love.

Paul is urging us to place ourselves in a position of humility that will enable the flow of God-like qualities from us toward others. As we mature, these qualities will become more evident, until, eventually, they become standard parts of ourselves. At that point we will be doing everything by the authority of our Savior, Jesus Christ, as Paul declared in verse 17 of this chapter (Col. 3), which says, "...whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Thanksgiving is a natural outcropping for believers living through the power and by the authority of Jesus.

Prestige in society, and honor in the world are not important, when we are living under the covering of grace. What grace calls for is “gracious living”, as seen in Eph. 4:2, which calls for us to do this: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Live in love...and be humble, or be humble so you can live in love. Love is a fruit of the Spirit, as seen in Gal. 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, and so on. These will be exhibited when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, and we will be controlled by the Holy Spirit more of the time AS WE MATURE through study of God’s Word. The fruits that the Spirit will produce through us will prevent us from becoming “conceited” (Gal. 5:26) and will help us stay humble.

When we genuinely love fellow Christians, because of our close relationship with God, we will lift them up and honor them and encourage them. Rom. 12:9-10 says it this way:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves....Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

We give honor and respect to our brothers. We are humble before them. Humble toward God; humble toward men.

Love makes pride irrelevant, because we are focused on the well-being of others, rather than on whether our egos are being fed. 1 Cor. 13:4 gives us this: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.” This seems plain enough. The beginning of love is humility. The outcome of humility is love. Since love shows humility, it is certain that, where love prevails, pride will have its legs cut out from under it.

Don’t Brag. When we feel we are not getting the attention we need, we sometimes (perhaps frequently) try to find ways to affirm to ourselves that we are valuable and good by training the attention of the world (especially those nearest to us) on our good traits and deeds...or perhaps on ourselves whether we are good *or* bad. Any achievement must be noticed, we feel, and if no one is paying attention, we clear our throats loudly enough to get noticed. In short, when we get the chance, we exaggerate our good points and accomplishments to help us feel good about ourselves. We will be talking about our self-concept in some detail before we are through with this study, but for now, we can say that our image of ourselves needs a boost now and then...known as the “boast boost”. We say nice things about ourselves in case others don’t.

On the other hand, there are those who really do have good images of themselves, and believe they are competent and capable. Recognizing our own abilities can be legitimate, especially when it comes to discerning the gifts we will use in our service for God. But a problem occurs when we see our strengths as something special, or see ourselves as “self-made” men. Whatever good we *are* is because God has taken up residence within us, and any good thing we *do* is a result of His grace and power.

The Bible has much to say about “boasters”. That would be most of us, if we’re being honest, even though some of us are able to “brag” with more finesse than others. Rom. 12:3 says, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given to you.” We are to look squarely at our own capabilities, and see our worth as coming from God and not from ourselves. Part of seeing ourselves in a true light is recognizing our gifts, or our “measure of faith”, not forgetting that it is God Who gives the abilities to us, and He should get credit for any production emanating from them. When we know what our gifts are, we should operate with confidence that our *gift* is operating, and that God is using us to good purpose. But the operation of our gifts leaves no room for pride or boasting. We are the gloves; the hands are His.

1 Sam. 2:3 gives us clear instruction, saying, “Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.” When we look at our achievement and see OUR handiwork, we will be proud. When we look at what has been done and realize that it is God Who has done it, we will be humble. It is a matter of seeing where good and powerful things come from. If we talk proudly, we will be insulting the God within us.

If praise is to come our direction, it should not come from our own lips. If we praise ourselves we are trying to get approbation...we are serving ego and pride. This is why Prov. 27:2 tells us, “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.” This thought is completed in Prov. 30:32, which says, “If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil, clap your hand over your mouth!” Bragging is right up there with “planning evil”, which puts it in a really bad category. If you cannot control your mouth, put your hand over it. And if we see you wearing duct tape around your mouth, we’ll know your arm got tired and we’ll understand. God says bragging is foolish. To even “think” we are special is relegated to “deceiving ourselves”, as we see in Gal. 6:3, “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

Even Paul had to deal with this issue. He gave an honest report in 2 Cor. 12:5b-9, where he disclosed his struggle with conceit, as follows:

I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. [He was really achieving a lot.] But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations [the Pauline epistles], 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.

This passage is loaded. Many topics arise in these verses that draw us to spend more time with them, but we want to focus on the main point pertaining to our present topic...that boasting should be about our “weaknesses”, because that is where the power of Christ will operate in us to bring about divine good in our lives. God’s power is “made perfect” in our weakness. Why do we try so hard to hide it, when God says our weakness is the catalyst for His power? When will we ever get this? God does not need our “strength”, or our ability. He has these to spare. He just needs us to acknowledge our weakness and His power, so He can turn the good stuff loose in us. If we can’t get this just from understanding God’s Word on this subject, He may have to give us a “thorn” to remind us, so that “no one may boast before him” (1 Cor. 1:29).

Humility Comes with Maturity. Just hearing about God’s power, and fear of the Lord, and faith, and prayer, and all the rest of the things we are studying, does not make any of us instantly mature. Maturity is a deliberate process, the rate of which is determined by the time we spend studying God’s Word, and the degree to which we believe the things we are learning. We are not mature at salvation...we are babies...feeding on milk. If we feed continually, we will experience “normal growth and development”, but if we try to emote or work or plot our way forward, we will not grow, and we will be frustrated in our Christian walk.

Humility is one of the things that comes with maturity. We cannot expect ourselves to shed our pride and “fleshly” psychological defense mechanisms immediately, just because we have been placed on the roster for eternal life in heaven. Victory over sin, and operating in God’s full power, come with the competency of maturity. Do not expect too much too soon. Use the techniques we have been studying, and TRUST that, given continued growth, you will surmount all difficulties, and will come out on top. There is no question that the opposition is fierce, ranging from the laziness or corruption of the flesh (sinful nature) to the pride that the world uses to manipulate you to the machinations of Satan all around us. When you mature, you will slap these forces down by the power of God. Until then, a little patience with yourself is in order.

Pride Brings You Down; Humility Lifts You Up. There are many wonderful verses that clearly state that pride will bring our downfall, and being humble will lift us up. Here are a few:

- Prov. 29:23. “A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.”
- James 1:9. “The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.”
- James 4:6. “But he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”
- Prov. 3:34. “He mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble.”

- Matt. 3:11-12. “The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

With pride comes an “expectation” of good fortune, but isn’t it curious how disappointing the promise of pride can be? Conversely, what a surprise it is that humility is the sure path to elevation and honor.

More on God Using Our Weakness. Paul is our model once again in demonstrating the power of God working through our weakness. In Eph. 3:7-8, Paul describes this condition, telling us, “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Paul says he is “less than the least”. Where does that put us? What words can we use to describe our weakness? What is *below* “less than the least”? We can only imagine.

We are going to include here a rather lengthy passage that must be read, as presented, to get the full point of how God uses weakness as injection points for His strength. Take time to read this; the paradoxical contrast it presents is staggering. Here is, in part, 1 Corinthians, verses 20 through 31:

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?...for the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

Can you feel the verbal thunder from God’s Word in this passage? From start to finish, we have nothing to boast about. It is all from God, and about God, and to God...and we are intrinsically inconsequential. We hear it sometimes from preachers...how they were so heroic and brave in the beginning and how much they have achieved since those humble beginnings. Most of them credit God, but boasting should *always* be about God, and *only* about God...not our own efforts. Pride can be subtle, but anytime we are telling about *our* accomplishments, we are expressing pride, and we will face self-reduction because of it.

In a passage we quoted above, Paul was telling us about the thorn in his flesh, which kept him from becoming conceited. Paul followed that statement by saying, “...I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak,

then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). And, as he had just said in verse 9, he was happy to boast about his weaknesses, so that “Christ’s power may rest on me.”

Humility Precedes Confession and Forgiveness. Amon was a king in Judah. He was guilty of worshiping and offering sacrifices to idols, as his father Manasseh had done before him. But his father had done something that Amon was not doing, as we see in 2 Chron. 3:23: “But unlike his father Manasseh, he did not humble himself before the Lord; Amon increased his own guilt.” He magnified his guilt (from worshiping dead idols) by not being humble. As a result, he was assassinated in his own palace. Whatever guilt we accrue from sin is actually *made worse* when we are not “humble”.

Humility initiates many processes that God has set up to enable us to grow and serve in His kingdom. One of these is the confession of our sins to maintain fellowship with God. 2 Chron. 7:13-15 gives a powerful declaration of this condition, as follows:

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

The truth in the Word is glaring in this passage...my people who are called by my name...humble themselves...and pray...and turn from their wicked ways (repent), then I will hear...and forgive their sin. What a beautiful thing God’s forgiveness is. Without it, we could not be saved, and, as believers, we could never hope to please Him. Humility begins the process of forgiveness.

We may also avert *punishment* by being humble. 2 Ki. 22:19 shows how this works:

Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord.

Being humble, tearing the robes, and weeping are all symbolic of confession, which is an acknowledgement of actions or thoughts on our part that are prohibited by God, or that do not fit His standards.

Deliverance from “destruction” (due to humility and confession) is also seen in 2 Chron. 12:6-7, which says the following:

The leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, ‘The Lord is just.’ When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, this word of the Lord came to Shemaiah: ‘Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance.’

Verse 12 in this same chapter (2 Chron. 12) confirms this deliverance, saying this: “Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord’s anger turned from him...” Humble confession averts punishment.

Psalm 51 is all about the confession of sins to get forgiveness and avoid divine discipline. Verses 16 and 17 in this psalm help us understand what God is looking for when we sin. He is not looking for sacrifices...He is looking for repentance. These verses say, “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.” The sacrifice God wants is a change of mind about our sins, agreeing with God about them.

And what accompanies confession and forgiveness? Micah 6:8 answers this question: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” “Just acts” are acts of submission that invoke the work of Christ, which satisfies God’s justice, so He can then show mercy. When we are humble (i.e., when we confess), God reviews the sacrificial work of His Son, accepts it, and can then offer mercy and forgiveness. In other words, when we are humble, justice and mercy can operate on our behalf.

God Responds to the Prayers of the Humble. We saw in 2 Ki. 22:19 above that God hears the prayers of the humble...of those who have confessed. We see something similar in Daniel 10:12: “Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.’” What a story. Daniel determined to get “understanding”, which clearly represents for us a knowledge of Scripture. Then he “humbled” himself BEFORE GOD.

Being humble does not mean the “humble mumble” in public...it means being humble *before God*. This is “fear of the Lord” in action...acknowledgement...God consciousness...being still and knowing that He is God. Then notice what we can expect. God will HEAR our words and RESPOND to them. Our prayers will be heard and will be answered.

The Humble Get Knowledge. There are a number of scriptures that indicate that the humble will be taught. Sometimes humility is voluntarily assumed, but sometimes we need encouragement from God to help us get the picture and take the proper posture in our standing with Him. Then we can be taught. We cite a few of these verses here so that you can see that humility does make a difference in whether you will be taught God’s truth. These are seen in the following:

- Ps. 25:9. “He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.”
- Deut. 8:2-3 gives the following:

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, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you...to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

- Prov. 16:18-20. “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud. Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.”
- Prov. 11:2. “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”

Part of the reason the humble can be taught is the fact that they are receptive to the teaching. They trust God’s Word, and are able to process the information into their hearts, where they will recall it and apply it.

Another aspect of humility is the acceptance of the “teacher”...the person with the gift of understanding and explaining God’s Word. If we are going to sit at the feet of an instructor, we must trust his knowledge and understanding, and believe that his gift will be able to categorize and clarify God’s Word so that we can use what we are learning to get closer to God and have Him conduct His will through us. (Selecting a teacher is an important part of the process, and one that each of us must conduct prayerfully and carefully, ever alert to signs of false teaching and “private” interpretation.)

God Gives Attention, Comfort, and Help to the Humble. God will attend the broken in spirit, as per Isaiah 66:2, which says, “Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the Lord. ‘This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word’.” Humble and contrite. Recognize the sin and name it to God...then God will give us His attention.

God also gives comfort to the humble. 2 Cor. 7:6 discloses, “But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus....” There is no relief like the comforting hand of God Who touches us when we are beaten down or suffering. He has compassion for us and—from the vantage point of His position inside of us—waits for us to access the comfort He wants to give. He is in the Most Holy Place, beckoning our entry. Humility will get us there; God will greet us there.

The humble receive the sustaining power and provision of God. Ps. 147:6 says, “The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.” He holds the humble up, especially when they are weak, and he provides their needs. All the promises that God makes to us to care for us and keep us supplied are met when we are humble before Him. He is ready to pick our limp and flagging selves up from the ground and fill us with His power to face and

conquer all foes and forces that move against us, both earthly and heavenly. By letting Him be Who He is through us, we assume His might, which no person or thing can withstand. 2 Chron. 20 depicts this well. King Jehoshaphat was facing a formidable, hostile army. He recognized his weakness, and acknowledged God's strength. In a fervent prayer, the king said this: "O our God, will you not judge them [the enemy]? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chron. 20:12). Because of the humility of the king and the people of Judah, admitting "we do not know what to do", and because they kept their eyes on God, He responded to them, as we see in 2 Chron. 20:15-17:

He said: 'Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'

When we face a vast army, we can remember that the battle is not ours, but God's. What we are to do is surrender to His will and subject ourselves to His power, so that He can fight the battle for us. We have to face powerful armies, enemies of peace and sanity, but twice we are told, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Our eyes should be on God. He will be with us. Trust. Submit. Let go. Let God. He is here, and He will prevail.

Humility and Leadership/Followership. In Romans 12, Paul is telling the Romans to assume positions in the church according to their gifts, but not to see believers with particular gifts as superior to believers with other gifts. In delineating the gifts he had in mind, he brings up the gift of "leadership". In verse 8, he tells the Romans that, "...if it [your gift] is leadership, let him [the one with the gift] govern diligently." A leader must be on the job, on the floor, in constant communication, creating clear organization, structuring for consistency, weighing systems and processes for efficiency, managing personnel fairly, and assuming responsibility.

There is no time for arrogance or pride when a leader is "diligent". He is not the "top"...he is the "bottom". Everyone does not work for him...he works for everybody. A lazy leader will seek to escape responsibility, blame others for weaknesses and failure, and allow loose practices for performance to weaken the organization. Leaders who are not diligent will not operate on the basis of principle and policy, but will be arbitrary and capricious in their leadership. For a leader to shirk responsibility or ignore the working conditions and provisions of those under him is a reflection of preoccupation with self, and a kind of insouciant arrogance that undermines the purpose for his being in a leadership position. God will not bless such leadership.

Followers also have responsibilities, as we see in 1 Pet. 5:5, which says, “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” This applies to anyone who is under the authority of another. “Be submissive”. That is the posture of the follower. Submission begins with humility, and is seen as following the orders of those in charge. Not challenging...submitting. This is where humility can be the hardest, but we are instructed to stay humble...to FOLLOW OUR ORDERS and TRUST GOD FOR THE OUTCOME. If we can relax and trust God in the process of submitting to authority, God will elevate us...exalt us. That is His promise.

Fear of the Lord and Humility. Humility is repeatedly linked with fear of the Lord in Scripture. Prov. 15:33 says, “Wisdom teaches the fear of the Lord, and humility comes before honor.” Humility is the opposite of pride, as we have seen; with pride, no humility will exist, and no fear of the Lord will occur. The absence of humility dampens fear of the Lord, because our focus stays on ourselves, rather than God. But if humility is present, it will enhance the benefits of the fear of the Lord, as we see in Prov. 22:4, “Humility and fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.” Consider this also: without fear of the Lord, what is humility? It is just pride that is empty of content...pride turned upside down. But coupled with fear of the Lord, humility is an expression of reverence toward God. Humility opens our lives to God, who fills empty vessels.

We want to go further with this. We discussed “Acknowledging God” in *Getting Closer to God*. By acknowledging God, we express our correct assessment of the greatness of God and the smallness of ourselves. God is crushingly powerful, yet He is loving and gracious. When we acknowledge Him, it is because we increasingly see His pre-eminence and our dependency. Notice the two parts of acknowledgement. On one hand, we recognize the holiness and greatness of God. On the other hand, we admit the weakness and helplessness of ourselves. The second part of acknowledgement is humility. Without humility, there can be no acknowledgement.

Can Humility Be Bad? Many things that are good can also be bad. Sometimes, even the “best” can be the “worst”. For example, the “best” and “worst” form of government is the monarchy...or having a king. If the king has management skills and a good heart, the monarchy will be a good form of government. If he is a cruel despot, it will be bad. Same form of government...two different outcomes...one good, the other bad. This can also happen with humility, as we shall see.

When we discuss life and behavior from a divine viewpoint, things are not always what we expect. The Bible clearly extols the virtues of humility, but there are conditions under which it can be bad...perhaps even a sin. The difference between “good” humility and “bad” humility is *God*. Anything done out of fellowship will not please God, and humility that does not direct itself toward God is not the humility talked about in Scripture. If humility is

directed toward God, it is good and legitimate; if it is directed toward anything or anyone else, it is bad, and can be very destructive. We will explain.

If Christ is prevailing in the life of a believer, if God-consciousness is sustained by fellowship with the Spirit, and if constant absorption of the Word is going on, humility is not only good and appropriate, it is inevitable. Humility is a fruit of the Spirit connected with love (Gal. 5:22), and it discourages conceit (Gal. 5:26). Humility expressed toward God is constructive and energizing, allowing Him to infuse His divine power into us. But if the sinful nature is dominating, and if spiritual growth is not happening, humility may just be synonymous with a poor self image. No sadder state of mind can be imagined, as we shall see next.

Humility vs. a Poor Self Image. Self image is a big topic in psychology and education. Ways to improve the self concept of students and citizens have been tried and touted for years, with sporadic successes here and there. Many attempts in secular society to improve behavior can actually be helpful to some degree. The component that is glaringly absent in these, however, is the *power of God*. When God's power is invoked, real change can occur. Otherwise, you just need to get "lucky".

Most perceptions of the self-image run something like this: In life...in the world...bad things happen to people, especially in the realm of person-to-person interactions. These occurrences create a downward drag on the way people view themselves...i.e., on their self images. Self images are diverse and inconsistent, for individuals and for society. Somewhere between self-effacing shame due to heredity and experience, and beaming pride due to feedback from others regarding acquisitions and achievements, the self concepts of people ebb and flow. Fluctuations depend on both the conditions existing externally, and the psychological states brought to these conditions.

Because all people have needy self images, they seek constantly to feed their hungry egos. They want to pump up their flagging sense of self-worth, so they pan their radars across the horizons of humanity in search of praise and recognition. They want to feel better about themselves. But their blind spot is this: the *world* gave them their damaged self awareness, and now they are turning to the *world* to restore it. They will not be deterred. They demand attention, approbation, and approval, and chase self-affirmation like pots of gold at the end of endless rainbows. There might even be some "improvement" as a result of doing this, but the problems will persist, just as surely as the person *trying* not to sin may actually do somewhat better...but the problem is not solved.

Humility APART FROM GOD is not humility...it is simply a sorry view of oneself in a competitive and unsympathetic world. Without God, all we have is awareness of ourselves. There is no purpose, no comfort, no hope in such "humility"...it is endlessly negative and disappointing.

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Without God we can only see our improvement as coming from the world (we do this so easily and “naturally”). From such a perspective, it is not intuitive for us to think that humility will solve our self-image problem. But the effect of humility in the presence of God is paradoxically *exactly* what we need to bring ourselves up...even though this is not what the world would predict.

By sinking, by embracing our weakness, and by envisaging our smallness, all the while recognizing the power and bigness of God, we *rise up*, as though coming back from the dead. He “exalts” us, or puts us up on a high point of recognition, not necessarily in view of the world, but in the place of the “spirit” and holiness, where it counts the most. And to promote His goodness and as a sign to onlookers, He can even visibly manifest our “recognition”, so our friends will be encouraged and our enemies put to shame (Ps. 86:17).

Humility rooted in *focus on God* will rescue a struggling self-image, and will bring pride down. This will put us on a level playing field, where comparisons have no place. We are God’s. We all have the greatest worth in the universe attached to us...the righteousness of Christ. Furthermore, those of us who are in fellowship and maturing are inside God’s inner arena, which is the Most Holy Place, the place where the Holy Spirit fills and leads. Outside this arena is the world, the place of sin, where our sinful natures dominate. Inside, we are all equal, and all of us have a place next to God’s couch, where we can sit at His feet to learn, and rest as we watch Him work.

Self-control

Introduction. Self-control is something the Bible tells us to exercise. We are to control ourselves. On the surface, this seems like a process, something we *do*: controlling ourselves. But we will see that self-control is actually a product...an outcome...of what God does in and through us, not an action we take.

If we follow God's guidelines for growth and spirituality, we will not be able to do anything *but* control ourselves. Like seeing order rise out of chaos, when we get closer to God, we see control brought to our lives. Many pitfalls and snares along the way purport to disrupt the production of self-control. We want to look at the forces that prevent self-control, and see what God can do to help us get it.

