

*Bible Studies on Living  
by God's Standards  
Pathway to Righteousness*

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# *Bible Studies on Living by God's Standards: Pathway to Righteousness*

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## Introduction

Many Christians believe that our spiritual standing and status depend on what we DO...it's just "practical" that our actions would generate our condition. But the point will be made in this study that *what we do* will always be an outcropping of our *spiritual connection* with God, rather than the means to that connection. Otherwise, we are simply practicing what religions everywhere espouse, such as morality, ethics, humanity, and semblances of righteousness, generated in a state of self-dependency, always seeking to placate some higher power or force... sometimes even done in the name of Christianity. Such practices are nothing more than operations of the flesh, which have no "spiritual" value.

We will look at evidence that the presence of God's power and control in our lives provides the only way that *doing* will become *pleasing* to the true and living God. This is where all our growth and training are headed. Understanding God's standards for our behavior will give us *spiritual* goals to move toward, and will keep us humble, as we come to realize that—by ourselves—we are incapable of attaining the standards that God has established.

When we realize our limitations to "rise" to the level of God's standards, we discover that we must rely on Him to do what He requires. We will spend time looking at the standards, and then we will see how to live up to them. The enormity of God's standards is prodigious and prohibitive. But God has provided tools for achieving them, and we will look into these to learn what God expects our Christian lives to look like, and to see how His expectations can be met in us.

Standards of conduct abound in the Word, and they are quite clear and oft-repeated. Unfortunately, we may have relied on other sources for our standards that *exclude* God's view-point: printed materials, the entertainment and news media, "worldly" mentors in the past or present, and the provincial codes of conduct arising from our society and environment. These standards generally lead us away from God. Those espousing a worldly approach to meeting "God's standards" might even *refer* to Scripture to isolate and propagate specific standards, perhaps determined to live up to them. But here's the rub: there is a danger that we as believers will develop a facsimile of righteousness... "a form of godliness"...but leave out the "power" for complying with God's guidelines.

As believers, we often see compliance as our staying within some soft and variable zone of conduct that we believe will be acceptable to God, which gives us a degree of comfort...we feel safe, just as long as we are "good enough" to stay in His good graces. We might even keep score to see if our "good" is outweighing our "bad", believing that our conformity will please God. In the end we tend to think that, either we are not that bad, or we are so bad that we are beyond God's reach. In either case, we decline *God's power* to "make us good", in favor of our own ability to achieve His will and accommodate His way.

What we have ignored is that by failing to meet ONE standard of conduct, we fail to meet them ALL, or—as we infer from James 2:10—we are all "lawbreakers". Enforcement of

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God's standards falls into the realm of "no tolerance". No margins of error exist. His *specifications* are indeed *specific*. No deviation is allowed.

We see the standards and we know we are to meet them, but unfortunately we assume that the only way to meet them is to try really hard, and—failing that—to try still harder. That is clearly our biggest problem: faith in self, rather than in God. To meet God's holy requirements, we must access His holy Word to understand His holy nature...in order to man and manage the tools He offers to enable us to do what He commands.

We have seen before that the power for doing God's will comes from our ongoing connection with Him. In the previous book, *Sin and Mercy*, we looked squarely at the connection between confession of our sins to God and our fellowship and communion with Him. In this book we want to review the importance of confessing and restoring fellowship, but then we want to look beyond these to the actual connection between fellowship and the filling and operation of the Holy Spirit. In regard to the "filling" of the Spirit, we want to see how this becomes our "walk in the Spirit", as we build and exercise our faith. When fellowship is restored and the Holy Spirit fills and controls us, we believe we will then be equipped to 1) learn more, 2) build our faith, and 3) learn what it is really like to live within God's standards.

## God's Standards

**God's Standards Introduced.** The standards that comprise God's parameters for our behavior and thought patterns are fully disclosed in Scripture. These consist of things that God despises...and things He commands. The string of requirements is endless, and cannot be entirely encompassed within a few pages of text, but it is our prayer that we will provide a discussion here that will highlight and elucidate God's standards. More importantly still, we hope before we are finished to show how the standards can be met. This presentation is abridged, out of necessity, but we believe it is "representative".

**Seven Things God Hates.** To get started, we see in Prov. 6:16-19 seven things that God hates. These seem to be categories, rather than individual acts or attitudes, and serve to encompass most things we would consider "bad" or sinful. Here is the list:

1. **Pride.** Pride is focus on self, which includes any condition or practice that can be described with a word that begins with self: such as self-centered, self-satisfied, self-sufficient, self-confident, self-motivated, self-dependent, self-absorbed, self-pleasing, self-serving, and self-supporting. Some of these may represent the best forms of humanity, but they are the worst forms of spirituality. Self-anything represents self-interest and faith in self. Whether we are attempting to find pleasure, or to perform "righteous" acts, we are doing what God hates, if "self" is not supplanted by "God". Try replacing "self" in the words above with "God" and you will see the difference.
2. **Lying.** When we lie to others, or to God, or to ourselves, we are leaving honesty behind. This is especially a problem when we either ignore...or try to conceal...our sins from God. When believers confess their sins to God to get forgiveness, the most important component in that process, with the possible exception of "humility", is honesty. Without honesty, there will be no confession, no forgiveness, and no enabling of the Holy Spirit to help us live our lives.
3. **Murder of the innocent.** Keep in mind that the enlarged view of murder includes hatred, and even favoritism, as we saw in *Sin and Mercy*. Without a proper spiritual walk with God, we will not avoid the root conditions of murder.
4. **Wicked schemes.** This is planning anything that does not factor in the will and plan of God. Any plan that excludes God, or that fails to seek Him first, is "wicked". God must be central in our plans. And, of course, any plan for scheduling sinful acts is wicked, as well.
5. **Hasty or frantic "evilness".** Emotional attachments and/or addictions create excitement at the prospect of their fulfilling our fleshly pursuits and habits. These lead to all kinds of distortion of truth, idol worship, and frantic searches for anything that promises happiness...or that gives temporary relief from misery. This is looking to substitutes (instead of God) to find meaning in our lives.

6. **False witness.** This involves sins of the tongue. When you judge, criticize, or gossip about someone, even if they have behaved inappropriately...especially if you embellish or exaggerate their mistakes or patterns...then you are doing what God hates.
7. **Causing division among believers.** This is one of the greatest detriments to the church (or a church) in the fulfillment of its mission, and a danger threatening relations among believers. Sometimes in the name of doctrinal hair-splitting we create artificial separations among believers, when the big test is simply that we have each believed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. As long as that condition has been met, we need to lock arms for the battle ahead. And if we see a "better" way to do God's work, we should follow it, but not use differing beliefs as a cause to foster splits among believers. God hates this.

This list of things that God hates is not exhaustive...it's more representative and introductory. There are many other things that God does not like. There are also things that He wants to see more of. We will look further into both of these.

**Some Sins to Avoid.** In *Getting Closer to God*, we created several "lists" of sins, which are acts and attitudes that God's standards rule against. We present parts of these in the following:

- Types of "wicked" people from 1 Cor. 6:9-10:
  - The sexually immoral (commit adultery and fornication)
  - Idolaters (worship outside of God or making anything more important than God).
  - Adulterers (players, cheaters, swingers, and prostitutes).
  - Male prostitutes.
  - Homosexual offenders (part of the wicked).
  - Thieves (taking what someone else has earned).
  - Greedy (preoccupied with acquiring money, property, or things).
  - Slanderers (con artists, deceitful in business practices).
- Sins from the Flesh (Gal. 5:19-21):
  - Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery.
  - Idolatry and witchcraft.
  - Hatred, discord, jealousy.
  - Drunkenness, orgies, and the like.
- Other products of the flesh (Col. 3:5-10):

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- Sexual immorality.
- Impurity (dirty thoughts or actions).
- Lust (looking and wanting).
- Evil desires (imagining and wanting).
- Greed (idolatry from wanting).
- Anger (of the sinful type).
- Rage (screaming or destroying things or people in an emotional fit).
- Malice (hatred).
- Slander (destroying reputations).
- Filthy language (forbidden or offensive words).
- Lying (works must match the truth).
- Other sins to avoid (Eph. 5:3-4):
  - Not a hint of sexual immorality.
  - No kind of impurity.
  - Absolutely no greed.
  - No obscenity.
  - No foolish talk.
  - No coarse joking.

Many sins are overt and visible; others are not seen, even though they are still prominent; and some are completely off the radar screen...appearing not even to the one doing them. We will try to see as many of these as we can, as we comb through the Scripture in search of divine standards. We will continue to use the “list” format, since most of the “standards” are self-explanatory.

Rom. 1:28-32 presents a picture of evil, citing the following abhorrent conditions:

- Every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity.
- Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice.
- Gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful.
- Inventors of ways of ways to do evil.
- Disobedient to parents.
- Senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.



Yes, of course these are characteristics of unbelievers, but rest assured that believers are also capable of any of these violations of God's standards.

**Additional Standards.** God's standards can create "positive" requirements, as well as prohibitions or proscriptions. Rom. 12:1-21 provides some standards of "good" behavior, interspersed with some "bad", in the following:

- Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.
- Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
- Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.
- Think of yourself with sober judgment.
- Exercise your gifts (examples given are prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, governing, and showing mercy).
- Love must be sincere.
- Hate what is evil.
- Cling to what is good.
- Honor one another above yourselves.
- Keep your spiritual fervor.
- Be joyful, patient, and faithful.
- Share with God's people.
- Practice hospitality.
- Bless, rejoice, and live in harmony.
- Do not be proud or conceited.
- Do not repay evil with evil or take revenge.
- Feed your enemy.

This is just a start; there are many more standards. Ex. 23:1-9 gives us several:

- Do not spread false reports.
- Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.
- Do not pervert justice.
- Show no favoritism on the basis of wealth or poverty.
- Return your enemies' lost animals or goods.

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- Do not accept a bribe.
- Do not oppress an alien or a stranger (includes race, religion, national origin, etc.).

Here are some from Jer. 7:6-7, which are standards that the Israelites had to meet to “live in the land”:

- Do not oppress the stranger in the land.
- Do not oppress the fatherless.
- Do not oppress the widow.
- Do not shed innocent blood.
- Do not follow other gods.

Jer. 7:9-11 from this same passage is worth quoting. These verses show God’s reaction to our violation of the standards just given. Jer. 7:9-11 says this:

Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, 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? Has this house which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.

This is reminiscent of God’s reaction to sins committed by believers as described in Heb. 10:26-31, which is seen as resulting in “a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God”. Verse 31 says, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” The discipline that comes to believers can be “hell on earth”, as this passage suggests. This is why we want to understand and live within God’s standards, and stay “cleansed”, as per verse 22.

Rom. 13:5-14 gives us some standards that hit close to home, as follows:

- Submit to civil authorities.
- Pay your taxes.
- Give everyone what you owe him.
- Let no debt remain outstanding.
- Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.
- Behave decently, as in the day, not in orgies or drunkenness.
- Do not commit sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension, and jealousy.

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- Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Sandwiched among these standards is a reference to the condition of anyone who violates them...he is considered to be “asleep”. We have seen before that spiritual sleep refers to a condition of being out of fellowship due to sin, and we have acknowledged that the only way to return to communion with the Holy Spirit is through confession of our sins to God. Violations of standards put us out...confession puts us back in. Once we are returned to fellowship, we will be able to avoid thinking about ways to “gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Rom. 13:14).

Jude 1:16 gives us other things to avoid as we build ourselves up in our “most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit” (1:20):

- Avoid grumbling.
- Avoid faultfinding.
- Avoid following evil desires.
- Avoid boasting.
- Avoid flattering others for one's own advantage.