I Just Can't Help It. Sin blocks everything good or productive. Sin makes it impossible for God to help us control our impulses, and puts us into a state of "no-control". To make matters worse, we have gargantuan forces around us that bulldoze us into sinful behavior, and make us useless to ourselves and to God. This is one of the most overlooked conditions in Christian teaching...the utter helplessness of man to stop himself from being stupid and self-serving.

We all have areas of strength...and areas of weakness. All of us have areas of low resistance, of which we can honestly say, "I just can't help myself." And generally we applaud our own areas of strength and criticize the areas of weakness exhibited by others. Have you ever said, "I would certainly *never* do *that*." And we take comfort that the weaknesses of others are not our own. But WE have areas of weakness...tendencies that we just can't control or stop, no matter how hard we try.

The areas in which we say "I can't help it" run the gamut, and we want to cite a few of them so we can get an idea of what they are. Here's the list.

Sex	Criticism
Pride	Boasting
Money-grabbing	Lying
Greed	Raging/Violence
Envy	Gossip
Jealousy	Loss of Temper
Complaining	Self-pity
Laziness	Rudeness
Addictions	Grumbling

Do you see yourself anywhere in this list? If not, we just need a longer list. You have weaknesses, and you sometimes feel helpless to stop the patterns that defeat you and keep you out of fellowship. So forget your strengths! Acknowledge your *weaknesses*. These are the places where you need assistance. But you are right...you can't help it...or at least, not by yourself.

Self-Control Begins with Focus. Prov. 25:28 says, "Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." Such a man allows "anything" into his mind. He has no filters and no boundaries, and as a result he is unfocused and open to impulse and self-indulgence. Walls must be erected to keep evil out, to prevent the world, the devil, and the sinful nature from having unfettered access to the mind. Without focus and knowledge of our allies and enemies in this fight to defeat evil and produce good, we essentially "lose our minds". Our thoughts and intentions are taken over by forces alien to our purposes as God's soldiers.

We are admonished in 2 Tim. 4:5 to "keep our head in all situations" so we can "discharge all the duties of [our] ministries". To get the job done, we have to stay focused, and that means keeping a clear mind.

It is getting more difficult, it seems, to avoid having our minds "jumbled" by the world. The pace of our lives, calculated in nano-seconds, is accelerating at a rate that our minds can barely accommodate. We are numbed by the bombardment of data and stimuli that confront us, and our nerve endings have become frazzled by the demands of the world. In the heat of battle, we are overwhelmed with all the "busy-ness". Traffic is a problem, for sure, and lines in stores, and, oh yes, budgets and kids and cell phones and personal upkeep and on and on. It is easy for us to feel a need to sublimate with innocuous distractions, or perhaps to escape in ways that are inappropriate, as we might do, for example, by using drugs or abusing alcohol. But we must keep our minds clear and not lose our grip. 1 Pet. 4:7 says, "Be clear-minded and self-controlled, so you can pray and love." When we lose focus, we cannot stay in contact with God through prayer, and we cannot love or be fruitful.

Sometimes we just want to throw our hands up and run away, and some do. But there is hope for real relief, as we shall soon see. In the meantime, we must know God's views regarding any *lack of effort* on our part...that thing called "laziness".

Don't Be Lazy. Laziness is unproductive. Prov. 10:4 offers this: "Lazy hands make a man poor." This is echoed by Prov. 19:15, which tells us this: "Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry." This applies especially to someone who is not taking care of his own family, as we see in 1 Tim. 4:8. This verse says, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Not taking care of your own has you doing something worse than even unbelievers do. Care for others requires effort and work, not laziness or sleep.

In Hebrews 6:10-12, Paul instructs believers to work in love, as follows:

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 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.

Our instructions are to “work”, be “diligent”, and “not become lazy”. Paul says that we should “warn those who are idle” (1 Thess. 5:14), and in 2 Thess. 3:10, he gave his rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” Work is satisfying and fulfilling, as well as being something that pleases God, as seen in Eccl. 2:24, which says, “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God...” God approves work and deplors laziness.

Prov. 6:6-11 gives a good model for our work ethic, as we see here:

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? 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.

Laziness and its results sneak up on you and then rob you blind...take from you everything you have. Like a thief, laziness absconds with your time, resources, relationships, and opportunities. There is no place in the Christian life for laziness. Rest, relaxation, and entertainment all have their place...*after work*. Rest later. Work now. But what if this is YOUR area of weakness? Do you have self-control when it comes to doing a job thoroughly and in a timely fashion? If not, how are you going to change that pattern? Do not despair. There is a way.

General Notions from Scripture Regarding Self-control. Before we dig deeper into ways for dealing with a lack of self-control, we want to pause and pull together some scriptures from here and there in the Bible that treat this topic. For the sake of brevity, since each of the following could be a study by itself, we are presenting these “notions” in list form, as follows:

- Self-control will wane in the last days. 2 Tim. 3:1-3 says the following: “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves...without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control...”
- Church leaders must be self-controlled. 1 Tim. 3:2 says, “...the overseer [bishop] must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled...”
- Titus was told to teach self-control. Titus 2:1-15 gives some of the doctrines Titus was to teach believers in his care. Prominent among these is self-control. He was to teach this to old men, old women (so they can teach younger women), young men,

and slaves. They were to say “no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives....” (Titus 2:12)

- Self-control is part of our growth and preparation. “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet. 1:13).
- Sin weakens self-control. Prov. 5:22-23 gives us this: “The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.”
- The spirit of self-discipline is a gift of God. 2 Tim. 1:6-7 says, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”

Self-control is good; the lack of it is bad. That’s the basic premise of what we are seeing here in Scripture. We now need to begin looking at the resources that can help us achieve greater control. Self-control for work of any kind begins with spiritual preparation and faith. Any job we do is to be done as part of our service to God, and can only be completed satisfactorily when we encircle ourselves with God’s power and purpose, and trust that He will take whatever menial thing we do and use it for His glory. If God is in it, it will serve Him, and we will have Him to sustain us and support us throughout. But first things first...we must *trust* that He will do it.

Faith Produces Work. In Rom. 12:10-12 we see a call to zeal...enthusiasm, faith, fear, love, reverence, worship, and God-consciousness. Here is what this passage says:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

These verses tell us not to lack zeal and to keep our SPIRITUAL fervor strong, and then they tell us what these produce: service for God, joyful hope, patience in adversity, and faithfulness in prayer. When we are enthusiastic about God *in us*, we look for ways to prepare ourselves for His service, and we assume *attitudes* (e.g., joyful hope and patience)...and *practices* (e.g., faithfulness in prayer) that motivate us and equip us to do His will. These prepare us to go to work, whether it’s at the plant or at the local church.

“Work” is an odd word applied to us, however, because only God has the ability to finish *our* tasks in the right way...a way that actually pleases Him. Our job is to learn enough about Him that we trust Him completely to work through us and complete the job that He wants US to do. That is when we *really* go to work. When we rest in Him and truly have faith that *He is Who He says He is*, we will work ourselves into exhaustion, by giving the job to Him. Heb. 4:11 says “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest....” This is an

oxymoron: work to enter the rest. God is asking us to work hard to rest. Heb. 4:10 says, "...for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." God rested on the Sabbath, and that is what He wants us to do. He wants us to rest in faith in Him and His promises, so He can perform the work He has in mind for us. Work gets done through the power He generates in us as a result of our faith in Him.

1 Thess. 1:3 puts the cap on this concept: "We remember your work, produced by faith...inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." When we trust God, and do what we must to move closer to Him, we can see His hand at work, generating effects and results in our lives that we did not foresee. When this happens, our self-control is subsumed by God's power, which means we are surrendering our control to Him. With our control belonging to Him, meaningful work and production can take place.

Two Sources of Control. There are two internal sources of control in our lives: the Holy Spirit and the sinful nature...so where is "self" control? We shall see very quickly. As we have seen so often in previous studies, either the Holy Spirit or the sinful nature will be in charge of our minds at any given time. As for self-control, it makes sense that, if the sinful nature is in charge, we have *no self-control*. The sinful nature compels us to do bad things and does so with a force that "self" cannot resist. Self discipline is practically useless when the sin nature dominates.

The other source of control is that of the Holy Spirit, Who leads us and moves us spiritually, as long as our sins have been confessed. When the Holy Spirit is controlling us, we will not sin, and divine good can come through us as a result of God's power and love within us. When the Spirit controls us, we have "self" control, but not because of ourselves or something we generate, but because His grace and goodness are operating through us. In a sense, our self-control is tantamount to Spirit-control. Our control is linked directly to our being in fellowship, whereby we are filled with and led by the Spirit.

Everything we do by means of the Holy Spirit is good; anything done under the power of the sinful nature is bad. If you want self-control, you have to have the control of the Spirit. Rom. 7:5-6 says the following:

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit....

In the studies we have done, we have seen repeatedly the dichotomy of our inner life. We are Jekyll or Hyde, comedy or tragedy, good or evil, spiritual or carnal, all depending on who is in charge of us. There is no "neutral zone", where our lives are simply governed by ourselves...there is never a time when either the sinful nature *or* the Holy Spirit is not at the helm. It is one or the other. So the controllers in our lives are two in number...not three. Self-control cannot slow down the sinful nature; conversely, it is no substitute for the

control of the Spirit. Self-control is real, but it does not function independent of the Holy Spirit.

We confess our sins and are cleansed to keep the Holy Spirit in power, but we must also *grow* to build consistency in our fellowship, which we do by studying and (increasingly) resisting sin. As we have seen many times, sin is our greatest drag and our biggest problem. We must deal with it. Unfortunately, even when we are in fellowship, we have pre-existing areas of weakness that are vulnerable to attack. Sin waits to control us.

Self-control and the Problem of Sin. Before salvation we were “dead” in our sin. Eph. 2:3 says, “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” This thought continues in verse 12 of this same chapter (Eph. 2), as follows:

...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

There is no hope or relief for unbelievers, who are “without God in the world”. They have no avenue for curtailing their sin natures, and will be governed only by customs, traditions, and external enforcement and motivation. Some of these may “look good”, for the sake of civilization or self-preservation, but sin and its nature lurks behind all the masks and curtains, always seeking to please the world and follow Satan, where things are “out of control”.

Believers are not exempt...they also have to deal with sin and the sinful nature. 1 Pet. 2:11 tells us this: “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” These desires come from the sinful nature, and have waged a war against our souls, trying to overthrow our minds. We are to “abstain” from sin. Abstaining is a form of self-control, yet the sin that is refused in abstaining is the very thing that seeks to undermine self-control. Abstaining is not for weak and uninitiated believers; it is for the mature. The only thing the baby believer can do is to confess frequently, as he is concomitantly eating and drinking from the Word, in order to grow and gain spiritual strength for resisting sin.

The Sin Plot Thickens. Lust comes from the world, our sinful natures, and the devil. We cannot let these names roll casually off our tongues and passively dismiss their power over us. If for one minute we think that these are simply minor irritations that disrupt our Christian serenity, we are placing ourselves right where Satan wants us. He wants us to discount the size and scope of his influence, because then he can attack us by surprise, due to our lack of preparation. We need to revisit the issues of the world, the devil, and our sinful natures to make sure we understand the flesh-tearing menaces they are.

1 Jn. 2:15-16 says the following about the world:

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

Even the cravings of the sinful nature come from the world. Lust comes from the world, so that is where sin finds its resources and opportunities. The world is irresistible to the flesh...self-control is reduced to gurgling infancy.

Self-control, as such, will be spotty in our lives, due to varying levels of spiritual health and due to differing areas of strength and weakness. There are actually areas where we feel pretty self-controlled. These are areas of strength, where sins of a particular type do not appeal to us. If you deplore the taste of alcohol, or the feeling it invokes, you will probably not become an alcoholic. This is an area of strength emanating from conditions that occur naturally in your life. Don't get too smug. As we cited earlier in this study, you still have areas of weakness. These are the areas for which you have very little control. So guess where Satan will concentrate his efforts to pull you into sin? Satan goes after your weakest area, which creates for him an easy mark.

Paul recognized this when he recommended marriage over immorality in 1 Cor. 7:1-7, which reads as follows:

...it is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband...do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote your selves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. 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.

Paul reports that different “gifts”, or areas of strength, make for varying levels of toughness in warding off sin, and Satan will tempt us at the point of “least” resistance. He goes after the chink in our armor. Strengths and weaknesses exist whether we are in fellowship or not. Even while we are controlled by the Spirit, Satan aims for our weakest spots. We always operate in the dichotomy of the sinful nature vs. the Holy Spirit, but we must understand that we are more easily drawn off track and into the throes of the sinful nature in some areas than in others. These are the places where Satan will pull you down, and sometimes these are also the places where we are least likely to admit our weaknesses. Once again, **ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR WEAKNESS**. God will trade His strength for your inability.

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 10:13 that God will provide a way of escape from Satan's temptation. Remember that he is going after our most vulnerable spot, so we must rely on God's strength to help us escape. 1 Pet. 5:5-11 calls for us to resist the devil by humbling ourselves

and leaning on God's power. By casting the burden of temptation onto Him, we allow His mighty hand to protect us. Our self-control in the face of Satan's temptation comes in the form of standing still in the power of the Holy Spirit and waiting on the deliverance of the Lord.

In Eph. 6, Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God to "stand against the devil's schemes" (v. 11). We are to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (v. 10), knowing that our battle is against enemies that can blow us away if we try to take them on by ourselves. If we attempt to fight Satan alone, we will get clobbered. But by putting on the king's armor, we can "stand [our] ground" and keep our footing against powerful spiritual foes. Bible study (v. 17) and prayer (v. 18) are key components in our resistance. It will take the power of informed prayer for us to see the victory.

Reminder: the Bible says we must pray without ceasing, and here is why: Satan believes he can defeat us, and he assuredly will if he can draw our attention away from God. This means that we must not just "pray"...we must *live a life of prayer*. Prayer *is* our life. Prayer is not what we do...it is who we are...in thought and practice. Whatever we do, wherever we are, prayer must envelop us, so that we can stay close to God and keep Satan away. We are to "stay alert", to watch for surprise attacks. In short, we must fortify ourselves in every possible way to prevent Satan's grip from constricting us and squeezing out of us any will to walk in the light and please God.

The world and Satan are potent allies, and they have a friend living right in the middle of our camp...the sinful nature. We need to review the truth about this treacherous nature—*our* nature—to secure our defenses against this enemy, who is residing in our tent.

The Sinful Nature and Choice. The enemy within doesn't necessarily want to bring us down...it just wants to have a good time, and invites us along for the ride. The bad thing is this: The result of sin is decline and degradation. The sinful nature enlists our participation in practices that seem enjoyable or profitable at the time, but that destroy us in the end. 1 Cor. 10:1-12 tells us what happened to the Jews in the desert, and warns us not to follow their example. These Jews were "believers", but they did not express faith in God's promises (His Word), so God was not pleased with them. Twenty thousand of these Jews died from snake-bites, because of God's displeasure with them. This can happen to us, as well, which is why Paul says in this passage: "...if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" We all have sinful natures, even mature Christians, and the sinful nature is perpetually Eveready-charged, waiting for the switch to flip so it can begin operation. We confess in humility and study in faith to prevent this from happening, because—when it does—we will fall from fellowship and quit praying, growing, and trusting.

We have a choice about this. We can choose to confess, study, and pray, or we can just be indifferent and lazy and hope we don't get caught in some snare. Unfortunately, when the sinful nature is at the helm, it will carry us like a raft down a swift-moving stream and will

eventually swamp us and drown us, if we allow it. The sinful nature is monstrous, and we can't wish it away...we have to make a choice to follow God's Word and use His methods for keeping our nature in its cage. This is self-control: following God's way for dealing with sin.

James 1:13-15 says, "...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin...." Rom. 8:5-8 frames this concept, as follows:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

When the sinful nature is in control, we are "dead"...our spirituality is dormant...but if we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, our spirits and even our "bodies" come alive; we experience "life and peace".

The Sinful Nature Opposes God and Brings "Death". We want to emphasize this point, because it is easy to forget that forces inside of us oppose God, and that we must not ignore the "killing" power in them. Rom. 8:12 tells us that we have no obligation to live under the control of the sinful nature. If we live under the power of our fleshly natures, we are going to "die". Two views of this death can be extrapolated from this passage, and both are plausible...but neither is desirable, as death can never be a good thing. This death can be 1) the mind controlled by the sinful nature, or 2) physical death due to surrender to sin.

The first view, seen above in Rom. 8:6, envisions death as the "mind controlled by the sinful nature". When sin occurs and no confession takes place, we get a picture of the body of a believer submitting, not to God, but to the sinful nature, thus leaving the believer spiritually lifeless and useless. The enemy that lurks within us...takes over.

The other view is of physical death. 1 Cor. 5:5, as seen in the *Interlinear Bible*, tells us about a believer who had slept with his mother-in-law. Paul instructed the Corinthians to "deliver [him] to Satan for destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (Endnote 6) Some sins (perhaps just one) can result in our flesh "being destroyed", which is tantamount to our being pulled from the game for poor performance. This shows that physical death can happen due to sin.

The sinful nature is not Satan, and it is not some condition of the world. It is *you*. Inside of you dwells an enemy of God that enthusiastically embraces sin...a direct affront to God and an attack against His causes. Our first objective as believers is to conquer sin, thus controlling the sinful nature, so we can enjoy the free flow of God's grace and power in our lives, and see His love operate through us.

The Sinful Nature Must Be Subdued. The sinful nature is the most powerful part of our natural selves. Col. 3:5-11 tells us about things done by our “earthly nature” in the following passage:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

The sinful nature must DIE. It was crucified with Christ so that its power has been annulled in the eternal realm (Rom. 6:6), but its death tremors still shake within us and its power remains overwhelming. Jesus Christ is the solution, as we see in Rom. 13:13-14, which give us this:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Do not *think* about how to gratify the yearnings of the sinful nature, but dress yourself up in the Lord Jesus. Put Him on! Bathe yourself in His Spirit. Immerse yourself in His holiness. This will give you the “new man”; you will be renewed in the knowledge of Jesus, and, having the mind renewed, you will be able to walk in “newness of life”. The only thing that can displace the old is the new. And the new is the New...and He is alive. Here is what this looks like in our experience, as per Col. 3:12-17:

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

How many volumes could we write just from this one passage? This is the beautiful and holy call for all believers. This is God’s standard for Christian living, and His offering that promises such a life. We are His “chosen”, receivers of the “peace of Christ”, with the “word of Christ” taking up lodging within us, so we can do everything “in His name”, and will be

left with nothing to do but praise Him, always “giving thanks” to the Father through Him. This is what Satan, the world, and the sinful nature disdain, the life of Christ on us, in us, around us...saving us and showing Himself to us in His Word and in our spirits.

To Beat Sin, We Must Stay Close to God. James 4:7 says, “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.” When we submit to God, we move closer to Him. We submit by confessing our sins, by acknowledging Him, by praising Him, by thanking Him, by praying to Him, by *believing* Him, and by fearing Him. And when we move closer to Him, we feel His protection surrounding us. Then we can resist the devil by “being still” and knowing that God is God. When we are close to God, the devil flees, and SIN MOVES AWAY.

When We Are Close to God, We Have Help from the Holy Spirit. It may seem odd that the topic is “self-control”, yet we are talking so much about “sin” and how to beat it. That is because processing sin *is* related to self-control, which—as we have established—is not so much about our controlling ourselves as it is about learning the way to have God controlling *us* to help us avoid sin...and produce good.

Sin is the great divider, the chief violator of God’s laws, the ultimate tool of destruction, the badge of condemnation, the sign of evil, the killer of humanity, the opposite of God, the pass to Hell, and the scourge of fallen man. There is nothing good about it...it is all negative. Yet we hold on to it like some toddler clings to his mother’s knee. It keeps us from fellowship with God, and brings all forms of misery to our lives, but still we embrace it. It is not a thing to be trifled with or ignored. We must account for it, and that is why we spend so much time studying ways to deal with it. If you are tired of the subject, my apologies, but please hang on. We need this.

Gal. 5:16-18 says the following:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The Spirit and the sinful nature are in opposition. This dichotomy wars inside of us, good and evil, in a battle for our minds. Col. 2:11-15 describes the victory of good over evil that is made possible by the cleansing death and saving life of Jesus Christ. We are “made alive in Christ” (v. 13*b*), who has “disarmed powers and authorities” that move against us. But we are still slaves to sin, as Paul admits in Rom. 7:25, “So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” Still, the “law of the Spirit of life [sets] me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1). The sinful nature ensnares us, and the Holy Spirit sets us free. This battle goes on for as long as we live. We have to keep the Spirit in control.

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2 Tim. 2:19 tells us that everyone who claims to be a Christian should “turn away from wickedness”. Verses 20 and 21 in this chapter (2 Tim. 2) let us know that “if a man cleanses himself” from ignoble purposes (sin), “he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” When we confess and are cleansed, we are prepared to do *good work*. In verse 25, those who oppose God’s ministers must be gently corrected and taught, “. . .in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” *After confession: prayer and Bible study*. This is the chant of the maturing believer.