Luke 3:14 adds these:

- Share your goods.
- Don't extort money.
- Don't accuse people falsely.
- Be content with your wages.

We could go on and on...here are just a few more:

1. Col. 3:2—Be focused on things above.
2. 1 Pet. 5:5-8—Young men submit to older, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, humble yourselves before God, cast anxiety on Him, be self-controlled, and resist the devil.
3. 1 Pet. 2:11-17—Abstain from sinful desires, live good lives, show respect to everyone, submit to every authority (e.g., speed limits), love the brotherhood, fear God, do not use your freedom to cover up evil, and honor the king.
4. Phil. 4:4—Rejoice always, let your gentleness be evident, be anxious in nothing, present your requests to God with thanksgiving.
5. 1 Tim. 6:8—Be content with food and clothing alone.

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6. Is. 35:3-4—Encourage fellow believers.
7. Prov. 17:23—Don't reward evil for good.
8. Prov. 11:24—Don't be lazy!
9. 1 Cor. 10:14—Flee idolatry.
10. Gal. 6:2—Bear one another's burdens.
11. Ps. 28:3—Avoid deception.
12. Ps. 26:3-5—Avoid evil and evil people.
13. Ps. 10:2—Don't persecute the poor.
14. Prov. 28:4—Mind your own business, give help when it is requested, and don't impose your style of help if it is not wanted.
15. Is. 33:15-16—Walk and speak uprightly.
16. Matt. 6:1-7—Don't flaunt your good deeds, don't "give" to put on a show, and don't pray to impress people.
17. Matt. 6:19-34—Store up for yourself treasures in heaven, keep your eyes on the "light", serve God and not money, trust God for your provisions, do not worry.
18. Matt. 5:21-48—Don't be angry with your brother, as that is murder; keep short accounts with fellow believers; and don't look at a woman with lust, as that is adultery.

To finish, we get a practical guide for personal conduct from 1 Thess. 4:1-12. In this passage, we see the following standards enumerated:

- Be sanctified (confess your sins).
- Avoid sexual immorality.
- Control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable.
- Do not wrong your brother or take advantage of him.
- Live a holy life.
- The man who rejects this instruction is rejecting God (avoid this).
- You have been taught to love each other...do this more and more.
- Lead a quiet life.
- Mind your own business.
- Work hard at your job.

**Conclusion.** Our goal as believers is to do better. But...are we beginning to get the picture of how hard this is going to be? These standards are endless...and we have just scratched the surface.

The first mistake we make as believers is to look at the standards and then focus on our own personal resources to meet them. We tend to start with ourselves as the place to find the ability to meet God's standards. We must take the standards seriously, but we must also realize what our proper role will be in meeting them.

Here's the first thing we must learn: We might achieve some visible "good" on our own, but our good will not impress an infinite God. We need His good, His righteousness, His guidance, and His power...to achieve His standards. We want to end up with good fruit and good works, but we will not get there by starting there. Notice where the Bible places "Start" on the board that leads to real righteousness: It begins with Jesus Christ, Who leads us to the Father, Who imbues us with His Spirit. And it is the Spirit Who will empower us, if we let Him.

To meet God's standards we must keep on starting with Him, because it is God that will keep us going. We must begin, and begin again, and begin once more...and always...with God. We must start with God, and return to God, over and over, which is equivalent to fresh starts and new beginnings made possible by confessing, and then we must stay with God by praying, studying, and growing in our faith.

When we focus on God, confess to Him, acknowledge Him, fear Him, TRUST HIM, and thank Him, we have the best shot at achieving the standards He has specified. But we can't start at the middle or the end. We start at "Go", and then add a "d". The purpose of this book is to see how God will help us meet His standards.

## **The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit**

**Introduction.** We must understand from the previous chapter that God's standards, both "positive" and "negative" represent to us a "call" to fellowship and faith, because it is by these that we hope to meet the standards. We will be looking in the next several chapters at the role of the Holy Spirit as it relates to our fulfillment of God's standards. We will examine the indwelling of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, fellowship with the Spirit, and the fruits of the Spirit...all pertaining to achievement of God's standards. For openers, we will explore the process of the Spirit's indwelling of believers.

**How It Was in the Beginning.** The Holy Spirit is part of the eternal Person of God. He has always existed, and always will; He has "being" beyond our lives and past the end of time. But He can localize Himself to individual believers, as He does in the Church Age, when He interacts with all believers. This was not so in the Old Testament, when the interactive ministry of the Holy Spirit was not the same for all believers, but was targeted to specific ones at specific times.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is now universally applicable, as He indwells every believer from the time they are saved. But this indwelling was sporadic in the Old Testament, based on God's purpose and plan and the degree of faith of individual believers. The Spirit of God has, however, been "among" us from the time of the garden, and all down through the history of mankind.

Gen. 5:22-24 shows Enoch "walking with God", or with God's Spirit. Gen. 6:9 shows Noah's relationship with the Spirit, saying, "This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." In Exodus 33:14-17, God had a conversation with Moses about "going" with him, as follows:

The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

The "Presence" of God is His Spirit, a presence He permits, according to His will. In Lev. 26:12, God offered His presence to the people of Israel, saying, "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." God is present where He chooses.

Zech. 2:10 reports another instance of God declaring His presence among His people. This verse says, "'Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,' declares the Lord." God is eternal in scope and size, but He places Himself among us. We know God is infinite, but He can choose to place Himself into time and confine Himself to specific places, when it suits His purposes. The time for every believer in the Church Age

is *now*, and the place is *within our hearts*...He is in our innermost selves at all times. In the Old Testament, however, He came and went.

Is. 57:15 confirms God's infinite flexibility by saying this:

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, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

God is infinite, but can be “with” an individual believer, when that believer is “contrite” (a form of confession). God was “among” Old Testament believers, was occasionally “in” them, and is now “within” each of us in a very personal way.

**The Old Testament Anticipated the Pouring out of God's Spirit.** A new role for the Holy Spirit was anticipated in the Old Testament. We see the work of the Holy Spirit forecasted in Ezek. 36:25-27, as follows:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

In context, these verses pertain to the coming of the Holy Spirit to Israel, which will happen in the “last days”, but this is also an illustration of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age, when He cleanses and empowers believers. When we confess, we are cleansed by the Holy Spirit, Who enables us to follow God's guidelines for living. The Holy Spirit is the agent for 1) cleansing, 2) the transformation of our “heart of stone” (tendency to sin in unbelief), and 3) the empowerment to understand and follow His Word. The Holy Spirit *makes* us right and then *moves us* to *do* right.

The coming of the Holy Spirit to the Jews in the last days is an event that will resemble the advent of the Holy Spirit at the start of the Church Age. Joel 2:28-29 gives a description which can apply to either occasion, as follows:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Peter related this passage to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:16-21), an event which portended the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Jews in connection with the Second Coming of Christ. The Holy Spirit will come to the Jews, but He has already come to us. We have the grace now to have Him *inside of us*, so our focus in the Church Age is to acknowledge His presence and access His power.

**The Holy Spirit in the Church Age.** In John 14:15-27, Jesus announced that the Holy Spirit would be coming for a special ministry on the earth after He (Christ) ascended into heaven. In verses 16 and 17, Christ gave His disciples this assurance:

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

He was telling them that the Holy Spirit would be setting up housekeeping *inside* of them. This is a perspective we must embrace. The Holy Spirit is INSIDE of us. And He wants, not only to *live* there...He wants to keep our house spotless while He makes Himself at home there.

All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, as we see in 1 Cor. 6:19, which says, “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.” This is confirmed in Rom. 5:5, which declares, “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Because of the Holy Spirit, we can be productive as believers. John 7:37-39 suggests this, saying the following:

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

“Water” probably refers primarily to the *life* of the Spirit of Christ, which for us represents *eternal life*. But the idea of living water flowing from within us also conjures up an image of the fruit of the Spirit, which He produces from us.

The Holy Spirit fulfills the requirements of the Law in us...producing righteousness, as opposed to the sin and “self-righteousness” produced by the sinful nature. Rom. 8:2-5 makes this very clear in the following:

...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. 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 Holy Spirit indwells us, not just as a decoration for our temple, but as the living power of God within us to do what God requires. This is the power that makes the difference, and the power without which we will accomplish NOTHING. This power is always there, but if we do not tap into it, the power is useless to us, and our production is useless to God.



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When we access that power, however, we have the ability to live up to all of God's standards, and we can accomplish what the Spirit desires.

Since we "live" in the Spirit, and He in us, we want to live our lives with that presence always in front of us. This is God...within us...the One we want to acknowledge and be conscious of. Gal. 5:25 admonishes us, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Endnote 1)

## The Power of the Holy Spirit

**The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit can be Meaningless.** Having the Holy Spirit inside of us has eternal implications that we acknowledge. We are born again, adopted, anointed, and sealed by the Holy Spirit when we are saved. After that time, His presence within us is our guarantee that we will live with Him forever. The eternal life we have comes from the Holy Spirit. But the presence of the Holy Spirit *in us...in time...* will mean nothing to us if we do not give Him access to our minds, souls, spirits, and hearts. For Him to have access to our inner selves, we must *want* Him to have it. And IF we want Him to have access—so that He can control and empower us—we must be CLEAN. These principles have been well-established in previous studies.

**Building Spiritual Strength.** Many times the analogy of lifting weights is applied to the spiritual life. I have used this illustration myself. Lifting weights is designed to build muscle and strength. Supposedly, building spiritual “muscle” and strength can work in a similar way. Through spiritual exercise, and following a strength-building protocol, we can get stronger spiritually. But this analogy needs more study to explain what really takes place as we build our faith and increase spiritual strength to serve the Lord. We have been a half-bubble off in our understanding of the concept of “strength”.

Maturity is not about building OUR strength, so that we can face our enemies as *strong* individuals. Growing spiritually is not about refining our abilities and competencies so that we can have greater trust in our own power. Building strength is actually about accessing the infinite strength of God, Who is always powerful, and always available. It is not increased personal strength that we need, but GREATER CONNECTION WITH THE ONE WHO IS ALWAYS STRONG. Our connection with God is stronger as we get closer to Him—*trust* Him more and *understand* Him more—and this is what increases the strength we need in order to face our foes and produce divine good. We do not actually become stronger; rather, we increase our access to *God's greater strength*. The only thing about us that gets stronger is our FAITH, which relies, not on our strength, but His.

Eph. 1:18-19 describes God's greater strength, as we see here:

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....

This “mighty strength” is what is available to us. This is what God wants us to draw on to live our Christian lives. He is the source for this power...not us. Eph. 3:14-21 confirms this in Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, which is worth quoting in its entirety, as follows:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your

hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The Spirit is the power, and love is the outcome. Love is the greatest fruit the Holy Spirit produces in us. Notice that this is an internal process...it takes place in our “inner being”, which is where the temple is, and where the Spirit dwells. The power is at work “within us”, and it comes from the Holy Spirit.

2 Cor. 3:3-6 says the same thing: Meaningful power and ability come from God. This passage says the following:

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 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 [the Law] but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

If we want to be competent and effective, we must recognize that these conditions will come only from God. Spiritual achievement must come from the Spirit. When our lives are centered on Him, and we are constantly conscious of God, good things will follow. Even trying circumstances will lead to “good”.

2 Tim. 1:7 says, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity [fear], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” We get strength and courage from the Holy Spirit, so we can “be strong” in His power. 2 Tim. 2:1 says, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” It is in His grace and strength that we get the motive and might to carry on...to do great things for Him.