Bible Study and Self-Control. Self-control is not a myth, but the implications of its name suggest an over-involvement of “self” that is not productive in the real world of God and spirituality. When the Bible calls for self-control, it envisages a use of all the resources God places at our disposal to keep ourselves in the saddle spiritually. To have self-control, we know that we have to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and that it is pointless for us to attempt resisting the devil, the world, and the sinful nature *by ourselves*. The other major component in our progress toward maturity and self-control is, as we have seen many times, Bible study.

The source for understanding God’s path, His way, His will, His pleasure. . . is His Word. By studying and believing God’s Word, we will know for sure how to live and walk in a way that God accepts. Our task is to learn *from Him about Him* so we can *please Him*.

1 Cor. 3:1-3 gives us this, as seen in the *Interlinear Bible*:

And, brothers, I was not able to speak to you as to spiritual ones, but as to fleshly ones, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, and not food, for you were not then able. For you are yet fleshly. For where among you is jealousy, and strife, and divisions, are you not fleshly and walk according to man? (Endnote 7)

Believers who are new to the faith, or that have not matured, regardless of how much time they have spent as believers, are viewed by Paul as “babes” . . . they are helpless infants. The result of their immaturity is that they are “fleshly”, or tend to spend time under the control of the sinful nature. This condition will not enable them to exercise self-control and will make them “destructive”, rather than “productive”.

The first chapter of 2 Peter cites self-control as part of the building blocks (verses 5-7) that make us “productive” (verse 8). We see the following in verse 8, as stated in the *Interlinear Bible*, “For these things [self-control among them] make you not barren, not unfruitful in the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Endnote 8) The building blocks are things that we build on (and with) as we mature, and these things bear fruit “in the full knowledge” of Jesus Christ.

As we mature, we will see more fruit as a result of increased understanding and application of God’s Word. We see in verse 9 of this passage (2 Pet. 1) that the building blocks are *not*

seen in believers who do not study the Bible or confess. Quoting from verse 9, we see this: “For the one in whom these things are not present is blind, being short-sighted, taking on forgetfulness of the cleansing of his sins in time past.” (Endnote 9) Blind, short-sighted, forgetful, not accessing the cleansing routine that God has used to provide for the control of the Spirit: these are the things that will prevent self-control and turn our bodies over to handlers that will train us for spiritual destructiveness.

Next, we want to offer sundry key points concerning the value of studying God’s Word. For convenience and brevity, we are compressing these into a list:

- Bible study feeds the believer. Without being fed we will become “hungry and weak”.
- Study is a matter of choice, as we see in Prov. 16:16, which says, “How much better to get wisdom than gold, to *choose* understanding rather than silver”. (Emphasis mine)
- In Hebrews 5:11-14, Paul tells his audience of Jews that they are not maturing because they are too lazy to study. Verse 14 says “...solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”
- When we reject God’s Word, we set ourselves up for destruction. Prov. 1:20-33 cites those who “hate knowledge”, “love simple ways”, “reject God when He calls”, “ignore God’s advice” (God’s Word), and choose not to “fear the Lord”. This passage announces that they will be overwhelmed by “distress and trouble” and overtaken by “calamity” and “disaster”. Conversely, “...whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm” (Prov. 1:33). Which will we choose?
- Learning the Word gives us new selves and new attitudes in our minds, as seen in the following (Eph. 4:20-24):

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

- Prov. 6:25-35 describes how we are lured by evil. Then Chapter 7 tells us how to resist this temptation, beginning in verse 1, which says, “My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you.” The concept is finished in verse 5, which promises, “...they will keep you from the adulteress.” Understanding strengthens resistance against sin.
- When we believe God’s Word, it “works” within us. 1 Thess. 2:13 says, “...when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the

word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

The power of God’s Word is spiritually organic...brought to life by the power of the Holy Spirit. It feeds us and sustains us. It is worth every ounce of effort we can make to receive it and believe it. The *Interlinear Bible* (Endnote 10) gives us this charge in 2 Tim. 2:15: “Earnestly study to show yourself approved to God, a workman [student] unashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” We are students forever, some of us pre-schoolers and some in the advanced grades. We are not just to *dabble* at learning; we are to “earnestly” study. This is the most valuable way we can spend our available time, and the surest way to achieve self-control.

What It Means to Feed on the Word. We want to look back at 2 Pet. 1 to pick up an important point that might be overlooked without close attention to the wording in the original language. Verses 3 and 4 in this chapter give us the following from the *Interlinear Bible* (Endnote 11):

As His divine power has given to us all things pertaining to life and godliness through the full knowledge of the One calling us through glory and virtue, by which means He has given to us the very great and precious promises, so that through these you might be partakers of the divine nature, escaping from the corruption in the world by lust.

We have studied this verse before, and cited the power of the divine nature to help us resist sin. We stated before that “great and precious promises” represent the Word of God. The power of the divine nature comes to us through the Word. But let’s look closer. “Through these” means “through the Scripture”. Through study of the Scripture, we become “partakers of” the divine nature.

The *New International Version*, which we have used as our primary resource throughout our writings, translates the phrase, “might be partakers of the divine nature” (seen above), as “may participate in the divine nature”. The word *koinonoi* in the Greek means “partake of”, not “participate in”, so the NIV translation is misleading. Even if this word were translated “partakers in”, it would still be questionable. According to Webster, “partake in” means to “participate in, as in an activity”, while “partake of” means to “eat or drink something”. Since the word is translated properly as “partakers of”, we see that the latter meaning applies. We are to “eat or drink” the divine nature.

We must understand this. When we study the Bible, we are not merely “participating in” an activity or quality of the divine nature; we are actually *feeding* on this quality. We are not just gaining knowledge; we are taking in the very *nature* of God, meaning His *thoughts*, which are found in His Word. As we grow, the divine nature (truth and wisdom...the mind of Christ) becomes *a part of us*, so we are empowered to resist sin, and ennobled to love and serve. That is how we become more like God, as we grow on His teachings. The nutrients

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in the Word are not just information...they are expressions of the nature of God Himself. By studying we assimilate knowledge, of course. But more than that, we incorporate the viewpoint of Almighty God into our inner selves. There's the holiness. There's the fullness of God. There's the solid basis for self-control.

Finish. Without planning it, we have walked again the well-worn paths of confession and study, which lead us into all the things that move us toward maturity in spirit and service. We have seen these before and will see them again. It seems we are trying to get the base firmly established. When this is done, we expect to move deeper into the treasure trove of God's Word. As we learn, we will keep moving, always eager for more. And God in His grace will show us everything we need to know to become more like Him.

Finally, we have seen that self-control is a requirement from God, but that it is not ours to produce...it is a product of confession and study. God commands it, and then God offers the power for it to be done. Once again, without Him, we are nothing; but when God does a thing...it's done well, and God gets the glory. "Self" is removed.

Gifts

Introduction. When we speak of a gift in the spiritual realm, we do not refer to something we possess after it is given to us. A gift from God is not “turned over” to us to own and exercise by our own will, even if we hope to use it in God’s service. If we believe our gifts are OURS, pride can set in and neutralize the effectiveness of the gifts. He gives specific gifts so that He can operate in special ways within us, and throughout the arenas of our lives, to complete the purposes He has planned for us. His divine *will* targets individual believers and the collective body of believers (the church) as beneficiaries of these gifts. Gifts are opportunities for us to have God fulfill *in* us what He has determined to complete *through* us.

Gifts are provided so that each believer can serve other believers in specific ways that advance the cause of Christ within the church and in the world. Perhaps in no other way is Scripture more concrete and definite about the function of God’s power than in the area of gifts. As it is with all other aspects of the Christian life, God is in charge; He is the initiator, the actor, and the finisher of every worthwhile task we will ever be a part of. Yes, our bodies and minds will be engaged in normal and sensible ways as our gifts operate, but—if we are in fellowship and know what we are doing (i.e., know God’s Word), God will be the one operating His gift in us and around us, and He will get the glory that only He deserves.

There are some surprising implications surrounding the topic of gifts from God. We will not spend much time exploring the different *kinds* of gifts, or in analyzing the *function* of specific gifts. These have been treated thoroughly in other works by other students of the Word. Our primary focus here, as always, is to see how *God* operates. Regarding gifts, we want to see how God works in the dispensation and use of these gifts, and what these mean to us. We will also address in this study some of the conflicts that have arisen pertaining to gifts.

Definition. A gift from God is the power of the Holy Spirit configured to function within an individual believer in a special way for the purpose of assisting and strengthening other believers in order for God to be glorified, and/or to advance the gospel of Christ.

God Gives Gifts for Service. God gives gifts so they can be used in service for the body of Christ. It all started with the ascension of Christ. Ephesians 4:8 quotes Psalms, saying, “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” Christ “gave gifts to men” for a reason. These gifts are to bolster, support, and strengthen all the believers in the church. A strong church, then, will promote the gospel for unbelievers. God has ingeniously aligned all believers and all gifts to function harmoniously so that all the spiritual needs of all believers are met. Each believer has a contribution to make to the group, by God’s grace and through His strength, so that all believers benefit. Paul told the

Corinthians that they were “not lacking in any gift” (1 Cor. 1:7). God provides for the needs of every believer, and many times He uses other believers to do it.

The gifts that believers use are not for “money-making” or personal aggrandizement, but for service. Eph. 4:15-16 says the following:

...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.

Each believer has a part in helping other believers; each must use his gift to serve others. We see this clearly in 1 Pet. 4:10, which says this: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” Our gifts take many forms, differing greatly from one believer to the next, but the motivation is the same for all of them. The moving push comes from *love*. Eph. 4:2 tells us to support each other in love and to be “completely humble and gentle [and]...patient”. Eph. 4:15, cited above, calls for us to “speak the truth in love”. Love is the basis for the operation of our gift. 1 Pet. 1:8 makes a tender call for us to “love each other deeply”. When we love with God’s love, the service we are called to do is fulfilling and satisfying, because it is rooted in love.

Love is the driving force behind our gifted service, and it is also the objective. We serve because we love, and love is increased when we serve. Look at Eph. 4:16 again. As our gifts bring their benefit to each of us, we will “grow and build up” our love. Love...God’s love...makes each believer work, and brings the church together as a unit. Then, whether it is from an individual believer, or from the church, God’s work can get done. God’s work in us is a rich and fruitful product of our maturity. Can you imagine what would happen if all believers became mature?

Gifts should also be used with God’s *strength*. 1 Pet. 1:11 admonishes us with this: “If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” Gifts exercised outside God’s power are simply “talents”, and represent OUR efforts to do God’s work. These will not be sufficient to bring praise to God through Jesus Christ. To do God’s work *God’s way*, God has to do the work.

The Gifts. The gifts themselves are contained in lists or groups in several places in the New Testament. We want to look at some of these. Eph. 4:11 tells us this:

It was [Christ] 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.

The gifts of prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are designed to move believers toward maturity, so they can know the “fullness of Christ”, and fulfill God’s purpose for

each of them, and for the church. By consistently accessing the teaching ministries, we grow and mature, which enables us to get close to God, where we live in His light.

Romans chapter 12 gives us another discussion of gifts and cites several gifts that operate in the body of Christ. Rom. 12:3 sets up this discussion by saying that you should not “think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but rather think of your self with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” God gives us our gifts consistent with our faith in Him and His Word.

Rom. 12:4-6a describes the function of our gifts in the body of Christ. We all have important assignments, which is why we should be neither proud nor ashamed when it comes to our gifts. Verses 4-6a says the following:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

Verse 6b continues, beginning a delineation of specific gifts, saying, “If a man is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.” Once again, we see that gifts are affected by the level of our faith. In other words, maturity affects not only effectiveness *within* our gifts, but the *kind* of gift we get. Prophecy, for example, is repeatedly seen as a prominent gift, and will be given only if great faith exists in the person receiving this gift.

Verses 7-8 lists other gifts, as we see in the following:

If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

All of these gifts are for helping other believers do the job *their gifts* prescribe. So you not only have God to help you operate your gift, you also have the assistance of other believers. All this, once again, takes place in a circle of love and support. The next verse (Rom. 4:9) reminds us, “Love must be sincere.” With sincere love (the kind that comes from being close to God), we will see gifts functioning and flowing among believers throughout the church.

One more passage that cites gifts and discusses their operation is seen in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. This chapter is often cited in discussions of gifts, because it is a rich resource for understanding the place of gifts in our lives and in the church. Volumes can be, and have been, written concerning the concepts in this chapter, so we will make every effort to streamline our discussion about them.

1 Cor. 12:4-6 says, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” God operates His gifts differently from one

believer to the next, but the Holy Spirit is the power for all of us, so that all work (and righteousness and fruit and love) is done by God. God *works* all gifts in all believers.

1 Cor. 12:7 gives us this: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Each gift is a “manifestation” of the Spirit. If we want to see God at work, we only have to look at a mature believer *in fellowship*. This is as close as we come to actually seeing God...seeing Him working in mature believers.

1 Cor 12:8-10 lists significant gifts provided through the Holy Spirit, as follows:

- Message of wisdom
- Message of knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Miraculous powers
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing between spirits
- Speaking in different languages
- Interpretation of languages

Verse 11 adds this: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” Gifts are chosen, implanted, and implemented by God.

In 1 Cor. 12:12-26, Paul uses the analogy of the human body again to depict the importance of all gifts. No gifts are non-essential. They all count and contribute. All are to be equally honored, which is not to say that all gifts are equally “sought after”.

1 Cor. 12:27-30 tells us that each believer is a part of the body of Christ, which is the church. In the church God gives specific gifts, arranged in a certain order of priority, as we see in v. 28.

1. Apostles
2. Prophets
3. Teachers
4. Workers of miracles
5. Healing
6. Administration
7. Tongues

These gifts are desirable, some more than others. The result of this varied desirability is that some are “strived for” with greater intensity. In the middle of verse 30 (1 Cor. 12), Paul says, “But eagerly desire the greater gifts.” But what happens if we all want the same “coveted” gifts? This may be a problem. The NIV is the source for the translation of this phrase, but the translator offers an alternate translation in a footnote, as follows: “But you

are eagerly desiring the greater gifts.” I believe this translation is better, because it does a better job of setting up v. 31...which in turn introduces chapter 13. These believers were striving for the better gifts, and perhaps competing for the “top spots”, causing division and envy in their ranks. Verse 31 says, “And now I show you the most excellent way.” The better way is *love*. There is no competition in love. Remember that love is both the motive *and* the objective of gift functions. Love motivates gifts, and love increases because of the exchange of services.

Verse 31 introduces the classic “Love Chapter”, which is 1 Corinthians 13. The topic is “love”, but Paul is still thinking about gifts, a subject he wants his audience to know more about. 1 Cor. 12:1 says, “About spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.”. In chapter 13, Paul is citing love as a context for the operation of gifts. He sees love as the beginning and ending of all gifts, and presents it as superior to the gifts themselves. Without love, the gifts are meaningless. This means that the act of excluding God’s love and power from the operation of a gift makes the gift dormant and fruitless. We will not be productive outside of fellowship and maturity, because the function of a gift depends on the control of the Holy Spirit, and a full understanding of Scripture.

What we have gleaned from chapter 12, and so far from chapter 13, is that we should make every effort to find our gifts, and when we know what they are, we should be happy with them. If we operate in love, we will be happy with our own gifts, and for the gifts God has chosen for others.

One final point in this section from 1 Corinthians comes from chapter 14. In this chapter, Paul provides a perspective of the comparative value of tongues and prophecy. It appears that believers in Corinth were making too much of the gift of tongues, and were emphasizing them to the point that it was interfering with Bible study. Paul said tongues are great, and that he himself spoke in tongues more than any of them. But he told them that *prophecy is better*, because it is understandable and instructive. Prophecy helps all believers in the church, whereas speaking in tongues helps only the person speaking, unless the person himself, or another person, interprets what is being said. Paul wants order and clear purpose to prevail in church meetings, so that believers can be strengthened through increased teaching and understanding of the Word. We will say more about tongues and related gifts shortly.

Being Worthy of Our Calling. When God gives us our gifts, He is “calling” us to service. We will see more about the process of “calling” later in this study. At this point, we want to look at our requirement to make ourselves “worthy” of our calling (Eph. 4:1). God calls us to be saved, initially, and then He calls us to serve. Our task is to be “worthy of His calling”, as those who have been saved, but also as those who have been given a gift for service.

Eph. 4:4 says, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” There is unity in the church as a result of the specific call to service given to each believer. There are many jobs, but one mission. As we launch our role in achieving the objective God chooses for us, Eph. 4:1 tells us to “walk worthy of the calling in which you were called” (Endnote 12). To walk worthy of our calling and our gift, we must be confessing our sins, studying Scripture, praying, giving thanks, acknowledging God, expressing fear (and faith) in the Lord, staying God-conscious, trusting God’s promises, surrendering to God’s will, submitting our bodies to God’s service, and learning God’s will for our individual lives. If these sound foreign to you, please read, or re-read, *Getting Closer to God*. As we get closer to God, we will be able to walk worthy of our calling.

Paul again expressed his concern about readiness for service among believers in 2 Thess. 1:11-12, as follows:

...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. We pray this so the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was praying that they would fulfill God’s will in their lives through their faith (resulting from maturity), allowing God to fulfill the purposes He had given to them. The outcome of this is that Jesus Christ can be glorified *in them*. Note especially that verse 10 says, “by his power he [God]” does the fulfilling. Phil. 2:13 echoes this notion, which we have seen over and over again, saying, “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” He gives us the will, and He works within us, to “act” in the fulfillment of His good purpose.

God gives gifts to allow us the privilege of having Him work in us to do the things He wants done in our lives and in the church. I personally do not believe He *can’t do without us* (He can), but He gives us a chance to tag along as he does His work. I am reminded of a child that goes to work with his father, where he is dazzled and amazed at the things his father can do. We have to stay out of the way, but God lets us come along. The joy and privilege of being with Him at His work are boundless.

As we seek to walk worthy of our calling, we are told in 2 Tim. 1:6 to “fan into flame the gift of God”. This is one more call to move toward maturity. We see this again in 1 Tim. 4:13-16, where Paul admonishes Timothy, saying:

Until I come, attend to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not be neglectful of the gift in you, which was given to you through prophecy, with laying on of the hands of the elderhood. Meditate on these things; be in these things in order that your progress may be plain to all. Hold on to your self and to the teaching; continue in

them; for doing this, you will both deliver yourself and those hearing you. (Endnote 13)

The essence of not neglecting one's gift, or "fanning the flame" of a gift is the putting of ourselves passionately into the study of God's Word. We cannot say we believe God, or live for God, or serve God, or want more of God, IF WE DO NOT SPEND TIME learning about Him in His Word. Bible study is not an adjunctive activity that we do occasionally or incidentally. Serious, committed, *daily* study of the Bible is the only way we can find and practice God's will, especially as seen in the operation of the gift He has selected for us. When we study, our "progress will be plain to all". Our gifts will really work when we mature. God picks the gifts and (as we shall see) sets the timing for their being given to us. Our part is to keep moving toward their impartation and implementation by becoming full-grown believers.

Commissions from God in the Old Testament. We saw earlier that Christ gave gifts upon His ascension. The big gift, of course, was the release of the Holy Spirit into the souls of post-resurrection believers. That big gift, the Holy Spirit, brought many smaller gifts, the ones we receive to do special things for God. God's Spirit was not given in this way to Old Testament believers. Gifts, as such, were not the same as we have now. But that's another study. What we know is that God commissioned selected Old Testament believers to accomplish specific tasks. Here are three examples:

1. Gideon. In Judges 6:11-8:35, we see the story of Gideon, who was called on by God to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites and Amalekites, desert nomads who rode camels to raid the farms of the Jews. Gideon was called, but delayed, twice laying out fleeces to test God and make sure he understood that God was really in the call...and perhaps to find an excuse to get out of the commission. He finally acceded to God's call, and was very successful. It is interesting how many times God's call is resisted by believers, in the Old Testament, and even now. When we answer the call, good things happen.
2. Jonah. The classic "resister" is Jonah, as seen in the book of Jonah. Jonah was called to go and preach in Ninevah, which is in Assyria. The region was crawling with violent and cruel "gangs", and lawlessness prevailed. It was not safe, especially for someone challenging the behavior of the local thugs. Jonah's reluctance is understandable. The mission seemed suicidal. But God was calling, while Jonah was resisting. God's response to Jonah's refusal is well known: God prepared a fish to swallow Jonah. While the fish was at work digesting Jonah, Jonah was at work digesting God's call. By the end of three days in the belly of the fish, Jonah agreed to go to Ninevah, where he was quite successful. If we resist the gift and calling God chooses for us, we may find ourselves in a dark and uninviting place that really stinks.

3. Moses. Moses was called on to convince Pharaoh to release God's people, and then to lead them out of Egypt. We see his calling in Num. 12:1-16. Buried in this passage, in verse 3, is a citation of the quality that made Moses most attractive to God. This verse says, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Gifts and their successful operation are often associated with humility, as we see in the following:

- Rom. 12:3—Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.
- Rom. 12:16—Do not be proud; do not be conceited.
- Eph. 4:2—Be completely humble and gentle.

Moses was the prime example of humility, yet he provided strength and leadership for his people through seemingly impossible times. Gifts thrive on humility.