1 Cor. 16:13-14 tells us what we will do in God's strength: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.” And most importantly, “Do everything in love.” When we operate in God's power, we will do all of these things. We will be focused on Him, trust Him, be unafraid, and stand strong. Above all, we will do what we do in a spirit of love...His love.

Finding grace by obtaining mercy, so we can draw closer to God and be empowered by His strength, is the most important thing we can ever do as believers (Heb. 4:16 and 10:22). This is not just a “better life”...it is the difference between life and death, as we are about to see. And it is the only way we will ever serve or please God.

## **Coming to Life from the Dead...or...Returning to Fellowship**

**Waking up from the Dead.** Eph. 5:14 calls for us to “wake up”, and to “come alive”, as we see here: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” In context, the dawning light of Christ is what we are invited to walk within, where everything is visible. This is a process of bringing our sins to God’s light, so they can be forgiven (1 Jn. 1:5-7). God’s way of forgiving believers is through confession of sins, which exposes them to the light so the dark stains of sin can be removed. When we confess, we are coming into the light that Christ shines, and we are forgiven (1 Jn. 1:9).

When we move into His light, and receive His forgiveness, we engage the power of the Holy Spirit within us, and come to life spiritually. We wake up, and join the living, to serve God by walking in faith and by the Spirit. Rom. 8:6a says the following about the “death” of being out of fellowship: “The mind of sinful man is death...” When we are out of fellowship, and controlled by the sinful nature, we die spiritually...not in an eternal sense, since the Spirit does not leave us...but in a temporal sense, as the power of the Spirit is disengaged within us. The power is still there, mind you, but it will not translate into strength until we are “turned on” to receive it.

Rom. 8:12 tells us that believers “have no obligation” to live under the power of the sinful nature, but—when we do—verse 13a tells us what will happen: “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die...” This is not the death of eternal condemnation, as believers are exempted from that death. And it is not physical death, though we can be extracted from this life “early” if we persist under the control of the sinful nature. This is the death...or deadness and darkness...that we experience whenever our access to the power of the Holy Spirit is switched off due to sin and/or self-dependency. Rom. 8:8 says, “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

The other side of the coin is the lively connection that we have with the Holy Spirit when we are in fellowship. Rom. 8:6b says, “...but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace...” This is fellowship: life and peace. We will have much more to say about spiritual life and death...and peace...later in this series. These are not “take it or leave it” propositions, but are “absolute” conditions that we will either live by...or die by (in a temporal, spiritual sense). Without spiritual life, we will be spiritually dead...walking zombies...and we will enter heaven with empty hands. For our lives to have meaning, we must stay *alive*.

**Seeking Fellowship.** In Phil. 2:1-2, Paul declares the thing that will make him happy, which is for the Philippians to stay in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Here is what this passage says:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then

make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Fellowship lights are flashing all over the place in this passage. All the phrases here are indicative of communion with God. We see “united with Christ”, which reflects our eternal union with Him, but also our being united with Him in fellowship. As believers *in fellowship*, we experience the “comfort” of His love, expressed toward us and through us. We have fellowship with the Spirit, so He is able to produce “tenderness and compassion” through us. This is fruit that comes from the Spirit, but accrues to Paul’s credit, and to ours. And we are “one in spirit and purpose”, “having the same love”. This shows our fellowship with each other, and is more evidence that fellowship is the topic of this passage.

Paul also wants his readers to stay in fellowship so they can receive the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. He said the following to the Colossians, in Col. 2:2:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love [marks of fellowship], 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.

When we are in fellowship, mysteries become knowledge, and we keep on building our faith for greater service. Paul was always pushing for more fellowship and more growth among believers. He wanted them to have full access to all of God’s “grace” provisions. He told Timothy to “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Tim. 2:22) See the fellowship signs again? Here they are: righteousness, faith, love, and peace...and those in fellowship will join the ranks of those who are CLEAN, or “of a pure heart”.

Eph. 4:25-31 gives us a string of standards regarding sins. The standards cited include the following:

- Put off falsehood.
- Speak truthfully to your Christian brothers.
- Do not sin as the result of anger.
- Do not give the devil a foothold.
- Do not steal, but rather work hard.
- Avoid unwholesome talk.
- Let talk be for the purpose of building each other up.
- Get rid of bitterness, rage, and anger, as well as brawling, slander, and malice.
- Be kind and compassionate and forgiving.

We have omitted one of the standards that is embedded in the middle of this passage, a special standard regarding the Holy Spirit. This one is found in Eph. 4:30, which says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." When we violate any of the standards found in this passage, *or any other standards from God*, we "grieve the Holy Spirit", and when He is grieved, He no longer fills us and controls us...the sinful nature has taken over. The moment of "grieving the Spirit" is the moment we step out of fellowship with God. This is a tragic moment in the life of a believer.

Whenever the Spirit is grieved, He is also "quenched", which is a way of saying that the spiritual fire, or divine source of energy, is turned off. The power is still there, but it is not flowing, because our sinful nature has short-circuited the current. 1 Thess. 5:19 says, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." This standard, related specifically to the Holy Spirit, is surrounded by *other standards*, just like the one we saw in Eph. 4:30 ("don't grieve the Holy Spirit"). We can only follow God's standards, including the ones regarding the Holy Spirit, if we fulfill 1 Thess. 5:23-24, which calls for us to be cleansed by God Himself. This passage says the following:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

God is the one Who cleanses us and makes us blameless. He does this when we submit our hearts for cleaning through confession. God, after all, loves the "clean", as we see in Prov. 11:20, which says, "The Lord detests men of perverse heart but he delights in those whose ways are blameless."