Paul's Calling. In Rom. 1:1 and 1 Cor. 1:1, Paul identifies himself as a "called apostle". He was "a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). Eph. 3:7-8 is more specific, saying this:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people [note the humility], this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ....

Here they are again: God's gift, God's grace, and the working of God's power, swirling around in the life of an humble believer with a well-defined mission. Paul was mature, full of faith, surrendered, and unequivocally committed to doing things God's way. The tree he planted by God's grace is still bearing fruit. To God, he was a servant; to us, he is an absolute hero. Thank God for Paul, for his perseverance and faith, for what his teaching means to us every day. Thank God for calling Paul, who prepares us to be called, as well.

Paul knew Who called him, and what he was to do. He knew Who sent him, and proclaimed it by saying, "Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father..." (Gal. 1:1).

The Timing of Paul's Calling. There is much that we want to say about God's time and timing, and we begin with the timing of Paul's calling. The calling of Paul has a dual meaning, as it does for each of us. God "calls" us to be saved, knowing in eternity past that we would believe in Christ. And God "calls" us to service by imparting gifts to us. These events might happen at the same time, as they did with Paul, who was called to be saved, and called to preach, both at one time. Or they might occur at different times. The timing, as you might suspect, is up to God, and He can do WHATEVER He wants, WHENEVER He wants.

Bible Basics on Maturity: Pathway to the Worthwhile Life

NOTE: There are respected students of the Word who believe *everyone* receives his gift at salvation. This could be so, but evidence exists that the operation of our gifts are products of advancing faith and maturity, as we shall see. It could be that they are received in “embryonic” form, waiting to “hatch”, or to be “fanned into flame” (2 Tim. 1:6).

In Gal. 1:13-16, Paul describes his calling, as we see in the following:

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man....

Notice that Paul’s life did not seem particularly useful as preparation for the ministry. He persecuted Christians, and was absorbed in the teachings and traditions of a law-based belief system. But he was picked out by God for his mission before he was even born. God knew what Paul was going to do, and hand-picked him long before he was actually put into service, a calling that was already being prepared at the time Saul (Paul), an unbeliever, was terrorizing Christians.

One of the often-overlooked truths of God’s Word, one that tells us so much about God, is the immutable, undeniable fact of God’s foreknowledge. He can plan things, well in advance (as in an *eternity* before something happens), because He knows the end from the beginning. Rom. 8:28-30 spells this out, referring to God’s selection of those who are going to be saved. Here is what this passage says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Do I believe in predestination? Yes. Do I believe in man’s free will? Yes. How can these be reconciled? By understanding the foreknowledge of God. God “foreknows” those who will accept Christ as their Savior, and He plans the occasion and time of their salvation, as He did for Paul. He does the same thing for the granting of our gifts, and for *every single detail of our lives*. God is in charge of all outcomes, and has enfolded them into His plan.

God is in Absolute Control. God is in control of everything. We confuse this, sometimes, because we think *we* are in control. Dan. 2:20-22 gives us samples of things that God controls, as follows:

- Wisdom and power
- Times and seasons

- Setting up and taking down kings
- Knowledge
- Secrets of the deep
- Light

God controls technology, economies, weather, the working of the components of time (planets, sun, moon, stars), knowledge, governments, and light (energy). These are representative of the extent of God's control, but they make a pretty exhaustive list. There is really nothing that He does not control.

Since God is in control, each of us must examine his response to God's authority and power. James 4:13-15 reminds us that things we plan must take place within the scope of God's power and God's will. This passage says the following:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money"....Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

These verses call attention to one small thing that we tend to forget: God is in charge of absolutely everything, including what we do today or tomorrow. If it is not God's will that we do "this or that" today or tomorrow, it will not be done. God has absolute power over everything, including life and death. At the same time, we have free will while we are alive. So how can God's absolute control and our free will be brought together? What is there that enables God to implement *His will* without removing the *free will* He has given us?

Here is how it works: God has foreknowledge, as we have said. He knows the choices we are going to make...every one of them for all of our lives...and He knows every infinitesimal detail of every event or non-event since pre-time. He not only knows what is going to happen, He knows what to do about it. He fashions His "will" around the events He knows will be caused by our "choices". God's perfect response in planning each moment so that our choices remain intact while His will is done is testimony to His infinite genius and capacity. We *must* see God's infinite power in this, and "fear" it (in our case, "trust" it).

Only God has the power to bring about all the events in the world in such a way as to allow our choices to be made freely, while He implements divine actions that maintain the integrity of His will. He makes both realities co-existent and true. We have free will; God has absolute control. This does not mean that God "likes" everything that happens, but that what happens complies with His will *under the circumstances* (the conditions that are brought about by our choices). On each page of history, God arranges it so that everything that happens works for good for believers who walk with Him. And *ultimately*, perhaps *eventually*, God's purpose, will, and plan are fulfilled.

Our task in time is to learn to make choices that correspond with His will. Thus we see the importance of learning more about Him and getting closer to Him, our great God. In the

very chapter that talks about gifts, Romans 12, we see in the first two verses the need for us to surrender to God and be changed (by maturing) through the process of study, so that we can know God's will. This passage says this:

Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Notice that mercy, or *forgiveness* must be seen before we will be prepared to offer our bodies, be renewed in our minds, and find God's will. Confession of sins is the first step toward spiritual renewal, maturity, and service.

God's Timing. God comes to us in time...in His own time, and in the time that He owns. His timing is perfect, fitting into the framework of absolute control that we just discussed. Gen. 1:4-5, and 14-19, tell about God creating morning and evening, and days and years. In effect, he created time. God existed before time, so He is not limited *by* time. He exists both inside and outside of time. Here are some verses that show God's relationship to time:

- Exodus 3:14-15. "God said to Moses, 'I Am who I Am....This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. This is God's name *forever*."
- Ps. 93:2. "Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity." The scope of God's existence is eternal.
- 1 Chron. 16:36. "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting." He is the God of Israel from one end of eternity to the other.
- Heb. 13:8. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Christ is co-eternal with God the Father.
- Jude 1:25. "...to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore." Into the past forever, into the future forever, glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to Jesus Christ.

God's time is not our time, although He can operate *in* our time. We must get the picture of God's control of time, down to the tiniest micro-second. As a "mono-phasic" person (that can do only one thing at a time), it is hard for me to imagine how God can keep up with all that He does. But His job is in good hands (His own). I am sure it is easy for God to look at us and say, "I can see that if this job is going to get done right, I'm going to have to do it myself." Thank God He does it. I have the feeling that, when we try to do *His* work, we must look like buffoons.

Seeing Ourselves in God's Time. Let me remind you that our topic is "Gifts". I assure you that what we are saying ties into that topic. The things we are considering now feed into a greater understanding of the place of gifts, and give us a framework for their operation.

We begin now to see ourselves in the larger world of God's absolute control of everything, relating to a Heavenly Father that is not only greater than time, but invented it. We do have a place in His time, and it is time to see where we fit in.

Eccl. 3:1 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." This is the most significant truth we can learn concerning time. We have often heard that everything has a place. But here we see that everything has a time. God controls the "what" and the "how" of our lives, and He also controls the "when". When God determines that the time is right for a thing to occur, it will happen...not before...and not after.

One of the most beautiful, God-acknowledging passages in the Bible is found in the book of Acts, chapter 17, verses 24-28, which reads, as follows:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and [He] does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Do you get the size? The scope? The power? The control of everything, including time? This is our God. He determines times and places throughout eternity, yet He is inside of you, waiting for you to reach out to Him every day, to acknowledge Him, to draw near to Him.

We can get close to God, but we will still not know when things are going to happen. In Acts 1:6-7, the disciples asked Jesus, "Is it time?" Here's what they asked specifically, and how He responded: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He answered, saying, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." God sets the times and dates for everything...by His authority. Eccl. 9:11-12 substantiates this truth, saying the following:

I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the mighty; nor even bread to the wise; nor even riches to the men of discernment; nor even favor to knowing men—for time and occurrence happen to them all. For man also does not know his time. (Endnote 14)

No matter one's station or status, no one knows "his time". We do not know when our lives on earth will end, because *God controls time*. Heb. 9:27 tells us "each man is destined to die once." The operative word is "destined". The time for us to die is established, a time of God's choosing.

God does everything on the schedule He makes. 1 Pet. 5:6 says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” He will lift us up when it pleases Him. When we get in a hurry for God to act or move, we are operating in human-viewpoint time, not God’s. His schedule is timed to perfection. His time is right.

Even our salvation takes place at a particular time, as we see in Eph. 1:4-5, which gives us this description of our “adoption” into Christ:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...

See how far back the foreknowledge of God goes? He chose us “before the creation of the world”. He knew our names and that we would respond to His universal call to salvation, even *before* the first beam of light pierced the darkness of pre-creation.

God also planned our production for Him. The good things that will come as a result of our relationship with Him were designed long ago. Eph. 2:10 confirms this, by saying, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God anticipates every sin confessed, every prayer, every moment of attention to His Word, every act of love, every giving of thanks, every acknowledgement of His Deity. And He plans around it because He knows it is coming. When we get close to Him, we participate in His perfect will and He becomes the executor of His own plan through us.

Waiting on God’s Time. If God is in charge of time, and if he gives us our “gift” when it pleases Him, that means our job will be to prepare to receive that gift. 1 Cor. 12:11, cited previously, told us that God gives us our gifts “just as he determines”. The timing and manner of dispensation of those gifts will be decided by God, and not by us. We might feel impatient sometimes when we feel God’s schedule is not quite up to the 21st Century pace. We want it NOW. But God wants us to *wait* for the right time. Here are some verses that calm our anxious hearts, calling for us to trust, hope, study, and “wait”:

- Ps. 37:34. “Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land.”
- Is. 26:8. “Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you.”
- Ps. 33:20. “We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.”
- Ps. 27:14. “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”
- Ps. 130:5. “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.”
- Mic. 7:7. “But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.”

- Hab. 2:3. “For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”
- Ps. 38:15. “I wait for you, O Lord; you will answer, O Lord, my God.”
- Ps. 37:7. “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways when they carry out their wicked schemes.”

When we truly understand that it is God that controls everything, we will know that even in waiting, we are blessed and cared for. God loves us. He is patient with us. He is forgiving. How can we choose to go the way of *our* choosing and ignore the opportunities God gives us to access the control of His Spirit, the truth of His Word, and the work of His kingdom? How can we not surrender to so great a God? How can we not wait for His time? How can we refuse His gift? Wait for it. He will give it at the right time.

The Conflict Over Whether Some Gifts Are Temporary. We are going to discuss here the notion that certain gifts are temporary, and did not continue beyond the early church. Our current observation is that many Christian groups espouse and practice the so-called “temporary” gifts as part of their worship and service to God. Many argue that these gifts are not the continuing expression of spirituality that these groups claim. It is difficult to ascertain the correct scriptural position on this issue. It is possible that God may have allowed a little vagueness about the operation or cessation (discontinuance) of certain gifts, so that He could introduce or remove their function in ways we cannot describe. He can use them for now, take them away for awhile, and bring them back, as needed. That is, of course, His divine prerogative.

Gifts in question include apostleship, prophesy, healing, “miracles”, tongues, interpretation of tongues, discernment of spirits, and others. One of the proof passages used by those who believe certain gifts are temporary is derived from Eph. 2:19-20, which says this:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Kick-starting the church called for special spiritual gifts, according to one interpretation of this passage, and then once the church was underway, or when the “foundation” was completed (with Jesus as the “chief cornerstone”), these gifts were no longer needed. They had served their purpose, and could therefore be discontinued. The foundation is laid *once*, and after that the building is erected on top of the foundation. Only one foundation can be laid. Apostles and prophets, part of the foundation, were engaged at *one time*, but their “foundational” work does not need to be repeated over and over

Another argument that some gifts may be temporary is based on an interpretation of Rev. 21:14, which says that the names of the twelve “apostles of the Lamb” are written on the

twelve foundations of the wall of the Holy City of Jerusalem. This list seems to consist of only twelve apostles. Those claiming to be apostles beyond the main twelve do not have this confirmation that they are legitimate.

Probably the best known passage used to dispute the current viability of certain gifts today is found in 1 Cor. 13, verses 8-12. This passage is used to suggest that the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and special revelation (knowledge) are temporary and do not exist today as authentic spiritual gifts. These verses say the following:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

The argument that this passage anticipates the cessation of tongues, prophecy, and special knowledge is compelling. The case is made that the “perfection” that is anticipated is the completed Scripture. When it is completed, it will be perfect, and then we will “know fully”, so these special gifts will be unnecessary and will “pass away”. This is because we will have everything we need in the completed Bible. The counter-argument is that the “perfection” cited is actually Jesus Christ, Whom we will see “face to face”, and then each of us will “know fully, even as I am fully known”.

These arguments have been made and countered by accomplished scholars, and the discussion continues between opposing sides. The disagreement will not be settled here. But we can, perhaps, create a new framework for considering this issue.

First of all, God can give whatever gifts He wants, whenever He wants. Miracles were seen by Moses, but not so much by David. Manifestations of God’s power may differ from time to time...but God is still perfect and all-powerful. His placement and timing are precisely engineered. He may choose to “pause” certain gifts at certain times in history. And if He chooses to rejuvenate these gifts when it fits His agenda, He will do it...without notice or permission. Different times will be accommodated by His perfect will and choice in different ways. The difference is...well...perfect. We cannot take away from God His pre-eminence and His *a priori* authority to administer gifts purely as He decides. Gifts may indeed come and go, but God is always the same. Each of us needs to take care of his own special gift(s) and his own spiritual growth and preparation, and let God cover the details.

Secondly, I think it is important that believers everywhere embrace the holy Word of God as the final and authoritative voice of our Father to us, and place it at the center of our lives and our mission, so that we unify our purpose behind His will, and feed daily on the divine nature that we find in Scripture. Rev. 22:18 says, “I warn everyone who hears the words of

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the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.” The book is closed.

I believe the Bible is complete, and that any words, spoken or written, that go against the Word are to be disregarded, and any gift that is used as a substitute for focused study of the Bible is not to be honored. We do not need “new information”. Gifts of prophecy, and tongues, and even special abilities to understand God’s truths, may exist today, but *these must never add to or take away from anything the scriptures say*. These must always confirm and support what the Bible teaches. If we want to know what God is all about, how to relate to Him through His Son, how to relinquish power to the Holy Spirit within us, how to get closer to God, and how to find and do His will, we can find it all written out for us in the canon of the Holy Bible. The Word of God must remain at the center of all that we are and all we do. Without it, we will not know the way.

Finish. To know God, we must look into His Word. The Word teaches us about His place within us, so we can experience His power throughout life’s journey. We will confess our sins to Him so we can draw near to Him...to a place where He can lift us up. We will pray to Him so we can cast our care on Him and give Him thanks. We will acknowledge Him to remind ourselves of His imposing size, beauty, and extent. Then, when we realize what a great God He is, we will involuntarily stop in our tracks, drop to our knees, and proclaim our thanks to Him for giving us life. We will be overwhelmed, weak with praise.

Products of Maturity

Introduction. This chapter is about things that come from maturity. This study has been broken up into two basic parts: 1) things that *decrease* with maturity, and 2) things that *increase* with maturity. There is no way to truncate this topic. If you become seat-weary reading this chapter, you will need to take it by parts or sections to keep the volume at a manageable level. The contents of this chapter emerge, somewhat intentionally, as a summary of many of the things we have learned, because maturity is at the core of everything we want to see and achieve as believers. Many previous studies are embedded in this study, along with a smattering of new concepts.

Maturity is crucial in the process God has given us for getting close to Him. But maturity is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, which is to get close to God. When we mature, we have at our disposal all of God’s techniques and methods for accessing His grace, power, mercy, and holiness. Until we are mature, these things remain elusive and unattainable. Maturity empowers us to receive the fullness of God in Christ, and enables Him to fulfill His purpose for us...through us. It seems we put forth so much effort to find God and please God, yet—no matter how motivated we are—we *cannot* please God until we have reached a level of maturity that we can know what He wants. At maturity, we learn that it is our reception of His gifts to us, and not our efforts for Him, that please Him most.

The mature believer will see certain “products”, or outcomes, with his attainment of maturity, and these will give him victory over sin, the world, and the devil. Things that bring displeasure to God will diminish. At the same time, all the things on the “Checklist for Maturity”, seen in the previous series, *Getting Closer to God*, will be in greater evidence. These include such things as regular confession of sins, daily Bible study, constant prayer with thanksgiving, consistent acknowledging of God and His Son, fear of the Lord, God-consciousness, believing God’s promises (His Word), faithfully surrendering to God’s will, and submission of our bodies to God’s service.

To better understand the things that *decrease* with maturity, i.e., the things we want to see less of, and to appreciate the things that *increase* with maturity, we will review scriptures that describe examples of each. The objective throughout our studies has been to isolate specific procedures from the Bible that tell us how to become believers who are stronger and more sophisticated in God’s ways, so we can get close to Him and know the ultimate life he has in mind for us.

Our biggest problem is that we think small, reducing God to some nice little companion that accompanies us through the day to “help” us...rather than seeing Him as the infinite God of everything, Who wants us to let Him be Himself...in us. Being mature means giving God credit for being Who He is, and recognizing that—without Him—we are nothing.

When we can see and acknowledge this, God can achieve great things through us, and produce in us the qualities that are fully His own, yet become ours. In this study we will delineate the things that happen as we become mature. But first, let's remind ourselves what we have already learned about maturity.

Maturity Revisited. Maturity is our aim. 2 Cor. 13:11 says, "Aim for perfection...and the God of love and peace will be with you." God commands us through Paul to set our sights on becoming mature. This is to be our goal. Not getting rich, not being famous, not "wowing the world" with our talents, not stacking up possessions, not even having interesting or exciting experiences...but MATURING. This should be the aspiration of every full-time Christian...the ones who believe that this life is just the beginning of a much greater and longer life, and who know that only what is done by God himself—through us—is important and lasting. The rest is drivel, including the things we do "in the flesh", even with the best of intentions.

Jesus set our standard for maturity in Matt. 5:48, when He commanded, "Be perfect, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." We can never achieve this, of course (except in the sense of our eternal standing with God, whereby we are credited with the righteousness of Jesus Christ because we have believed in Him and have been saved forever). But we have learned that we can follow God's pathway for growth, and that this will move us in the direction of God's perfection.

Paul considered it his job to teach believers so that they would mature. In Col. 1:28, he wants all his readers to mature, so that he will be able to offer them to God as his fruit, for God's glory, presenting "everyone perfect [mature] in Christ". Paul knew that by teaching the believers he was addressing, they would be "rooted and built up in him [Christ], strengthened in the faith as you were taught" (Col. 2:7). Unfortunately, some were not responding to his teaching, and could not move up through the ranks of maturity. In Heb. 5, he scolded believers for not progressing toward maturity, saying in verse 12, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" He follows this in the next chapter with the admonition for them to "leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity" (Heb. 6:1).

Studying is important, but when we hear the teachings of God's Word, we must *believe* them so they will process into our souls and nourish us with the divine nature of God. In 2 Tim. 3:7, Paul pointed to believers who were "always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth." If we do not *see* the truth in what we are going over in scripture, the truth will not benefit us. If we don't *believe* the Word as it is imparted to us, it will not help us grow. We can sit in Bible class endlessly, and still not mature, unless we attach our faith to the things we hear as we study the Word. Heb. 4:2b repeats this idea, saying, "The message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith". Our

faith in God and His Word must be brought to our studies. Otherwise, we just as well go fishing.

The presumption also exists, based on previous studies, that all sins will be confessed as we approach our studies, since the Holy Spirit is our tutor and we will not grasp the things of God if we are not led by Him. You must confess your sins to Him, so He can teach you. As you mature, you will be in fellowship more of the time (because you will be more faithful in confession, and will actually sin less), which leads to more learning and more maturity. This is the way God wants us to go.

We will look now at our two primary considerations: 1) things that *diminish* with maturity, and 2) things that *increase* with maturity. By the time we finish this study, you will have a clear idea of where you should be headed in your Christian life...and why it is worth your effort to get there.

Things That Diminish with Maturity

Sin: Our Nemesis. Sin separates us from God. God hates sin, and sin qualifies mankind to be punished forever for choosing it. Sin is big enough in the divine order that God found it necessary to send His Son to pay our penalty for sin. This is huge. Sin is the biggest problem we have.

All of the outcomes of sin are bad, and destruction is in its wake. Christ paid our penalty for sin by dying on the cross, a substitution we accept by believing it. Through believing, we accept His gift and are saved forever. Then we further access God's forgiveness in the course of our lives as Christians. This is done through 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Sin is big enough that it requires the power and strength of our Great God to defeat it, which is why this enemy of God and man represents the greatest negative force in creation. Sin cannot be ignored, and gives a good reason to aim for maturity, in order that we can participate in the victory over it.

If we do not mature, sin may become our master. In 1 Cor. 6:12b, the ever-growing Paul says, "I will not be mastered by anything," agreeing with Peter that "a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him" (2 Pet. 2:19). At the heart of slavery to sin is *unbelief*. Everything bad we do comes from not believing in God and His Word. In Heb. 3:12, we see Paul's warning: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." Sin thrives on unbelief, which culminates as inattention to Bible study, bypassing confession, and disregard for prayer. Maturity increases our faith, which enables us to deal with sin.