When we are cleaned, we return to fellowship. When we are not, we will be controlled by the sinful nature. 1 Cor. 3:3 describes this condition as "fleshly", as we see in the following: "For you are yet fleshly [KJV has "carnal", or controlled by the sinful nature]. For where among you is jealousy, and strife, and divisions, are you not fleshly and walk according to man?" (Endnote 2)

In *Walking by Faith*, we cited the following results of carnality:

- The Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched.
- The sinful nature takes over.
- The control and the fruit of the Spirit are lost for the duration of our carnality.
- Our prayers are not heard. (Ps. 66:18)
- We cannot learn Scripture. (1 Cor. 2:14)

But when we get forgiveness for the things we have done wrong, simply by confessing them, we can immediately move forward again. God is not looking for perfect behavior from us...He knows we can't achieve it. It is not perfection that matters; it is forgiveness. When

we are forgiven, we are perfect in that moment. And when we learn to walk in that condition, we will become mature (itself a form of perfection), and God will do marvelous things through us.

1 Pet. 1:14-16 calls for us to be holy...or sanctified...or cleansed. This passage says the following:

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."

We need to get very realistic about our being "holy" in all we do. How are we going to achieve holiness in all our actions and thoughts? The truth is, we can't. This verse is not referring to *making our conduct* holy, but *being in a state of holiness*, which is a state of *being clean*, when the conduct occurs. In other words, *as* we do things, or *when* we do things, we should BE "holy"...or clean! We are to do *everything we do* in fellowship with God, which He makes possible by His gracious forgiveness. For us to try to "act" holy is just that: an *act*.

Eph. 4:1-3 tells us to do the following to live our lives worthy of the "calling" we have received. Here is what this passage says:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Peace is an absolute marker for fellowship, as we will see later, but here we see two important components for "worthy" lives: 1) humility with gentleness, and 2) patience leading to love. These call up two primary conditions of our walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, which are confession (seen here as humility) and faith (patience leading to love). In Scripture, we see humility used a lot in connection with confession, and we frequently see faith and love in tandem. When we confess and trust, the Spirit can produce the fruit of love in us, and other fruit will follow. "Unity of the Spirit" is fellowship among believers, a "bond of peace", which is the direct result of fellowship with God.

**Finding Fellowship.** In *Sin and Mercy*, we did a thorough study on the gracious provision of forgiveness that is available through walking in the light and confessing our sins to God. A brief reminder here will point to that study, and to 1 Jn. 1, which is the primary resource for this doctrine.

1 Jn. 1:8-10 tells us that believers who say they do not sin, or have no sinful tendencies, are liars, and are calling God a liar. This passage also indicates that confession, or naming our sins to God is all that is needed to get His forgiveness. Sounds simple, but it cost Jesus Christ the price of His own blood for us to have this privilege, so all the heavy lifting has been done for us...all we have to do is accept the gift of grace.

Confession can involve feelings of guilt, tears of sorrow, asking for forgiveness, showing humility toward God, or simply “lifting our souls up to God”, but a simple naming of the sins we know about is all it takes to get forgiveness. 1 Jn. 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

One of the conditions for forgiveness when we name our sins is *honesty*. Any confession that is not sincere, or that is used to cover an intentional practice of sinful behavior, is an abuse of grace, and will not bring forgiveness. God knows the heart, and He will know if our confession is simply a pretext to go on sinning. Such a pattern of behavior will bring discipline, which will have the effect of causing us to change our mind (repent) about sins we might have wanted to excuse or continue.

It is interesting that sincerity increases commensurate with the degree of disciplinary intensity. In other words, the longer we continue to sin and minimize the importance of removing the sin, the more the discipline will increase, until we finally change our mind about the sin. We will see more about this in the next section of this chapter, which discusses discipline.

Forgiveness in 1 Jn. 1:9 is clearly indicated as the outcome of confession. We have seen this truth described in virtually every previous book we have written, and we have cited many passages and examples where this truth is taught. One thing that might need a little more clarification is the phrase, “and will purify us from all unrighteousness.” The sins we confess are obviously sins that we have identified. But we still have to account for the sins we have *not* identified, either because we don’t remember them, or because we did not know they were sins. According to this passage, these are covered, when we NAME the sins we *know* are sins.

So we need to recognize that it is possible for us to sin and *not know it*. But rest assured, an *unknown* sin will put us out of fellowship just as fast as one we know and recognize, and there are a myriad of opportunities for unknown sins to occur.

Here are some examples: We are late for an appointment and grumble because we are stuck in traffic. No big deal...just a normal reaction to a frustrating condition. But we did not give thanks or express our trust in God in that situation, so we are failing to meet God’s standards. Or we may be in a conversation, perhaps even with someone we care about...but our view-point or opinion may be challenged by that person, which causes us to go on the defensive (or offensive) to preserve and protect our own egos. Here comes pride, flying below the radar, but still putting us out of fellowship. Or we drive by a house that we admire, and express a fleeting wish that we lived there. Innocent enough. But greed and envy are slipping in on cat’s paws, without our even knowing it. Before we can even blink, we are infected with the sin-virus. And we drop right out of fellowship.

See why we need to confess often...sweeping in the corners to bring our sins into God’s light so we can get forgiveness? Remember, anything not of faith is sin, which opens up a huge area of sins that we may not even see. When we confess what we know, the provision



of “purifying all unrighteousness” will take care of the sins we can’t identify. Then, as we advance in maturity and discernment, we will be more adept at spotting our sins, and will be prompted to confess them with greater acuity.

When we confess our sins, we find fellowship with God. Staying in fellowship is within our control, made simple by the gracious provision of honest confession.

**And What Happens if We Don’t Find Fellowship?** What happens if I don’t confess? In *Sin and Mercy*, we gave what I hope was a balanced view between 1) the patience and mercy of God’s love, and 2) the intensity of the discipline that will take place if sins go unconfessed. In this current study on God’s standards, we want to look more closely at the pain that comes to believers when God disciplines them for unconfessed sins.