We see then that intake of Scripture will strengthen us against sin. Prov. 6:20-23a makes this clear, as follows:

Bible Basics on Maturity: Pathway to the Worthwhile Life

My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light.

Scriptures show us the way. As we have seen in former studies, Peter gives us the same hope in 2 Pet. 1:3-4, saying this:

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.

Maturity equips us to escape sin. Also, as we mature, we learn more about sin itself, and come to see it for what it is. Rom. 1:29-31 helps us with this, as we see here:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

This is the behavior of a sin-infected humanity. Those of us who have believed in Christ have been rescued from any obligation to behave this way, but in many ways, on many occasions, we still do; which is why God provides the mechanism of confession for us to find forgiveness for sins.

Gal. 5:19 lists acts of the sinful nature, which will be seen less as we mature. Here is that list: "sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like." Col. 3:5-9 repeats some of these, adding even more, as follows:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in this way in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

There it is. Sin. With maturity, as we have seen in previous studies, we will be renewed through knowledge (uh, yes...knowledge *believed*), with the result that we will behave in a way that reflects Christ. The mature believer will not live the way unbelievers or immature believers do. A mature life is a *moral* life, not because we discipline ourselves to play by the rules, but because we have found the strength that comes from knowing God through His

Word. As moral behavior increases, sin decreases. Removing sin is the most difficult assignment we have, and removal of sinful practices and thoughts will only come with maturity. In addition, by maturing, we fulfill our *greatest responsibility* as believers...getting closer to God.

We have seen lists of sins that haunt us and stymie our relationship with God. To get a better understanding of these sins, we must look more closely at what the Scripture says about them. If we were to discuss in detail all the dangers and perils of the sins we have listed, volumes would emerge. So we will limit our review of individual sins to several “bad” or onerous ones, to establish how important maturity is in removing them.

Anger. Anger is tricky, ambushing us at the most inopportune times, and destroying opportunities and relationships and stability in ways that can be permanently devastating. Col. 3:8 says, “Get rid of anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language. These are destructive practices that have no place in our Christian walk, and cause significant losses in our spiritual effectiveness. James 1:19-21 reminds us of the kinds of problems that come with anger, and gives us the solution, at no extra charge:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.

Anger does not help us in achieving righteous behavior. Instead, it drags us down. The solution for anger is plain: “the word planted in you”. God’s Word feeds us and leads us toward maturity, thus delivering us from immorality.

Eccl. 7:9 gives us practical advice regarding anger: “Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.” A person enraged is an idiot. Verse 8 had said, “Patience is better than pride”. We will talk more about pride below, but one of the greatest contributors to anger is pride. So, a sin—*pride*—gets us into *anger*, which can prompt all kinds of sins: hatred, violence, murder, criticism, insults, slander, destruction of others’ property, and other things that may hurt others, many of which end up shaming and hurting *us*, as well. That is why people who anger quickly are characterized as fools. Psalms 37:8 adds this: “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”

Anger is one of those compounding sins, leaving a trail of destruction behind it. Anger all by itself is not necessarily a sin, but anger often comes from a sinful state, such as pride, and often leads to sin, such as hatred or murder. And anger immediately makes us vulnerable to our sinful nature, the world, and the devil. Eph. 4:26-27 says the following: “In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” So it is possible to be angry and not sin, but anger can be an opportunity for the devil to snag us. And how many times do we get angry and NOT sin? Not very often. Once the devil has a “foothold”, he can partner immediately with our sinful nature...and the

world...to take us down to the mat. But there is hope. As we mature, anger will come under control.

Sins of the Tongue. The things we *say* can be devastating; the tongue of an immature believer, who spends most of his time out of fellowship, is a weapon of mass destruction. Prov. 11:9a says, “With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor....” Incidentally, the rest of that verse says that “through knowledge the righteous escape”. There’s that knowledge thing again...seems to be the solution for everything. Verse 13 in that chapter (Ch. 11) discloses this: “A gossip betrays a confidence”, which means that unbelievers or immature believers cannot keep a secret, and don’t care who gets hurt when they tell their stories.

Here are some additional sins of the tongue, seen in verses that show their destructiveness:

- The lips can hide deceit. Prov. 26:24—“A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit.”
- Lying is hateful and hurtful. Prov. 26:28—“A lying tongue hates those it hurts.”
- The tongue is untamable. James 3:7-10—“No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”
- Complaining and arguing remove our purity (put us out of fellowship). Phil. 2:14-16—“Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold on to the word of life.”
- God will judge grumblers, fault-finders, boasters, and insincere flatterers. Jude 1:15-16 says, “...to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him. These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.”

Sins of the tongue are often overlooked, because they seem minor and less heinous than some of the other sins. But they are sins all the same, and can leave us in spiritual freefall at the flick of a tongue.

Pride. Pride is sneaky. It promises to be our life boat in the rough seas of our own psychology, where we swirl around in whirlpools of neediness and self-doubt. We boast and brag and peacock up and down to get recognition, until we start to believe our own projections of ourselves and begin to see ourselves as we wish we were...competent, stable, intelligent, commanding, and productive. But pride will not rescue us, and is guaranteed to eventually destroy us, as well as those in our periphery. The big problem with pride is this: it makes us believe we can save ourselves. It is our solution to the depraved nature we’re

born with, or the demoralizing state we're born into. And it leaves God out. Pride is the cause for our turning our backs on God. We are sufficient in ourselves, you see, and we can do without God. This is the arrogance that prompted Satan, and now drives us. It must be dealt with, but this won't happen until we are mature, when we will finally know Who is in charge.

Ps. 10:4 says, "In his pride the wicked [one] does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." Pride shoves God out. It is no wonder He hates it, as it states in Prov. 8:13, "I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech." Pride prevents us from learning, since we refuse to humble ourselves to the level of "student", refusing to admit that we don't "know it all". "Pride only breeds quarrels" (Prov. 13:10), and pride brings us down. Prov. 29:23 says, "A man's pride brings him low."

Remember Nebuchadnezzar? He strutted around his castle and kingdom, and bragged about all he had done by his own might and in his own strength. He lost his kingdom soon after he said that. Seven years later, he was restored as king, because he had figured out that only God can put you up...and He can also bring you down. In Dan. 4:36-37 Nebuchadnezzar said this:

At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way. But he learned. This brought him back to his "sanity", which is the place of maturity that it took him seven years of living among the foxes to reach. But then he was ready to rule, because he had been prepared for it by becoming humble before God.

Finally, pride thrives in the world, the stage on which it plays out its devious part. 1st Jn. 2:16 says "everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father, but from the world." Unbelievers and immature believers look to the world to sustain them, satisfy them, and supply them. The mature believer looks to God to lift him up.

Greed and Envy. Prov. 27:20 says, "Death and destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the [greedy] eyes of man." Greed is insatiable. The more that is acquired, the greater the desire for even more. The greedy wants all he sees and imagines, which feeds greed, but does not fill it. Money, things, and experiences are like quicksand. Figures and sums and inventories and itineraries promise to satisfy, but always disappoint, as new aspirations arise. Satisfaction is elusive and illusory. The greed cycle is an endless loop. And no matter how low one's estate, or how high, the process is the same. The operative word is "more"...give

me more. Only the mature believer understands the distinction between gains in the world, and provisions from God. We see this in Heb. 13:5-6, which says this:

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.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

God will provide what we need. Our job is to aim for maturity, so we will know His provision when we see it. What are we going to do? Are we going to love money and things, or trust God? As we mature, the answer will become clear to us. Without it we will not realize the meaning of Eccl. 4:6, “Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.” When we mature, and learn to trust God, tranquility will come, and we will enjoy what we have.

Envy, that dry, hollow feeling we get when we see someone with a quality or feature or thing that we would like to have, screams within us at times, demanding to know why the things others have or achieve are not ours. If the sin of envy owns us, we will be destroying ourselves. Prov. 14:30 tells us that “envy rots the bones”. What is often hardest for us to get past without envy raising its ugly head, is seeing unbelievers or baby believers (who may well resemble unbelievers) being successful and wealthy and perhaps even famous, while we may struggle with less. In two different verses we are warned against pre-occupation with this, as follows:

1. Prov. 24:19-20—“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.”
2. Prov. 23:17—“Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.”

We see this over and over: the human, world-centered perspective and the divine viewpoint. The world view places man at the apex, and prompts us to tend to our selves and “save” ourselves. The “God” view is that humans are helpless, and that God *is* everything, and *does* everything. The world view does not understand this. So when the world dominates our minds, in league with our flesh and the devil, we see ourselves as the final arbiters of our fate, and the primary solver of all our problems and satisfier of all our needs and whims. The false world becomes real, and our real God becomes a fantasy. When will we ever learn? I know...when we mature, which, by the way, we do *because* we learn.

Where is our enthusiasm to be invested...our “zeal”? In the “fear of the Lord”. This is where life gets real, and when we see the world for what it is.

Sexual Immorality. God gave us the overpowering urge to engage in sexual relations, and then He set up limitations for its operation. Sex is probably the hardest sin to discuss in any detail, and is the most frequently-violated standard that God has established. Sex is

powerful, self-perpetuating, and cyclically rewarding. It compels repetition of seemingly-satisfying patterns that are established as permanent tendencies, deviant or otherwise. Add to this the pervasive communications media that is available, and sex becomes universally rampant, presenting Satan and the world with great tools for temptation...and providing sinful natures with endless opportunities for engagement. Sex is beautiful, but it can get ugly and will derail our Christian walk in a single furtive glance. And once the sinful nature is underway with a sexual outcome in mind, herds of mules cannot hold it back.

Sexual decency can only come with the power of God. We will not beat this one by ourselves. Thank God for His power and strength that fill our souls and minds and crowd out ALL indecent thoughts and behavior. Pay close attention to what we are saying: God CAN help with this huge problem and impediment. He can beat it, and you can benefit from His victory. But this will not be quick and easy.

1 Cor. 6:18 says this:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

God repeatedly rules against sexual immorality. If this is a weakness for you, as it is for many believers, focus on what the Word says about it, as you mature. Maturity will bring relief, but the battle is a hard one along the way, and it can destroy your Christian production, and even your life. It can bring great pain to you and to those you love. We must not forget that God is in our presence...and *inside* of us.

In Jeremiah, God gave the venerable prophet the following to pass on to the people of Israel: “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury...and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’—safe to do all these detestable things? ...but I have been watching! Declares the Lord” (Jer. 7:9-11). God is watching everything we do. This is an intimidating realization. We are in full view of the very One Who controls all things, and Who has warned us that we will be punished for our sins.

Prov. 6:32 says, “But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself.” This sounds serious, and goes along with the idea that sexual sins are aimed like a rocket-propelled grenade right at our own bodies. Sin destroys us. That is why God’s orders are clear, ranging from the commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14), to Jesus’ exact words, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). The standards are lucid; the consequences are dire.

Paul repeatedly warns against immorality, especially the sexual kind, which always seems to be at the top of his lists. For example, look at this one in Col. 3:5-6, where Paul says, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed.... Because of these the wrath of God is coming.” Such a slaying of sin will only come with maturity, which means the immature believer will be easy prey for sexual sins. God grant that our pathway to maturity will be straight and swift. We need it *now*. Sexual immorality is out of control. Maturity is the solution. Maturity is worth the effort, if for no other reason than this: the victory over the potent sin of sexual immorality is especially sweet.

Punishment. We need a reminder that God punishes sin. Christ paid our penalty for sin, which takes care of our eternal standing with God. But sin still exists in the world, and in our lives, so God prescribes punishment for sins. For unbelievers the punishment is eternity in conscious agony. For believers, punishment is seen as divine discipline, up to and including physical death. God will do what He has to...to get believers to humble themselves and confess their sins, and to get them to focus on His Word to find ways out of their troubles in this world. And if simple punishment will not work, He will increase it...significantly. Lev. 26:18 says, “If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride....” We know what to do: confess when we sin, and mature through absorption of God’s Word. Otherwise, the outlook will be bleak.

Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem repented to avoid God’s wrath, as we see in 2 Chron. 32:26, which tells us, “Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the Lord’s wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah.” God has provided a way for us to avoid punishment, which is to agree with Him about the things we do wrong. Jer. 2:19 confirms this, saying the following:

Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me, declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.

Such is the plight of the believer out of fellowship. And what’s worse, the end of his time may come sooner than he wants. Ezek. 33:18 tells us, “If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so.” Our moral condition is seen by God and if it is not good, He will respond to that condition with discipline. Woe to immature believers, who feed on milk, if they even feed at all. The road ahead for them is rocky, eventually running them off a cliff (meaning their journey may end unnecessarily early). Maturity enables believers to forego such calamity.

Conclusion of Things That Diminish with Maturity. So we see several things: 1) sin is the thing that disrupts our fellowship with God, 2) sin will keep us from honoring and

completing God's plan, and 3) sin will bring punishment. We have seen more than once in previous studies that maturity leads to free access to God's power, whereby we can resist the devil, avoid giving in to temptations from the world, and overpower our own sinful natures. We have established that sin diminishes with maturity, thus avoiding the consequences that God will cause if sin persists without confession.

We must pay attention to the things of God if we are going to conquer sin and move on to maturity. If we don't care, or if we don't believe what God says, then we will not grow, and we will struggle and suffer because of it. We know the things God hates. We know how to remove them from our lives. To delay in doing this can be perilous. Call the "Sin Hotline": CON-FES-SION...today.

Now, we will look at another subsection, in which we will see things that increase with maturity.

Things That Increase with Maturity

Confession of Sins. Confession of sins is something we will do more-faithfully as we mature. Concerning confession itself, we have visited this topic many times. But confession is like a diamond. It has many facets or sides. We are still turning it over and seeing new truths surrounding it. We have learned that confession is agreeing with God about our specific sins. The position we have taken in previous studies, based on the Greek word "*homologeō*" ("to say the same thing"), is that we name the sin and forgiveness is forthcoming. We hold to this firmly. But there's more.

As we learn more about confession, we see that it operates within an attitude of humility. We have talked a great deal about our unglamorous position as it relates to God, acknowledging that God is infinite and good, and that we are finite and bad. Confession fits into this hierarchy very well, since it recognizes that we are incapable of standards of behavior and thought that will satisfy God, and that grace alone presents our opportunity to be made acceptable to Him.

From the grace perspective, we are aware that we sin and that we are not worthy of fellowship with God, because God alone is holy. But when we acknowledge our weakness before God, give God His rightful place as the forgiver of the penitent, and express our awe before Him, we are reflecting a "spirit of confession", a form of confessing that actually looks like "fear of the Lord", or "acknowledgement", or "God-consciousness". This is confession that comes from humility. This draws God's mercy and forgiveness, as we see in Lk. 1:50, "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."

Sometimes, we feel so helpless in our sinful propensities that we just bow our heads in a kind of shame, and say, "I'm sorry, Father. I have sinned." We might not even know or be

able to enumerate the exact sins that sunk us, but we know we have sinned, and we know that we are helpless to stop it. We may have to say, “Father, forgive me for my sins.” This is confession. *Not confessing* is when we hide our sins, or ignore God and go on sinning with no regard for Him. Regret, remorse, shame, humility, contrition, sorrow, and a guilty conscience can each be a kind of confession when they are aimed at God, Who sees all and knows all. However we frame “confession”, God looks at the heart, and is looking for a genuine change of *attitude* about our sin. So when we express a *spirit* of confession, or lift up our souls to God in search of forgiveness, as David did in Ps. 86:4, we are confessing. Still, NAMING our sins is the purest form of confession, and should be our first line of attack against sin.

With maturity we become more sophisticated in identifying sins, develop keener consciences, and move closer to God, where strength and holiness are. The closer we are to God, the more we realize that our whole posture of life is to be an acknowledgement of Him as the ultimate cause, the giver of all life, and the final determinant of all destiny. When we reach this level of reverence, it’s almost as if we can confess without saying a word. It might even be seen as a groan, or a closing of our eyes in recognition of our guilt. As we grow, we will begin to have an intimacy with God that opens up alternative forms of confession.

Here are some other examples of these:

- Asking for forgiveness turns away God’s anger. Hosea 14:1-2 says this: “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.” This is followed in verse 4 by God’s response to calls for forgiveness: “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.” Asking for forgiveness brings it to us.
- Repentance is a form of confession. When Paul planned to return to Corinth, he was concerned what he would find. He wanted to see believers who were confessing their sins. 2 Cor. 12:21 reports his concern, “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.” Repentance is a form of confession.
- “Forsaking evil” or “turning to the Lord” can be a form of confession. This is a process that begins in the heart, where it counts as confession, and is portrayed in behavior, enabled through the re-engagement of the Holy Spirit. Is. 55:6-7 says, “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn [confess] to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” Correcting our view of sin, and refocusing our attention on God, are components in confession.

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As we move closer to God, and learn His Word, we will see many avenues for confessing and being forgiven, all involving humility and an agreement with God about the egregious nature of sin. And as we confess, we will learn more, because the teaching of the Holy Spirit will be operating, and our maturity will be advancing. When we maintain purity through confession, the nourishing “manna” of the word will feed us. This concept is expressed in Is. 55:10-11, which says the following:

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

God’s Word feeds us and causes us to flourish and grow. This is the rich “manna” that nourishes our soul and strengthens us with God’s might for His service and glory. This is the bounty that comes from study, preceded by confession.

And with greater maturity, confession—or repentance—becomes more consistent and reliable. And it will have more staying power, because maturity brings LONGER periods of sinless behavior, meaning that the times of harboring unconfessed sin will become shorter. This is the cycle of growth. This is the path to meaning.

A reasonable assumption which follows from this is that confession will result in a change of behavior and that the confessing believer will abandon the sin being confessed, but notice: the *immature believer* cannot resist the forces that drag him back into sin, and he will not enjoy his sinless relief for long. Do you see the importance of maturity? A child can hold a heavy weight for a tiny fraction of a second, and then gravity pulls the weight down. In the same way, an immature believer can confess and feel momentary respite from the burden of sin, but he will be too weak to keep sin away. He must *grow up* to be able to take it on. Of course, by growing up, he will discover that it is not he at all who takes it on, but the One Who has the power, the One Who has defeated it already.

Wisdom. When Billy Graham, now in his nineties, was asked recently what he would do differently with his life, he said he would spend more time in Bible study, prayer, and meditation. Then he gave his advice for aspiring “preachers” by saying they should “study and pray”. This venerable Christian, whose service resulted in millions being saved, saw that the only thing we need more of is to get closer to God through studying the Bible and praying.

This is the wisdom of maturity...the constant desire of the growing believer...to get more and more grace, more and more knowledge, and more and more of God Himself, in order to do more and more for God’s glory. Never stopping. Never looking back or from side to side. Moving straight forward, staying focused, keeping the eyes on God, following His path, seeking His will, doing what He says, and taking what He gives. This is the wisdom of the mature believer at work.

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We have established that, as we grow in *knowledge believed*, we also grow in wisdom. This is how we come to know God's will. Eph. 5:15-17 tells us this:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Wisdom opens our eyes to God's will.

Wisdom can be ours, if we ask for it, as David did in Ps. 119:125, where he prayed, "I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes," and as James recommended, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all..." (James 1:5). Prov. 2:1-11 tells us to passionately seek wisdom from God, who gives it to those who want it. Prov. 2:6 tells us that God is the source for wisdom, as follows: "For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding". We seek wisdom so we can grow. More growth leads to more seeking, which leads to more growth. These qualities feed on each other.

James 3:17 tells us about the wisdom of the maturing believer: "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." God's wisdom is interwoven with love, and both wisdom and love will be seen in the mature believer.

As we mature, and wisdom increases, we actually acquire the mind of Christ. One of the most beautiful descriptions of this aspect of maturity is found in Second Corinthians, Chapter 2, Verses 6-16. This passage speaks of the wisdom of God. Visit these truths with reverence:

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things but he himself is not subject to any

man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

This is mega-wisdom—the thoughts of God—and we are invited to know them. What a treasure.

Bible Study. As we mature, and the value of Scripture increases for us, we are more committed than ever to learning about God and getting closer to Him through His Word. We are maturing and acquiring God's wisdom. Moreover, as we assimilate the Bible through study and faith, our strength translates into victory over sin. In the first section of this study, we saw the effects of sin, and—already in this section—we have seen the remedy for sins once they have been committed. The role of Scripture in the process of resisting sin is also important. The Bible teaches us all about sin and how to handle it,

1 Pet. 1:25 says, "The word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you." These believers have received Christ and His Word, and are able now to do what Peter calls for in the next verse (1 Pet. 2:1), "Therefore rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." Then he tells them in v. 2 how this is done, "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." Peter's readers have been saved and are now ready to grow up as believers by taking in the knowledge and wisdom of God's Word.