When we do not confess our sins, nothing will work right, and things will not be working together for our good. We will be out of fellowship, will not have the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and will be completely exposed to punishment for “outstanding” sins. When we are out of fellowship, prayers will not be heard, Bible studies will not make sense, and faith will not be operating. The Christian life will be shut down, and we will be without the provisions that God offers. We are still His children, and He still loves us and will deal with us in grace, but we will not be inside the warm and comfortable dwelling of spirituality, because we have mud on our shoes. (The “mud” idea is from Is. 57:20, where an “out-of-fellowship” condition is depicted as producing “mud and mire”.)

When sins go unconfessed, we will be scheduled for divine discipline. Lev. 26:14-39 gives a picture of the progressive nature of God’s discipline. In this passage, God told the Israelites that their punishment would get worse by a cumulative factor of seven, each time they were disciplined and did not respond properly. We will quote verses 14 to 17 in their entirety to get some notion as to the way discipline can intensify. Don’t bypass this important passage, which says this:

But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.

God’s love for us is unshakable, but *unchecked, uncorrected, unforgiven violation of His standards will not go uncontested*. When we sin, discipline begins. The only way to stop it is by getting forgiveness, as we have discussed. But we are not through with Leviticus. The consequences stated in Lev. 26:14-17 are devastating, but that is just the beginning. Verse 18 says, “If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.” His objective, as stated in verse 19, is this: “I will break down your stubborn pride....” Pride prevents the confession that will bring resolution to the sin problem, so pride *must be broken*.

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In verse 21, the “seven times” factor becomes “seven times seven”, if pride persists. And this in turn is multiplied by seven, and this happens again and again, until the total intensity-factor of the discipline reaches a level of 16,807 times that of the original discipline. The description of the suffering and devastation resulting from this discipline is frightening. And if you think God’s discipline cannot come with great ferocity to believers in the Church Age, stay tuned, because it can. Here is a list of things that happened to the Israelites...consider that these can happen to us, as well. This is what we find in Lev. 26:14-39:

- Sudden terror.
- Wasting diseases.
- Fever that destroys sight.
- Financial collapse.
- Defeat by your enemies (including those brought in by Satan).
- Domination by those who hate you.
- Absence of sustenance (e.g., rain).
- Wild animals attacking and destroying the children and the cattle.
- Dwindling population.
- Swords coming against you (being conquered by other nations).
- Plague.
- No food.
- Digestion problems.
- Starvation leading to cannibalism of even family members.
- Dead bodies piling up on images of idols.
- Cities being destroyed.
- The land becoming wasted and desolate.
- No escape.
- Crazy fear, fleeing the slightest noise.
- Maniacal flight from imagined dangers.

This is unthinkable...unless you are living it...and then you know it is **real**. But hope springs eternal. The next three verses (Lev. 26:40-42) give a solution, reflecting what we have proposed many times. Here is what these verses say:

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

This passage illustrates, as do so many events and statements in the Old Testament, a very important principle: When we confess, we will find mercy, and we will get forgiveness...and the discipline will stop. There may be residual effects from the discipline, but IF WE ARE IN FELLOWSHIP, WE WILL NOT CONTINUE TO BE DISCIPLINED. This does not mean that we will not suffer, but that the discipline will change from suffering for punishment to suffering for growth. And we can be happy about that change. (cf., 1 Pet. 4:15-19)

Is. 57:20 concludes the plight of the believer out of fellowship, saying the following: “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked’.”

To dispel the notion that intense discipline cannot come to New Testament believers, we will look at a passage that gives clear indication that we can suffer terribly as a result of unconfessed sins. We see this in Heb. 10:26-31, a passage which gives a clear warning that sin brings discipline, possibly even *extremely harsh* discipline.

We use the *Interlinear Bible* translation as our source for this passage. (Endnote 3) We will quote verses 26 to 31, in part and in sections. Verses 26-27 announce the following:

For if we willfully sin after receiving the full knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice concerning sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and zealous fire being about to consume the adversaries.

“Sacrifice concerning sins” refers to the Old Testament sacrifices, which were not allowed for “sins of presumption” or “willful” sins. These sacrifices cannot apply to our sins, because 1) they are no longer practiced, and 2) even if they were being practiced in the Church Age, they could never be used to deal with willful sin. This passage suggests the level of intensity that discipline can reach.

So Old Testament sacrifices are no help to us if we sin, leaving only “judgment and zealous fire”. God’s discipline can be “hell on earth”, as we stated in a previous study, because God, though infinitely loving and merciful, is “a consuming fire, a jealous God”, as stated in Deut. 4:24. This is because God takes our sins seriously. Under the Law, anyone who did not take God’s standards seriously received punishment, including physical death (Heb. 10:28). But get this—the punishment we receive for (unconfessed) sin can be even *worse* than that. Our discipline can be worse than physical death! This has our attention.

The result of outstanding sins in the lives of believers is tantamount to the following, in God’s view, as seen in verse 29 (still in Heb. 10):

- Trampling the Son of God underfoot.
- Counting as “common” the blood of Christ.
- Insulting the Holy Spirit.

For these, God will provide punishment, or will “repay” believers for such disregard for the work of Jesus Christ...the work that “sanctified” them (also verse 29).

And then notice what verse 30 says: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” This means that when we sin and do not confess, we should be looking over our shoulder, because real trouble is coming. Still, we cannot forget God’s unfailing love, and His tender mercies, and that He loves to forgive us. In Heb. 12:5-8, 10-11, we witness both love and severity from God, and we see an explanation for the sin dilemma cited above in Heb. 10:26-31. The passage in Heb. 12 offers the following:

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons....Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. **No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.** Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Emphasis mine)

Once again, we see that the purpose of discipline is to correct us so we can share in God’s holiness. This is a reference to our being restored to fellowship, from which vantage point righteousness and peace (fellowship markers) can be produced in our lives. This also harkens back to Heb. 10:22 which says the following:

...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.