The effectiveness of Scripture in strengthening us against sin and preparing us for life is found in many passages; we cite a few of them here:

- Ps. 119:11—"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."
- Ps. 119:9—"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word."
- Deut. 4:10—"Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, 'Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children'."
- 1 Thess. 2:13—"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."
- Deut. 8:2-3—"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, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had

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known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

- Heb. 2:1—“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”
- Col. 1:28—“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ.”
- 2 Tim. 3:16-17—“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
- Heb. 6:1-2—“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”

We see this over and over. The richness of the Word...the way it moves us toward maturity...how it becomes our sustenance for living. The more mature we become, the more precious and beloved these words will be. The more you feed on God’s Word, the sweeter it tastes.

Love. The things that emerge with maturity...that grow stronger as we draw increasingly on God’s strength...closely correspond with the “fruits of the Spirit” in Gal. 5. Love is at the heart of these fruits. Eph. 5:1-2 exhorts us, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” This call, which is for us to “love as Christ loved”, is sandwiched by verses describing sinful behavior, the opposite of love (see Eph. 4:30-31 and Eph. 5:3-4). Sin and love cannot coexist. If we sin and are out of fellowship, control of the Spirit is gone, love is gone, and the sinful nature cranks up the assembly line for evil.

Love is the mathematical sum of all God’s commandments. Rom. 13:8-10 confirms this, saying the following:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love your neighbor. We are commanded to LOVE. We might be able to generate a little of this ourselves, but not the kind of love Paul is talking about. Godly love must come from God. That’s the secret. If God’s love is in us, because of fellowship and maturity, it will show. 1 Jn. 3:17 brings this into focus, “If anyone has material possessions and sees his

brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” Treatment of our Christian brothers is especially important, reiterated in Col. 3:12, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Whatever negative feelings we have will diminish with maturity, so we will be able to scrap any hateful attitude or behavior, and behave in loving ways. Eph. 4:31-32 tells us to “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” and to be, instead, “kind and compassionate to one another...” We repeat a question we posed in an earlier study: Can you imagine what the church would be like if all believers actually matured? What a nice place that would be.

God’s Power and Strength. God’s power does not actually increase as a result of our maturity, but our *participation* in that power does. Col. 1:10-12a describes this process in the following:

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father....

To live “worthy of the Lord” is not just to be “good”; living worthy is to be holy, sanctified, pure, filled with the Spirit, and partaking of the divine nature. Only then will we “please him in every way”. And we can do that only by being “strengthened with all power according to his glorious might”. Then we can be what He wants. We can’t think small about this. God is talking about living worthy of His *infinite standards*. This can only come from Him. We must get this straight, and see our subservient role in the process.

Heb. 13:20-21 goes further with this concept, saying, “May the God of Peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.” He equips us, not just to *do* His will; He equips us *for* His will, so that He can “work in us what is pleasing to him.” He preps us not so much for *our doing*, but for *His doing*. When we mature, we will really receive this, so that we can see “...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength...” (Eph. 1:19). This access to God’s power comes through the enlightenment of our spiritual eyes, described in v. 18 (Eph. 1)...by hearing and believing God’s Word.

Joy. Joy is an attitude of stability and confidence in the face of all the attacks of the world and the devil, which our sinful nature invites. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and is a consequence of fellowship and maturity. Joy will increase as maturity advances. Eccl. 2:26 tells us what happens to the mature believer in fellowship: “To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God.”

Joy is a product of fellowship, and not something we generate through self-hypnosis or positive thinking. As we intake Scripture and move toward maturity, joy becomes evident, because we trust in God...or have confidence that He knows best and is always caring for us. The following scriptures confirm this:

- Ps. 33:21 tells us “our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.”
- Rom. 15:13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
- This concept is repeated in Rom. 14:17, saying, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit....” Joy comes in association with the Holy Spirit, with Whom we have fellowship.
- Ps. 32:11 also states this clearly, “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” Through “cleanness” and fellowship, we experience God’s joy.

Our rejoicing comes from God, which is why we rejoice “in Him”. Phil. 4:4 tells us, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” This will happen more, as we mature.

Humility. As we grow, we see God more clearly, and automatically respond with awe, reverence, and fear. This means we become more humble and acknowledge that our life is in His hands. We saw in Col. 3:12, quoted earlier in our discussion on love, that we are to be clothed with, among other things, humility. Eph. 4:2 tells us to “be completely humble and gentle”, and James 4:6 gives us the reason we must do this, which is because “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”. If we exalt ourselves, we will be humbled, but if we humble ourselves and acknowledge God, we will be exalted. Matt. 23:12 presents this concept exactly, saying, “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” God elevates the humble.

Immature believers are still depending on the world for their sense of self-worthiness. They look for recognition from their environment to make them feel competent and admired. This recognition feels good momentarily, but the air is soon let out of this illusory tire, and the foundering believer is left flat. With maturity, this person will learn Who God is, and how he fits into His plan, and he will turn to God for empowerment and exaltation.

Humility comes before honor (Prov. 15:33), and we can only learn when we are humble (Ps. 25:9). Humility is also part of seeing the need to confess, while humble confession gives assurance that our prayers will be heard and we will be blessed, as we see in 2 Chron. 7:14-15:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

If we were invited into the Oval Office with the President of the United States, we would feel a sense of humility, because of the importance of that office. How much more will we feel humble, when we know Who God really is?

Operation of Our Gifts. Gifts are about edification. Edification is about building up fellow believers, and—ultimately—the entire church. Gifts are given by the Holy Spirit so that we can strengthen each other in faith and fellowship. Gifts can come at salvation, but some may wait for maturity. The gifts we want most are those that edify others (those that instruct, motivate, encourage, strengthen). 1 Cor. 14:12 tells us, “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

The concept of edification is seen throughout scriptures dealing with gifts. When fellowship and maturity exist, and love is working, the function of our gifts to help other believers in their service (the operation of *their* gifts) is normal and natural. Gifts “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph. 4:12b). This is stated over and over; we are maturing, so we can help others mature, so that the work of the body of Christ can be done. The following verses state or illustrate this further:

- Eph. 4:16—“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.”
- Col. 2:6-7—“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught....”
- 1 Thess. 5:11—“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”
- Jude 1:20-21—“But you, dear friends, build yourselves [each other] up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”
- Rom. 14:19—“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”
- Rom. 15:2—“Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”

Gifts are for building each other up. The more maturity we see, the greater the edification will be, and the more effective the work of the church will become.

Faith. Our faith increases with maturity. As we get stronger, we believe more. We believe God. We trust His Word. We expect God's promises to be fulfilled in our lives. We hope (meaning "trust") for the future. We have confidence God will work all things together for good. We accept His will in our lives. We rely on His provision. We anticipate His return. We increasingly fear Him.

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 direct your paths." Faith focuses on its object, which is the Lord, and recognizes His power, looking to Him to show us the way. By acknowledging Him, we open up the GPS he has designed for us.

It is amazing how all these things work together. Faith permits study to become more faith. Faith more and more magnifies our acknowledgement of God, which opens up His messages of direction, showing us how to walk, and telling us which way to go. All these techniques are tied together and strengthen each other, beginning with confession of sins, continuing with consistent study, and culminating with application of all the things we learn as we study and believe.

An example of this is seen in 1 Tim. 1:18b-19, where Paul told Timothy, "...by following them [prophesies and instruction] you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith." By learning the Word and following it, accompanied by confession of sins for a "good conscience", we will be able to fight a good fight and avoid shipwreck (a total loss of our effectiveness as believers). Without confession and study, we will be unable to lift a finger against all the powerful evil forces that attack us from outside ourselves...and from within. Our faith will not be strong enough to keep our noses above the surface of sin's waves.

Our faith is tested as it grows, to keep us moving toward maturity. When our faith is tested, we are confronted with circumstances we would consider undesirable, or even tragic; although sometimes even "good fortune" can test us. The thing God wants from us is our focus on Him. He wants our sense of dependency on Him to mushroom. Faith is *focus on God*, rather than on the troubles we see before us in life. By believing His promises and following His prescriptions for living, we are expressing that God is more real to us than experience. Faith is knowing that God is in control. Faith is what we want more of, and because we want more faith, we accept more testing...are even *happy* to get the testing, so faith can get stronger. This is what we see in James 1:2-4, which posits the following:

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

We want to be so mature that we will not be lacking anything that we need to serve God and fulfill His purpose. Then our faith will be focused and firm. This is illustrated in Acts 27:24b-26, where Paul was aboard a ship that was being hammered by a long and ravaging storm. The crew had thrown everything overboard, including the food, to help the ship weather the waves. This went on for days, and they were starving. Paul gives them encouragement, from God's perspective, although it may have seemed to them like bad news. Paul relayed God's promise to them, which he had received from an angel:

‘...God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ [Then Paul added] So keep up your courage, men [crew and passengers], for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.

The safety of all aboard the ship was assured, even though Paul casually reported that, “Oh, yeah, by the way, we will run aground.” This had to test their faith. What is the point? The passengers and crew needed to understand that God's Word is more reliable than any event in life or history. God can be trusted through any storm.

We see God's faithful care described again in Deut. 1:29-31, which tells us about a message God gave to Israel:

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

God protects us, carries us as His children, and gets us safely home. Is. 41:10 makes the same promise, saying, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” With faith we are equipped to fight, but the victory is still God's. “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord” (Prov. 21:31). Paul said, in 1 Jn. 5:4b, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” The faith of maturity will overcome all sin, all fear, and all enemies. We began the Christian life with faith, which gives us victory in eternity; we continue now in faith to be victorious in life.

Fear of the Lord. Fear of the Lord is faith, awe, reverence, and worship. Fear of the Lord is recognizing holiness. The closer we get to God, the better we will know His grace and goodness.

Knowing God's holiness causes us to hate what He hates, meaning all evil. “Do not be wise in your eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil” (Prov. 3:7). Fearing God comes before shunning evil. When we *know* that God is inside us, and we remember it, and acknowledge it, and His power is set loose within us...sin will be defeated and discarded. In Job 28:28, God says to man, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.” Prov. 8:13

adds, “To fear the Lord is to hate evil.” Fear of the Lord and hating sin are two sides of the same coin.

Fear of the Lord, then, is practical. It helps us have the same perspective of sin that God has, and equips us with antipathy for evil, and strength for resisting it. God enables our disdain for sin, and “delivers us from evil”. Ps. 34:7 says, “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” Effort does not do this; fear and faith do it, as we turn the sin problem over to the only One qualified to deal with it. As we mature, fear of the Lord will grow, and sin will diminish.

Prayer. Prayer is a natural response for us after we acknowledge God and are conscious of Him. When we focus on God, prayer will come. Prayer is talking to God about others, ourselves, circumstances, needs, hopes, and divine help. It is also the medium for confession of sins and giving thanks, and a time of submission to God’s will. Prayer is something we are to do constantly, which is the norm for all full-time, truly-committed (mature) believers. Prayer should be our life...the prayer line should never be closed...we should always be in contact with God.

In the chapter on “Prayer” in *Getting Closer to God*, we looked at many verses dealing with prayer. We want to revisit a few of them here that will remind us of the central place of prayer in our Christian walk.

- Mark 11:24—“Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”
- Eph. 6:18—“And pray in the Spirit [in fellowship] on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”
- Phil. 4:6—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
- Rom. 8:26—“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”
- 1 Jn. 5:14-15—“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”
- 1 Jn. 1:9—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Prayer needs great emphasis. It is talking to God, and hearing God speak to us. Often, Prayer is petitioning God, or asking Him if He would, or “wills to”, do a particular thing that we have in mind. But prayer is also a time of great acknowledgement and worship.

Sometimes when we pray, we feel the arms of God wrap around us and embrace us, and we know we have received divine comfort. David knew about this, as he expressed in Ps. 86:17b, saying, “You, O Lord, have comforted me and helped me.” The reassurance we get at such times has to be God comforting us. There’s nothing quite like it.

As we mature, the privileges and productivity of prayer will increase, and God will be pleased as He works His will through us.

Worship. Remember that God is within us. 1 Cor. 3:16 reminds us, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” From this place within us, God can strengthen us, as we see in Eph. 3:16, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”

When Christ died on the cross, the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was ripped apart. We have access to the Most Holy Place, because of the blood of Jesus Christ. And where is the Most Holy Place? Within us, because the temple is within us, and the Most Holy Place is in the temple. Heb 10:19 says that we can feel bold for entering the Most Holy Place, saying “...we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.”

The Most Holy Place is also the “throne of grace”, as seen in Heb. 4:16. We feel confident to *approach* the throne of grace...in search of mercy or forgiveness...but we cannot actually *enter* the Most Holy Place, without being cleansed through the confession of our sins. The chapter on “God Within Us”, seen earlier in this volume, discusses this process in some detail. By confessing our sins, we are able to enter the Most Holy Place, where we draw near, not only to the *throne*, but to God Himself. Heb. 10:22 states, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” Ps. 24:3b-4a confirms this, “Who may stand in his [God’s] Holy Place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart....”

When we enter the Most Holy Place, we answer God’s invitation to us, penned by James in his fourth chapter, verse 8, “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” This is when we get close to God. This is where we worship. As we mature, our worship becomes pure love and praise and thanksgiving for His inexplicable grace toward us. We will “...be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe...” (Heb. 12:28).

God’s Will. God’s will, both his general will for mankind and his differentiated will for each of us, becomes clearer to us as we grow in His knowledge. By the way, here—as always—“knowledge” is not just intellectual content or cerebral cognition; it is the wisdom of God acquired by assimilation of His Word as we study *in fellowship*. Knowledge from God becomes wisdom within us when we *believe* what He teaches us in Scripture. This knowledge

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acquaints us with God's will. Eph. 5:15-17, seen previously in this study, describes this process, as follows:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Wisdom leads to knowing God's will, which leads to seeing and taking advantage of the opportunities He makes available to us. If we are "foolish", not knowing God's will, we will pass by opportunities and not even recognize them. Some Christians live their entire lives this way, and can't understand why things never seem to work out for them.

We also learn God's will through prayer. Ps. 86:11 is part of David's prayer, "Teach me your way [will], O Lord, and I will walk in your truth." We can request for God to show us what He wants. Then we must submit to Him as we wait for His answer. Paul and other apostles and prophets prayed that churches in various locations would learn God's will. An example of this is seen in Col. 4:12, where Paul tells the Colossians that Epaphras is praying that they would "stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured." He was asking that they would come to know the will of God and live by it through maturity and faith. We also see here a connection between maturity and the believer's function within God's will.

We learned in a previous study on God's will that we come to understand it when we "renew our minds". Rom. 12:2 is a beautiful statement of this, as we see in the following:

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

When our minds are renewed through Scripture, our thinking changes from a pattern that belongs to the world, to one that corresponds with the way God sees things, and then we can see what God wants. Until then, we will be focused on what we see in the world, and we will seek the world's solutions for our problems and the world's plans for our achievements.

God has a better plan, a plan for your life. In His sovereignty and absolute control of everything, God desires to work through you, so that His will and purpose can be fulfilled. But He surrendered part of His sovereignty in order to give us choice, and that means He will plan around (not because of) our choices. God *chooses* to give us choice, resulting in Him interspersing His will second by second around the choices we make. His plan, designed in eternity past, includes suffering or blessing for us as He sees fit, given the conditions that our choices generate. And He works it all together for good. The more we know Him and the more our choices reflect His will, the more we will be in tune with the mind of our infinite God, and—as we see in Eph. 5:10—we will "find out what pleases the Lord". This is the mark of maturity...knowing His will.

Contentment. In Phil. 4:11b, Paul said, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” He was able to do this because of a provision we see in a subsequent verse (4:13), “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Paul’s contentment did not come to him because he was perched up on a comfortable couch, casually penning reviews of his comfort and ease. No. Paul wrote this from a cold, hard prison floor. He suffered imprisonments, beatings, flogging, and stoning repeatedly. These are just words to us, but they came to Paul as intense pain. Yet he said he was content “in all circumstances”. Why?

Paul was content, because he had the divine perspective of a mature believer. Whatever happened to him, he gave thanks and submitted to God’s will. Even if we have no idea what God is doing, or what He wants *us* to do, as we mature we will accept His plan as it unfolds before us. We will wait for Him and keep growing.

God’s provision will be there, even if it is not what we had in mind. This provision is not based on our wish list. He knows what our true “needs” are, and He will supply them all, while we are moving toward maturity. He is the determiner of our needs. We are not “entitled” to have God complete the things on *our* list. Paul told Timothy, in 1 Tim. 6:8, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” As we mature we will learn to be content with the things we have, and the events that comprise our experience, knowing that God is meeting our needs from a superior list...His own. This is the divine perspective. This is what we want to see...and how we hope to see it.

Fruits of the Spirit. The things that come with fellowship and maturity are neatly packaged for us in Gal. 5:22-23. These are the kinds of things that God will produce in us—in fact, these will *be us*—as we mature. Here is what this passage gives us: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such there is no law.” The growing season for our fruit is the time we are controlled by the Holy Spirit and the time when the Word of God has made us complete in Him. Until we are mature, these growing seasons will be short, and often fruitless. To see fruit in our lives, we must grow up. To grow up, we must follow the paths we have been studying.

Finish. It is time for us to step out of our diapers and put on some big-boy pants to get ready for service to God. The church is full of believers who remain babies, sometimes because they do not commit to studying the Word, and sometimes because they do not believe what God offers them as ways to grow. And for some, it is because they have chosen a Christian group that does not place importance on serious and consistent Bible study. All these can be remedied.

If you are a Christian, you must decide if you are going to commit to the entire process, or just sit on the sidelines and wonder why you can’t make sense of your life, and why things happen as they do. After all, you’re saved. Why hasn’t sin gone away? And where is the

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fulfillment and blessing that Christians are supposed to have? The problem is this: we have been misled. We have bought the lie that salvation does it all. It is a mistake to think that getting saved is the end. Getting saved is only the beginning. The objective that remains for believers is to become mature, so we can get closer to God. Then we can put sin in its place, and enjoy the blessings of mature Christian life. This is what He implores us to do this on every page of His Book.

As long as you are alive, you have the opportunity to choose the path of growth into the fullness of Christ...into the life God wants you to live. To be stronger *in* God, take time to learn *about* God. Gather at God's table to feed; then rise to put a new mark on the wall...because you are going to grow.

Holiness

Introduction. God is holy. He wants us to be holy...like him. We have looked at the ways God prescribes for us to become mature and draw on His power to accomplish in time what we cannot do on our own. We confess our sins, study the Bible, pray, stay focused on

God, fear Him, trust Him, wait on Him, give thanks to Him, praise Him, maintain humility, and seek His will. This is our pathway to maturity. But now—at last—we are asked to “be holy, as He is holy.” This is the ultimate. This is what we find in the Holy of Holies, not just access to grace, but the holiness of God Himself...and we are to become what He is: holy.

We have instructions for doing this. God tells us how to become like Him. The thing God has been teaching us is this: He loves us, He cares for us, He carries us, and He offers to live as Himself in us (from the time we are saved) and through us (when we get close to Him). He makes it easy, but we make it hard. Once again, God is the one who has done, and is doing, the work. One more time, we will look at His requirements for us, and ask Him to sharpen our focus on Him and His truth, so we can see the light that we are moving toward.

We want to know more about becoming holy, not so *we* can become great, but so we can see and know the greatness of God, and share in what He has and is. We thank God that He shares Himself with us...now and forever. And we want more. Some of the ways we will explore in God’s Word for us to become holy will be trails we have worn into tracks from frequent travel on them. Others will be new and fresh. In all ways that we can find, we want to know how to become holy, so we can fill our hearts with God’s *being*, and fill our lives with God’s *doing*.

Definitions. Webster tells us that holiness is being spiritually pure and sinless, the quality that most inspires our deep respect, awe, reverence, and fear. (Endnote 15) Holiness is the living nature of God...His most central essence. God is holy, not because we recognize Him as such, but because He pre-exists in holiness. It is Who He is. He is not an artifact, or a dressed-up official, or an ornate building, or anything grand we can imagine...He is the Almighty God, the creator of the universe, and the origin, cause, and reason for all existence, including us.

Vine defines holiness as “separation to God”, or “the conduct of those so separated”. Vine also indicates that holiness can be 1) God Himself, or 2) righteousness resulting from a relationship with God. (Endnote 16) Holman adds that God separates things and people from the world and “devotes them to Himself”. The term “holy” is associated with the character of God and God’s separated people. (Endnote 17) Grudem says, “God’s holiness means that He is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.” (Endnote 18) Grudem uses the Ark of the Covenant to illustrate this, describing the Ark as being kept in the “Most Holy Place”, or “the place most separated from evil and sin and most fully devoted to God’s service”. (Endnote 19)

The root word for “holy” is *hagiazō*

in the Greek, which is most often translated “sanctify” or “be holy”. Thayer defines this word, as follows:

1. To acknowledge as holy.

2. To separate from things profane and dedicate to God.
3. To cleanse or purify.

Thayer adds, “The stamp of sacredness passes over from the holiness of God to anything connected to God.” (Endnote 20) This pretty well sums it up. God’s holiness passes from Him to us, when we are connected to Him. As we have learned, we are not always “connected”, since we can be out of fellowship with Him, and not controlled by Him. The object is to STAY CONNECTED, so His holiness is passing from Him to us. (Need I remind you that we are inseparably connected to God for eternity, because we have believed in His Son, but we can be “disconnected” from His *power* and *holiness* in our daily lives, due to sin.)

God is Holy. God alone is holy. We become holy only when we receive His holiness. Is. 5:16b says, “...the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.” God’s righteousness is one of the attributes that give Him holiness. Is. 40:25-26 tell us in the following that no one is equal to God:

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

The God who holds the stars in place has designed a way to relate to the small creatures that we are.

God is seen repeatedly in Scripture as the “Holy One of Israel” (e.g., Is. 1:4), and is seen as “majestic in holiness” and “awesome in glory, working wonders” in Ex. 15:11. 1 Sam. 2:2 tells us, “There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.” Rev. 16:5 refers to God as “you who are and who were, the Holy One....” Rev. 15:4 asks, “Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy.” Is. 57:15 says even His *name* is holy: “For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place....” And because God is holy, He cannot even *look* at evil. Hab. 1:13 explains, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.”

God is holy. He won’t even *look* at our sinfulness. This is why we need the righteousness of Christ stamped on us so that we can be presentable to God. The imputation of this righteousness is the basis for our being saved. Then, after we are saved, God sees the covering of Christ’s blood that removes the sins we commit *as believers*, making possible the forgiveness we are promised when we confess our sins.

Anything Touched by God Becomes Holy. In the Old Testament, anything coming into contact with God could become holy. And sometimes that transferred holiness could be transferred again, as we see in Ex. 29:37, “For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy.”

“Things” became “holy” when they were set apart by God for His divine purposes. In Num. 4:15, if “holy things” were touched, instant death was the result. The holy things in the Old Testament were used to picture the passing of God’s holiness to believers in the New Covenant...or the Dispensation of Grace, if you please.

We are commanded to be holy, but we cannot become holy on our own. So, once again, we must remember where it comes from. We know we become “sanctified” at salvation, and we are moved into a place of holiness forever. This is the position we enjoy as children of God. We want holiness in our lives, want to “become holy”, and this is what we will need to know more about. As we become holy, we will behave in holy ways, and the evidence of our holiness will be seen.

Sanctification is cleansing...being “set apart” by being purified. Sanctification for believers starts in the soul, where we confess, show humility, and express fear of the Lord...and where we completely acknowledge God. Then sanctification moves to the outside, to our minds and then our bodies, so that our holiness can be seen in our behavior, and shown in our practices. But we are incapable of holding the outside in check, if the inside has not been cleansed and fortified.

Sanctification of the Christian’s soul leads to sanctification of the Christian’s body. A sinful body shows *evidence* that sin exists. This is what is seen on the outside. But the heart is the holding place for sin; so when we purify the heart, the mind and body will also become pure. Then the Holy Spirit will take the lead. Holiness *received* will become holiness *manifested*. This is why God-consciousness makes sinful thoughts and behavior lose their power. God-thoughts crowd out sin-thoughts. Holiness crushes evil.

To stay holy, we must be touched by God, and stay in contact with Him. We do this in the following ways, each of which we will look at in some detail later in this study:

- Stopping sin
- Practicing holiness
- Maturing
- Confession of sins to stay in fellowship
- Growing in the Word
- Praying
- Increasing faith

These are the things that will produce God’s holiness in us.

God Chooses Us to Be Holy. God first chose Israel as a holy nation. In Ex. 19:6, Israelites are seen as a “holy nation”. In Ex. 22:31, God proclaimed, “You [Israel] are to be my holy people.” And then in Lev. 20:26, God tells Israel, “You are to be holy to me, because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.” He

chose them, and then He chose to put them on the shelf for a while, due to Israel's disobedience and rejection of the Messiah. Rom. 9 discusses God's reasons for switching His attention away from Israel and setting up a new "favorite". His eye is still on Israel, but they are on the bench as a "race" while Christ is preparing His kingdom through the Gentiles.

1 Pet. 2:9 says of the Gentiles, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Paul said in Rom. 15:16, that he was proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles so they "might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified [made holy] by the Holy Spirit." God's *saving* holiness is now offered to Gentiles, often referred to as "the nations", but is still available to Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Anyone who believes in Christ will be saved for all eternity, and becomes one of the "Chosen". In Eph. 1:4-7 we see the following:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

He chose us to be "holy and blameless in his sight". This is the holiness of salvation, which comes because we are loved, adopted, redeemed, forgiven. This is the holiness we will have forever. It is God's will that all will be saved, and He planned our salvation and eternal holiness well in advance.

A Word on God Choosing. The confusion about God's sovereignty is unnecessary. A brief note is being inserted here to establish, for the sake of this study, that God's sovereignty is absolute, and that He can make or unmake, save or condemn, elect or reject anything or anyone He chooses. But in His sovereignty He chose to give us choice...free will...the ability to reject Him. He does not make that choice for us. We can accept the offer of salvation through faith in Christ and be saved by God's grace, or we can reject it and spend eternity apart from God.

Rom. 8:28-30, often misapplied, reads as follows:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose; because whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be the Firstborn among many brothers. But whom He predestinated, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; but whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Endnote 21)

The dispute seems to revolve mostly around the word, “foreknew”. We have mentioned in previous studies that God chooses us within a plan He made before time, based on His knowledge of our choice(s). That makes us “chosen” or “elected” or “called”. We become these things because God saw our choices in eternity past and planned around them.

The word “foreknew”, used several times in Scripture regarding God’s full prescience of all future events, is seen here as something God does intransitively, or passively, not as an “action” of God. The word means, most commonly, “to know beforehand”. Attempts to warp this into “loving us” or arbitrarily “attaching to us” or otherwise “selecting” us beforehand, with no consideration other than God’s own ability to choose, His pre-eminent grace, and His absolutely sovereign will, are misleading. God chooses us because He knew beforehand that we would fulfill His condition for salvation, which is to *believe*. We have the choice to believe or not. Salvation is available to all, because Christ died for all. But God will not “choose” us until we choose Him.

Furthermore, the use of Rom. 9 to prove that man has *no choice*, and that the choosing rests with God, is incorrect. Rom. 9 has to do with God choosing Israel initially, and now choosing “the nations” (Gentiles, but Jews are not excluded), as custodians of God’s Word and purveyors of redemption. This is not about God choosing each of us personally to be saved or condemned. God, after all, wants all to be saved.

Three things stand out in regard to God choosing us, rather than our choosing Him:

1. “Foreknew” in Rom. 8:29 (above) is *passive*, unlike “predestinate”, “called”, “justified”, and “glorified”, which are *active*. Knowing beforehand is not the same as God *doing something* in advance. God simply *sees* something *outside Himself* in the future and responds to it. He plans our personal salvation, based on what He sees...not on what He is making happen. The passive condition of God “foreknowing”, then, cannot be lumped with the *actions* of God in this verse. It is treated differently. What is it that God foreknows? He knows that we will meet His clear condition for salvation, which is to *believe*. He sees our choosing Him.
2. If God chooses us, then our faith is unnecessary. The faith would actually be His. God would not add a component for *us* to do something (believe), if the basis for our being saved were simply that He *chooses us*. If He chooses, why require faith? If God chooses us, “election” is the basis for salvation, not faith. But, indeed, He *does* require faith. It is the condition called for *in us*, for us to be saved, and if that faith *is* the basis for salvation, why then would He have to choose us on top of that? We do not need *both* our faith *and* God’s choice...we need only one or the other.
3. Finally, faith and works are seen as mutually exclusive in the Bible. Those who espouse the notion that God chooses us “unilaterally” believe that faith cannot come from us, because we are “depraved” and can do nothing good of ourselves. It is true enough that we can do nothing good on our own, but is faith really “doing something

good”? No, it is not. We are saved “by faith, not by works”, and if faith and works do not mix, faith cannot be seen in any way as “works”, or as something that we DO of merit or value. Faith, then, is “non-meritorious”, as opposed to “works”. Faith earns nothing on its own. The object of our faith is Jesus Christ, and *that* is what gives faith its value, and causes us to be the recipients of eternal life. We are assuredly “depraved”, but we can still choose, each one of us on his/her own, to believe...and accept Christ as Savior. God gives us that prerogative.

There are many other questions that those who take a strict Calvinist position are not able to answer, but it is not the point of this study to disprove their arguments...only to establish our responsibility 1) to accept Christ to be indwelt and sealed forever by the Holy Spirit, and 2) to get close to God as believers, so we can fulfill the plan He has for us, which is for us to receive His holiness in life and time.

We Are Told to Be Holy. Lev. 19:2 shows instructions from God: “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord, your God, am holy’.” We are to be holy *because* He is holy. God is not only our example for holiness; He is the source for holiness. After all, He alone is holy. Any holiness we get comes from Him...He is the only place where holiness exist. He is the only *supplier* of holiness. He shares that holiness with us, when we get close to Him.

Heb. 12:14 calls for us to be holy. “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy [in thought and behavior *in time*]; without holiness [the holiness received at salvation] no one will see the Lord. We have the holiness of salvation, and what we need now is holiness for the Christian life. Abram led the way, being called to holiness at the inception of the “fathers of Israel” in Gen. 17:1, which reports, “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless’.” He was asking Abram to keep in plain sight before God, to hide nothing, and to be blameless. This is the beginning of “walking in the light” (moving toward holiness), where all sins can be forgiven, because the heart is open for inspection.

We see the call to be holy again and again. 2 Tim. 1:8b give us this call:

Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has [1] saved us and [2] called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time....

We have been saved and are now called upon to live holy lives. We are to do as we see in Lev. 20:7, “Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God.” And nearby (same verse) we see one of the main ways for achieving this: “Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord, who makes you holy.” We have the reason; we have the way. God’s Word will tell us how to become holy. 1 Pet. 1:15-16 repeats this call to holiness, “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy,

because I am holy’.” And 1 Thess. 4:3-7 helps us know what it means to be holy, or sanctified, in the following:

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

God did not call us to uncleanness, but to sanctification. This is our call...to be clean, by being cleansed. Take a shower...then stay out of the mud. That is our objective.

Our last “call” to holiness comes from Eph. 4:22-24, which says the following:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

We will see it again later in this study: being “made new in the attitude of your minds” means learning and believing Scripture. God’s Truth gives us a new way of thinking and viewing life, which acquaints us with the selves we are meant to be...created by Him to become like Him...pure in our hearts and in our behavior.

Stop Sinning and Be Pure. Sin stops Christian living. Sin must be dealt with, not only *after* the sin, when we confess, but *all the time*. Sin puts us out of fellowship and separates us from God’s power in our lives. It doesn’t separate us from God, as you know, but it separates us from the control of the Holy Spirit, through which God’s power and divine production flow. Sinning is something that must be stopped. 1 Cor. 15:33-34 says this:

Do not be misled. ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’ Come back to your senses as you ought and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.

We have learned that ignorance of the Bible weakens a believer and makes him easily influenced by others and susceptible to sin. When we learn God’s standards, and ways to meet them, we are “coming to our senses”. 1 Tim. 5:22b adds to this, saying, “...do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.”

Paul said to the Romans that they could beat the sin problem and no longer needed to remain slaves to sin. He expressed it this way:

You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer

the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. (Rom. 6:18-19)

Being free from sin...offering our bodies in slavery to righteousness...leads to holiness. But it's the same old story: we quickly surrender that freedom and return to the pattern of unbelievers and "carnal" (fleshly) believers, who surrender themselves into slavery under their sinful natures. Paul told the Thessalonians this:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God. (1 Th. 4:3-5)

God wants us to be sanctified, meaning having all our sins confessed, and then living free from sin...because we "know Jesus" and we know His Father. By knowing them, we learn self-control...God's way...and then our lives will show holiness and we will honor Him. Verse 7 in this same chapter (1 Th. 4) reminds us, "For God did not call you to be impure, but to live a holy life." This is echoed in 2 Pet. 3:11b, where we are told, "You ought to live holy and godly lives...."

Dealing with the flesh, the world, and the devil can be done within the scope of our lives. We have God's word on it. We will dig deeper into the powers of evil and learn how to keep them at bay as we proceed through this study. We have worked on understanding this problem and how to deal with it since the first studies in *Getting Closer to God*, and we are still learning how sin can be curtailed. This is the biggest problem we face, so we want to keep probing until we hold the reins of sin in our hands...or—even better—until we reach the point that we know how to give control to the One Who can tame those wild forces of evil.

Holiness in Eternity vs. Holiness in Practice. The holiness of God is credited to us through His Son. We are holy ones forever. We are pure righteousness in our permanent positions as children of God; we have the face of Christ shining out from ours before God, because we have believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior, and recognize the saving work He did on the Cross. Now, we are God's temple, as stated by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:16, "Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" This is permanent lodging for the Holy Spirit within us, and this makes us holy...we are the holy temple of God.

Jesus' atonement makes this indwelling, and our eternal relationship with God, possible. Rom. 3:21-25a describes this well, as follows:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference [it's the same for everyone],

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

We are seeing here that we have the Holy Spirit within us, and we enjoy an eternal relationship with God, because of the covering we receive from the blood of Christ. We also see that we acquire this gift by believing in the work Christ did for us. 1 Cor. 1:30 gives us something similar: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.” It is clear that these verses refer to the position of those who have trusted in Christ and have been regenerated (born again) by the Holy Spirit.

A thing that can be confusing, however, if we are not careful, is the distinction between verses dealing with our eternal “position” in Christ and those relating to our daily lives as Christians. We acquire righteousness, sanctification, and holiness relating to our eternal position, and this will never change or fluctuate. On the other hand, we see these qualities *in our lives* in varying degrees, depending on the spiritual strength of our walk with God, meaning our maturity and closeness to God. The more mature we are, the more righteousness, sanctification, and holiness we will exhibit in our lives...in our actions and practices and attitudes. As we experience and practice God’s techniques for removing and controlling sin, we will see holiness magnified more and more within us. Sometimes, however, we tend to apply scriptures dealing with our temporal *condition* to our eternal *position*, and may miss some important nuggets of truth that apply to Christian living.

So we must distinguish between scriptures dealing with our “saved” relationship with God, and our temporal (in-time) relationship with Him. For example, 1 Jn. 1:9 calls for us to confess our sins; this passage is for believers. How often have we seen ministers proclaim, with the best intentions, that “unbelievers” must confess their sins as part of the requirements for salvation. This adds to the gospel, and misapplies the truth of the verse. Distinguishing the application of this verse is crucial. Confession of sins is for believers!

Heb. 10:14 separates the eternal from the temporal, saying, “...by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” We have been made *perfect* forever in our eternal state, yet we are in the process of becoming *more holy* in our temporal status. We have been sanctified once for all, but are now being sanctified in life.

Col. 1:21-23a is more difficult. Here is what this passage says:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds, as shown by 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.

Does this passage apply to our eternal state or our temporal status? Actually, it seems that it refers to both. What it is *not* saying is that we have been reconciled and will be saved *if we continue* in our faith. Saving faith is exercised one time for all time, at the time we are saved. This passage actually says that we have been reconciled through the death of Christ (our eternal state), but that we will be presented holy and without blemish and free from accusation (in time), if we continue in our faith. This is not the faith of salvation; it is the faith of the Christian life...faith in God's Word, which tells us how to live, how to avoid sin, and how to have sin forgiven. If we reject God's prescriptions for living, we will not be holy and without blemish in his sight. Sin will prevent this from happening.

Further analysis of this passage seems appropriate. Notice that Paul says these Colossians have been reconciled through the death of Jesus. Here is what has happened to them:

1. They have been changed from their "alienated" position (their *former* eternal state) to one that is "reconciled" (their *new* eternal state).
2. Their former alienation had resulted in "evil works" (their *temporal* practices).
3. Now, reconciliation creates a chance for their *temporal* practices to become *righteous*, so they can exhibit holiness in their lives on earth.
4. Their holiness is linked to their faith being "established and firm". Faith becomes the basis for righteousness leading to holiness. See Rom. 1:17.

So this verse, which is often used to establish a case for perseverance or endurance to "keep" one's salvation, is misunderstood. "To present you holy" refers to our temporal status, not our eternal state. We must always look to the larger truth of Scripture and allow substantial and well-established truths to clarify the meaning of verses that seem confusing, or even contradictory. Often we can get the meaning of a passage by deducing what it *cannot be saying*, based on extensive evidence seen in the larger body of Scripture. The distinction of the application of a verse to either temporal or eternal states is very important. In other words, take care to distinguish verses that apply to our eternal position from those referring to our temporal condition...or sometimes to both. Verses on holiness, in particular, call for such close scrutiny.

Eph. 3:16-19 confirms our opportunity to become holy in time...i.e., to be "filled with the fullness of God" in our Christian lives. Here is what this passage says:

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

This passage is addressed to believers. When we reach the holiness that God wants us to have, we will know the “fullness”, and we will be continually controlled by the Spirit Who indwells us. The Holy Spirit will produce God’s love in us. This is the final badge of maturity...to love the way God loves. God’s love can only come from Him, as we see in 1 Thess. 3:12, which says, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.” We want God’s love, not just *for* us, but *in* us. Love is a product of, and evidence for, holiness.

Maturity Leads to Holiness. Maturity is the pathway; holiness is the goal. As long as we are studying and praying and focusing on God, while we are IN FELLOWSHIP, we will be growing. But if we neglect God’s Word and fail to pray, and decide to focus on ourselves and the world, instead, we will regress. We have worked to get up the scale, and we can slide right back down. We can’t stop or slow down. God has to be the most important thing in our existence, and we must enlarge the place of Scripture and prayer in our routines until they overlay every moment of every day of our lives. If we do any less, we will limit our growth.

In 2 Cor. 3:15-18, we see that Moses’ face radiated the glory (light) of God as he returned from Mt. Sinai, so much so that he had to cover it with a veil to prevent onlookers from being overwhelmed. That veil has been removed from us, and we behold the glory of God, as in a mirror, which looks more and more like us as we mature. We are changing into the image of God from one level of glory to the next, as we grow in Him. Verse 18 says, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” The likeness and the glory, indeed, the holiness, “comes from the Lord”. The more we grow, the more it comes to us.

Maturity can be seen as a sequence of levels. These are broken down into seven specific steps, as we see in 2 Pet. 1:5-9, quoted here:

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, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, 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 if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

“Your faith” is likely the faith of salvation. Start with the faith you had when you accepted Christ as Savior. Then you will do the following:

1. Add goodness—virtue or righteousness that comes from confessing; then

2. Add knowledge—advancement through Bible study, which leads to knowledge (Knowledge, when it is believed, leads to understanding, which leads to wisdom.); then
3. Add self-control—sane behavior achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit (This operates in us as long as we are in fellowship, allowing His power to become “self-control” for us.); then
4. Add perseverance—patience that comes when faith is tested (This is God’s training program for us. Developed patience will be seen as unwavering faith in God’s promises, even when events or conditions in life threaten to remove from us valued objects or people, or create dangers of disease or death for us.); then
5. Add godliness—constant prayer, God consciousness, fear of the Lord, divine viewpoint, focus on Him; then
6. Add brotherly love—peace and joy and love in regard to fellow believers; then
7. Add love for all people—This is the ultimate fruit of the Spirit, the highest achievement for a believer, and the manifestation of supreme divine goodness in our lives.

Track yourself. Start at the beginning and move upward, by God’s grace. These steps are not slavish, and will vary from one believer to the next; so the sequence may be altered somewhat. But these are basically the bricks that comprise the edifice known as maturity. They include confession, study, self-control, faith, prayer, and love.

Confession Offers Purity and Fellowship. Is. 35:8 says, “And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way....” The road to maturity will not be walked by those stained with sin. You will need to be “cleansed” to move ahead on the “Holiness Highway”.

Eph. 5:8 says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth).” Repeatedly we see admonition to “walk in the light”. The light represents exposure...openness to God’s scrutiny and inspection. When we open our lockers for God’s inspection, we are holding our souls up to Him so He can honor the work of His Son and forgive us. This is our confession of sins, seen in many forms: humility, asking for forgiveness, repentance, sorrow, feelings of guilt before God, remorse, and so on.

The most direct form of confession is naming our known sins to God. Then there is no question that 1) confession has taken place, and 2) forgiveness has been granted. Still, it must be stated that confession does not take place in a vacuum. Empty words with no consideration for improvement are not convincing. It is assumed when we quote Scripture to say that we “name” our sins that we mean, “say the same thing about our sins that God says about them”, or to “agree with God about our sins”. God hates sin, so we cannot be

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indifferent to our own sinful behavior and expect that confession has taken place. Confession without humility is not what is meant. As for guilt, it has no place AFTER confession, but it can certainly be a prompt for us to confess, and a proper response to the sins we have committed that we know about.

Examples of humility before God because of an awareness of personal “uncleanness” or inadequacy abound. Here are several:

- Isaiah confessed his sin. “Woe to me!’ I cried. ’I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty’.” (Is. 6:5)
- Peter fell to his knees and told Jesus to “go away”, because he (Peter) was a “sinful man”. (Lk. 5:8)
- John was humbled when Jesus appeared to him, as described in Revelation. John “fell at his feet as though dead”. (Rev. 1:17)

Awareness of God makes us aware of our sinfulness. God-consciousness helps us isolate our sins and contrast them with the holiness of God.

In Genesis 35:2, confession is described, as we see Jacob speaking to those in his household and company: “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes.” In the Old Testament, purification was done ceremonially in various ways, one of which was the changing of one’s clothes (Zech.3:4).

Confession makes us serviceable to God. 2 Tim. 2:20-21 sets it up this way:

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter [confesses his sins], he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

If we want to be useful and be made holy, we must first confess our sins. We see this over and over in both the Old and New Testaments. Ps. 32:1-2 adds the following:

Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and whose spirit is not deceit.

Deceit is hiding...as in concealing sin, or in not even acknowledging that the sin exists (a form of self-deception). We must purify ourselves from contamination (2 Cor. 7:1); keep our conscience clear before God and man (Acts 24:16); and purge ourselves, so we will be cleansed (2 Tim. 2:21).

Psalm 73 is a complete study on the process and results of confession, as we see here:

1. God is good to the pure in heart. (v. 1)

2. Knowing this, the psalmist confesses the sin of envy, just in the nick of time, since—as he put it—“my feet had almost slipped”.
3. The situation is this: Often the wicked are successful, and they “peacock” in their great pride, while a “righteous” man may often be under God’s training or discipline and have little. (v. 3-14)
4. The problem is this: It is highly tempting to envy a person who is successful, when they make no bones about their lack of faith. And it is hard for the person who is living right to understand this. (v. 15-16)
5. Understanding was dim, until the psalmist “entered the sanctuary of God...” This has the same connotation as entering the Most Holy Place, where we enter and draw near to God, because we have been cleansed of our sins. (v. 17a).
6. Once the psalmist knew the outcome for the evil people around him (destruction), and that they were enjoying all the heaven they would ever know, he finally understood what was happening from God’s view point. (v. 17b-21)
7. The psalmist then celebrated the relationship he had with God and acknowledged the justice and righteousness of God. Because of his confession, he was able to adopt the divine perspective and know again the joy of being close to God. (v. 22-28)

We must continue to nail down the importance of confession. John 13:5-11 illustrates perfectly the principle of confession. In this passage, Jesus proceeds to wash the feet of Peter. Peter refuses, thinking it is totally inappropriate. This prompted Jesus to say, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” Peter acquiesced then and told Jesus to wash his whole body. Jesus explained, “A person who has had a bath [is sanctified for eternity and] needs only to wash his feet [meaning to be sanctified in time]; his whole body is [then] clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” The one “not clean” was Judas, whom Jesus knew was an unbeliever. All the others were bathed, but they still needed to have their feet washed to “have a part” with Jesus.

This illustrates our status as believers who need to be cleansed by confessing our sins. We are “clean” because we are eternally credited with the sinlessness and righteousness of Christ. And we are “cleansed” in our lives by having our sins forgiven through confession. Without this, we “have no part” in Him; we have no fellowship with Him.

Sometimes, even a good translation of the Bible can be misleading. We may have to use other study tools to ascertain the truth. I was using the NIV, my standard translation for these studies, and questioned its translation of 2 Cor. 1:12. I went into dictionaries and lexicons and *Interlinear Bible*, and so on, and found a nugget that was not seen on the surface in the NIV.

Here is my arm-chair translation of 2 Cor. 1:12:

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For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in mental honesty and purity from God, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and [even] more abundantly toward you.

Paul was mentally honest. Mental honesty means candor before God, or, here, the confession of Paul's sins, resulting in "purity" coming from God's grace and not from anything he did or was. The outcome of this purity in Paul's soul enabled him to disclose that his conscience was clean and that his conduct toward them was based on his fellowship with God. You don't get this from the NIV.

When we enjoy fellowship with God, we have confidence *and* competence from Him. The Holy Spirit empowers us to feel confident and do well. This is depicted in 2 Cor. 3:4-6, which says this:

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit....

When will we ever be convinced of our inability to do what God prescribes? When will we earnestly seek His methods for getting close to Him, so we can *share in* His power and strength...and holiness? We must take this seriously. It is not too late, but the time to draw near is *now*. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). These are not produced out of thin air. They are produced through *you* when He controls you. These will come from the Holy Spirit, but you will be doing them. Then you will be practicing holiness.

Growing in the Word to Become Holy. God's Word is the source of nutrition we have been given for growing into maturity. We established in an earlier study that feeding on the Word is actually eating and drinking the divine nature of God, which is the mind of Christ (2 Pet. 1:3-4). The spiritual strength we gain by studying (and believing) the Bible is not mysterious or magical. It is the work of the Word in us as the Holy Spirit teaches us about God, whereby we become more like Him, draw near to him, and become equipped to perform the mission He has designed for us. In John 16:12-15, Jesus anticipated this process, when He said the following:

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. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

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The Holy Spirit teaches us the things that Jesus knew we would need in our lives. This is how we become the Christians He wants us to be. The actions and thoughts that follow the effective working of the Word will be characterized as “holy”. As we study and grow, we will pray more, believe God more, and enjoy greater fruits from the control of the Spirit.

When we study—and process what we have learned into our souls, by believing it—we will be changing on the inside. Change on the inside precedes change on the outside. Change begins in our hearts, and that is where we must start. Too often, new or immature Christians engage in a perpetual process of trying to please and serve God by perfunctorily performing behaviors that *look like* service. There is no spiritual fruit, because the flesh is the driving force for the behavior. You don’t begin change by starting from the outside. You change the inside first through understanding Scripture, and the outside will follow. Change your heart, and your behavior will change. What’s more, you will learn God’s will for your life.

Ps. 19:7-11 hammers home the value of Scripture to create internal changes. This is depicted in the following, which says of Scripture that it is...

- Perfect, reviving the soul.
- Trustworthy, making wise the simple.
- Right, giving joy to the heart.
- Radiant, giving light to the eyes.
- Pure, enduring forever.
- Sure, and altogether righteous.
- More precious than gold.
- Sweeter than honey.
- A warning to God’s servants.
- A reward for those who keep it.

The next verse (verse 12) follows this up with an acknowledgement of God, a confession of sin, and a prayer for God to provide escape from sin. The prayer ends with, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” The featured components of this passage—study, confession, and prayer—confirm that “inside” is where the work begins. Study and confess; then the prayer for behavioral change will be effective, and both the outside and inside will be pleasing to God.

The Bible is our authority, and we must immerse ourselves into its truths. Paul warned the Corinthians, “Do not go beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). Earlier in this verse, he said, “I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit...” There is no substitute for Scripture. It is God’s designated Word to us, and our guide in and for this life. Phil. 4:9 asks us to accept this authority and to put what we learn into practice (once again, inside

first, then outside). This verse says, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.”

Paul makes the same request of Timothy, saying in 2 Tim. 1:13-14, the following:

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you [the teaching]—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Keep the things you learn. Guard them with faith and love in Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. This treasure has to be protected by God Himself, Who lives within us. This valuable message is kept safely like the King’s treasure: preserved, protected, counted daily, and drawn on as needed to support the lives of God’s servants. Paul continues his plea for us to store and use the teachings of God, in 1 Thess. 4:1-2, as follows:

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

The believers being addressed in this letter are maturing. But this is not true of all believers. Some are still “infants”, and can only get milk, as we have seen before in 1 Cor. 3:1-4. Because they are immature they are worldly (acting like “mere men”), and living under the control of the flesh. So they need to study and grow, or feed on the Word. But they must start with basic Bible knowledge, or with the milk. And if this is what they need...they should start lapping. 1 Pet. 2:2 calls for believers to go after the milk, saying, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...” This will put them on the path to maturity.

Peter turns his attention to intermediate believers (he still calls them children) in 1 Pet. 1:13-15, saying the following:

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’.

Start on the inside. Prepare your minds. Establish self-control by confessing and allowing the Holy Spirit to take over. Focus your hope (faith) on the future revelation of Christ in person. Stop sinning, because you are no longer “ignorant”...you have Bible wisdom. And BE HOLY. This is where all this leads...to holiness.

An interesting thing takes place when we study. We know already that we acquire the divine nature of God (God’s thinking), and that our participation in His character empowers us to say no to sin. Now we are beginning to understand that absorption of Scripture actually makes us “holy”. The process for this is intriguing. We want to recall one of the implications

of holiness, which is our being cleansed or “sanctified”. And we know that confession of sins leads to forgiveness, cleansing, and walking in the light. But does the Bible being assimilated play a role in our cleansing and sanctification?

For the answer to this question *about* the Word, we turn *to* the Word. Jn. 17:17 reports part of a prayer that Jesus was praying. This verse says, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” Jesus is asking the Father to make His followers holy (sanctified) by the instrumentation of the Word. The Word works to make us holy when we receive it through study, and then apply it. Techniques from the Word show us how to be sanctified, or cleansed.

Eph. 5:26 repeats this provision, speaking of the church as follows: “...to make her [the church] holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” “Water” is a term used to refer to the Holy Spirit, and “washing” is cleansing. Cleansing is done “through” the Word, or according to its instructions. So it is that the Word makes the church...consisting of its members...holy by means of the Holy Scripture.

Regarding marriage and eating certain foods, Paul said that the Word and prayer can set these apart as “good”. He told Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:4-5, “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.” When we receive food from God—or any blessing—it is *consecrated*, or purified, through application of techniques in the Word and through prayer. When we are sanctified, our blessings will be consecrated. Otherwise, what starts out as a good thing may soon turn sour.

We re-quote here a passage we saw earlier to establish these good effects from the Word. Is. 55:10-11 gives us the following:

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

Whatever God’s will and purpose and design for us may be, the Word will prepare us to accomplish it. This is what God desires. We can run around in circles and satisfy ourselves (and perhaps others) that we are “serving the Lord”, but unless our service is based on, and blessed by, the Word of God, our efforts have no value. The Word offers cleansing and clarifies our purpose so that we can become “holy”. Then our actions can become extensions of the holiness He gives to us.

Ps. 119 gives us another clear description of the place of the Word in our lives. As you peruse selected scriptures from this chapter, look for these concepts: the achievement of purity through confession and righteous living, the importance of learning Scripture, the

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effects of applying the knowledge we gain, and the place of worship. Here are some verses from Ps. 119:

Verse 1. Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.

Verse 2. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.

Verse 3. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

Verse 7. I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

Verse 9. How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

Verse 11. I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Verse 12. Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees.

Verse 24. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

Verse 25. I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word.

Verse 50. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.

Verse 66. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands.

Verse 105. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Verse 165. Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.

What a tribute to God's Holy Word. The Bible gives us all we need. This is clearly enunciated in Eph. 1:17-19, where Paul says this:

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

With 1) the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, 2) open "heart-eyes", and 3) strong faith, we will come to know the incomparable power of God in our lives, and we will bathe in His holiness.

Prayer Expresses Our Holiness. Prayer is the way we breathe toward God, our avenue of expression toward Him. We adore Him through prayer, as we appeal to His grace to provide us with everything we need, to be everything He expects. Prayer is how we connect with God from our direction...our way of presenting our humanity to Him, the One who

makes our finite selves holy and suitable for functioning as a member of His family. Prayer is always available, and is a rich relief and comfort to believers in a strange and hostile world. Prayer lifts us up toward God, and honors Him. Of all the ways we have learned to get closer to God, prayer is the most pervasive. Prayer is supposed to be with us and in us always, because it is our link with God

Prayer is our life. We should never be more than a minute away from prayer. It is our constant tool and our conveyor of care. Paul said, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Col. 4:2). Vigilance is often linked with prayer...watching for the devil, but also standing still and watching the deliverance of the Lord. And while we are watching and waiting, we are to devote ourselves to praying. Anytime we utter a word in prayer, we are expressing faith in God. When we invoke His promises in our prayers, we are expressing faith in His Word. And when we trust Him and His Word, things happen.

Prayer is seen in many forms: confession, acknowledgement of God, a way to show humility, a time to request provisions, an expression of love through intercession, an opportunity to give thanks, and a time of surrender to the wisdom and will of God. Prayer is a means of submission, recognizing that God is good and fair and just...and loving...and that what He does is right, and that it will be for our good, because He has promised it would.

But does God always hear our prayers? God knows everything, so He surely knows the words we use or the thoughts we think. But not all words directed toward Him will be “heard”. Sometimes He turns a deaf ear to us. Ps. 66:18 introduces us to the reality that the prayers of a “sinner” will not be heard. And are we sinners? Yes...all of us. But if our sins are confessed, those sins are forgiven. The 66th Psalm says, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” When we hide sin, or refuse to acknowledge it, God turns away from us. He does not listen.

Is. 59:1-3 echoes this concept; the call to God from the unrepentant believer is dropped on the first ring. This passage says this:

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

Verse 12 in this chapter (Is. 59) gives the solution for this separation, so that contact can be re-established, saying, “For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities....” The solution is our faithful companion, the acknowledgement of our sins (which, by the way, offers no “license” to sin, but provides a way to get closer to God, where we can beat sin).

Jesus sharpens our focus on the need to keep our communication lines in repair and open. In Jn. 15:7 He explains, “If you remain in me [in fellowship] and my words remain in you [you understand Scripture], ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” Relief is available. Prov. 28:9 emphasizes the idea presented here that an understanding of the Word (suggesting advancing maturity) increases the power of prayer. This verse says, “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law [Scripture], even his prayers are detestable.” The better we understand God’s Word, the more effective our prayers will be.

Once we are in fellowship and growing in the Word, we can pray “in the Spirit”, as called for in Eph. 6:18a, which says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...” When we reach the point that our prayers are taking place “in the Spirit”, we will bow our heads, or go to our knees, because we will know that the place where we are is holy, that the God Who gives us an audience is holy, and that we are becoming more like Him every day. And we will do this more and more. We will be on the path to holiness.

Faith is Central to Holiness. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” So says Heb. 11:6. We please God only by faith. Rom. 1:17 tells us “the just shall live by faith.” By faith we are saved. By faith we live. Faith is our choice to believe God, trusting His person, His promises, His plan, His Word, and His power.

God’s power, as an object of faith, is highlighted in 2 Cor. 2:4-5, which says this:

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

This is expressed again in 2 Thess. 1:11, where Paul says, “that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.” God fulfills it, but the prompt is our faith. God pays attention to our faith. He knows when we are trusting Him, and He responds to this trust. Our faith *makes a difference*. Faith activates God’s power in our lives.

Faith also gives victory. 1 Jn. 5:4b says this: “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” This is why we must hold on to our faith, as it states in 1 Tim. 1:19, “...holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and have shipwrecked their faith.” A clear conscience is the beginning (confession) and faith is the culmination (submission to God’s will). When we confess, sins are cleared; when we trust God, faith erupts as *surrender* to God’s victorious power.

Quoting from *Getting Closer to God*, we see the following:

The point of faith, or of our “knowing” God, is surrender. Faith is the conductor; surrender is the outcome. This is the most important component in our relationship with God. Surrender is the peak of acknowledging God, fearing the Lord, and being

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God-conscious. When we get close to God, we SUBMIT to Him, and to His will. He becomes more as we become less. God is in us...waiting for our submission to Him...so that He can open the gateway of our lives to His divine production. He produces IN us and THROUGH us.

Jesus expressed this concept in John 14:10, saying, “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” God does the work. Our role is to *let* Him by trusting Him. Why would we not trust God, instead of ourselves? Why would we not surrender to the all-wise God?

We want more faith, but the pathway to growing our faith may not be an easy one. We have seen repeatedly in previous studies the value of Scripture in helping our faith increase. And we know to pray for more faith. We embrace these. But the thing that we might find harder to accept is that we may have to *suffer* to develop greater faith. This is not suffering as a result of discipline for unconfessed sins; or a stern reminder for us to study the Word. Rather, this is the intense training God schedules us for to sharpen our faith *in experience*. Testing exercises our faith. God allows us to practice believing while we are *in the world*, where the battle goes on, and where our mission exists.

James 1:2-5 says the following:

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.

The testing of our faith leads to maturity. This is the polishing work of God, to bring us to the point of trust in Him, so we will keep our eyes on Him, and so that we can reflect the glory of His holiness. 1 Pet. 1:6-7 confirms this, saying the following:

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

The subject of Christian suffering is one that needs further study, but we will just summarize the topic here by saying that God allows us to suffer sometimes to serve the higher purpose of refining us and making us fit for His service. Many times, preachers and evangelists promise prosperity and ease to unbelievers, suggesting that—if they would just come to Christ—their lives would be sweetness and light from then on. What they should tell them is that by becoming Christians, they can expect to be disciplined and trained and drilled as they never imagined. They will suffer so they can grow. They will need to fasten their seat belts, because they will be in for a “bumpy ride”.

Paul found this out right away after his conversion. In Acts 9:16 God told Ananias to go to Paul. God said, “I will show him how much he will suffer for my name’s sake.” And did Paul suffer? Yes, with beatings, stonings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, and all kinds of deprivation. He suffered immeasurably, but God showed him things that no one had known before, great truths for living which bring grace to us even now. We can only give thanks for Paul’s suffering, and welcome the suffering we may do to strengthen faith and increase production in our lives, as we move toward His holiness.

The *real* place of faith, though, has eluded us. It is this: The role of faith is linked inextricably with the role of the Holy Spirit. We already know that confession gets our sins forgiven, and we have said many times that greater maturity brings more-frequent confession, and greater resistance to sin, so that times of fellowship can be more sustained and continual. We are clear that confession fills us with the Spirit, because sins are removed and we can fellowship with the Lord. As Amos 3:3 says, “Do two walk together unless they are agreed?” (Endnote 22) When we agree with God about our sins, we are able to walk with Him in fellowship.

Once we agree, the role of faith takes over, because faith is the condition that helps *sustain* the control of the Holy Spirit. Believing God, and believing the truths in His Word, will keep us focused on Him, so we can stay out of sin and in fellowship. As long as the Spirit controls us, we are empowered to endure God’s training as we prepare for His work. And we will be taught by the Spirit, so that we can, with Jesus, grow “in wisdom...and in favor before God and men” (Lk. 2:52). (Endnote 23) With maturity comes stronger faith for living, and that strength will increase the intensity of our commitment to continue walking in the Spirit. Confession initiates the control of the Spirit; faith keeps it going.

Finish. The puzzle is complete. Confession enables fellowship and study. Study and testing add to maturity and build stronger faith. Stronger faith increases confession and resistance to sin, leading to greater spirituality (control of the Spirit). Greater spirituality brings greater fruit, including righteousness leading to holiness. As we walk through our journey in time, holiness will be our destination (where we want to go), and hopefully our destiny (where we will arrive).

Confess, trust, study, pray, acknowledge God, live in the power of Christ’s resurrection, fear God, give thanks, surrender, submit the body, search for God’s will, wait on the Lord, maintain humility, serve in the power of God’s gifts, and be still before the Lord: these are the components of the special life we are offered under God’s grace. These work together and feed off each other. These are the keys to holiness. To be holy is to incorporate all these things into our hearts and our lives. These let us become mature by His power. These cause us to look at Him. These bring us closer to God. This is our quest.

Endnotes

- 1) *The Interlinear Bible*, ed. and trans. by Jay P. Green, Sr., p. 905. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Lafayette, Indiana, 1985.
- 2) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 905.
- 3) *Interlinear Bible*, pp. 932-933.
- 4) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 939.
- 5) *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 792. Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2003.
- 6) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 886.
- 7) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 885.
- 8) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 943.
- 9) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 943.
- 10) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 924.
- 11) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 943.
- 12) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 908.
- 13) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 922.
- 14) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 534.
- 15) *Webster's New Compact Desk Dictionary and Style Guide*, ed. By Michael Agnes, et al, p. 232. Wiley Publishing, Inc., Cleveland, Ohio, 2002.
- 16) *Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, by William Edwy Vine, p. 180. Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN, 1999.
- 17) *Holman*, p. 772.
- 18) *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, by Wayne Grudem, P. 92. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999.
- 19) *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, p. 92.
- 20) *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Joseph Henry Thayer. This reference was found online at www.tgm.org/bible.htm, under the site name, *Free Bible Tools—Strong's Concordance with Greek and Hebrew!*
- 21) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 878.
- 22) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 704.
- 23) *Interlinear Bible*, p. 789.

About the Author

William D. Gibbs, III, spent 25 years in public service as an educator and curriculum designer. He served as teacher, principal, superintendent, and curriculum developer in the public school systems of Texas. He has now taken his skills in the area of learning-program development and is channeling them into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much of his career in education was spent developing programs for at-risk students. This book is designed for at-risk Christians (or new ones). The same way that he built systems for filling in gaps and establishing solid foundations for student learning, he has built on the foundation of the Word to provide understandable lessons that facilitate Christian living and accelerate the growth and effectiveness of believers.

Gibbs began an intensive study of the Word in 2010, and initiated a practice at that time of recording his findings in writing. He has written ten books since then...and has now condensed them into a survey course: *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*. This course and the books which form the foundation for it, are the culmination of his experiences in life, his professional career, and—more recently—his studies in the Word...incorporating what he has learned into a turn-key, easy-to-read, step-wise study book. He has been surprised to discover what the Bible REALLY says about living, and is sure that you will be surprised, as well, when you work through his studies.

It must be said that the central player and point in this “work” is not the author, but God. If—and only if—God is in this writing, it will be helpful and beneficial to believers who read it, and God will be glorified by its dissemination.