When our sins are confessed, we have a sincere heart full of faith, hearts sprinkled to give us a clear conscience, and bodies that have been purified with “pure” water. When believers apply the blood of Christ to their sins by confessing them (1 Jn. 1:9; Heb. 9:14), and wash themselves in the pure waters of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:37; Ps. 51:2), they will be clean...and fellowship will be restored.

Discipline is a necessary part of dealing with sin in our lives. If we do not confess, and persist in a “sinful” state, we will be punished until we cry “uncle”. 1 Pet. 4:1-2 confirms this in the following:

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Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but for the will of God.

Look more closely at this passage. Christ suffered and smashed sin. Holiness repudiates sin, and it *has to go*. Peter wants his readers to have the same *attitude* toward sin that Christ had. Christ suffered for sin, and when we suffer in the form of discipline, we also suffer for sin, until we have the attitude of Christ...which is that of *repudiating* sin. In addition, Christ accepted His suffering, and we should have the same acceptance of our discipline, because *it will help us stop sinning*. When we suffer “in the body”, we will be “done with sin”, and will **not** live the rest of our lives plotting more sin, but will look for ways to get closer to God, where we can rest.

Discipline is effective. It makes us hate sin, which is exactly the response God wants. If we don't confess constantly, and our sins bring discipline, at some point we will say we have had enough, and we will look to God to get forgiveness, so He can take us out of the fire brought on by our sins.

## **Fellowship and the Holy Spirit**

**Introduction.** The idea of fellowship as it relates to the Holy Spirit is not a new and novel concept. We have covered it many times from many angles, and—if a central mission or point or passion emerges from all the books—it is this one: **The Christian life is to be lived in fellowship with God, so the Holy Spirit can produce the life of Christ in us.** The purpose for this is so we can propagate the gospel and strengthen fellow believers...and these bring glory to God. All of this has been thoroughly probed. So why are we still “harping” on this one point? This question deserves an answer.

First of all, there will be no spirituality, righteousness, maturity, or real production apart from the Holy Spirit. The function of the Spirit in our lives is crucial, because without it, there will be no holiness in us or from us. Secondly, and because of the importance of the first reason, we want to strengthen our *understanding* of the ministry and role of the Holy Spirit, and we want, as much as possible, to see it *in the street...or right where the rubber meets the road.* We are not looking for abstractions or abstruse conceits...we want to know what to *choose* and *do* to get more of the power of the Spirit into our minute-by-minute living.

For us to have confidence in this process, we must be sure that what we claim is substantiated in Scripture. If it is not true doctrine, we need to discard it and start over. But we have seen it, and want to see it even more clearly. In truth, we continue to see more and more that our small and petty selves cannot generate the righteousness that God calls for. To produce righteousness that pleases an Almighty God, *the strength for it* must match *the size of its requirement.* Only God is that strong.

So—whatever we do pragmatically—we must recognize that the standards God specifies in Scripture are too big for us, and we must constantly enrich and refine our understanding of God's ways for meeting His will. We have linked production in the Christian life with cleanliness that comes from forgiveness, and this is the link we want to magnify and amplify in this chapter. You have heard it said that “cleanliness is next to godliness”. There may be more to this adage than meets the eye...because being clean actually gets us next to God.

**We Begin with Fellowship.** The operation of the Holy Spirit is engaged within us through fellowship, or communion, or “reconciled relations” with Him. Sin disqualifies us for this fellowship, so sin must be removed in order to restore fellowship. When we accepted Christ at salvation, we did not solve the sin problem ourselves (by, for example, keeping the Law), and now that we are children of God for all eternity, the solution for the sin problem (that we still have) *will (still) not come from us.*

God must provide the solution for sin in our lives...which is what He has done through the gracious, non-meritorious technique of repentance. Repentance...changing our minds about our sins...enables forgiveness, which makes us clean and restores our fellowship. This was the main point of our previous book, *Sin and Mercy*, where we saw a clear connection between confession and fellowship in 1 Jn. 1.

In the preceding chapter of this current series, we looked at Phil. 2:1, where we saw links between fellowship and the production of the Holy Spirit. Phil 2:1 uses the specific word, “fellowship”, as does 1 Jn. 1. The word is also used in 2 Cor. 13:14, where Paul expresses once again a desire for his readers to stay in fellowship. Paul said this: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” The concept of “fellowship” has been well-established...in Scripture and in all our studies.

In 1 Pet. 1:22 we see further connection between the function of the Spirit and fellowship, based on the purity of the believer. This verse says, “Purifying your souls in the obedience of the truth through the Spirit to unpretended brotherly love, love one another fervently out of a pure heart.” (Endnote 4) The truth we obey to purify our souls is that of getting forgiveness ...or being “purified”...by means of the Holy Spirit. Peter cited the Spirit as the source and the power for purification. When we confess, we obey the procedure established by God for our purification. The result: The Holy Spirit produces “unpretended brotherly love” through us. Pure love comes from a pure heart. We don’t just *have* or *make* a pure heart...the Holy Spirit gives us one through cleansing.

It should also be mentioned that there is a technique in psychology positing this: “Acting as if something is true will tend to make it become a reality”. For example, if we want to develop love, we should practice acts of love until we actually feel it...along the line of “fake it ‘till you make it”. This is false. We must understand that **external practice will not truly change our hearts...only God can cleanse us and make us righteous**. God is our source for real change, and it is to Him that we must turn for improvement. One psychologist said, “Nothing changes until it becomes what it is,” but we declare this: “Nothing changes until **we** become what **He** is.” It is His life that changes us...and there is no substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Living in the Light.** Living in fellowship, or in the power of the Holy Spirit, is tantamount to “living in the light”. Light is exposure, but it is also “energy”, referring to the spiritual power that we receive from the Spirit to achieve “sanctified” behavior. When we see “light” in Scripture, it may refer to our being a born-again child of God, or it may mean *being in fellowship*. Whichever of these is intended, the meaning will be determined from context.

Eph. 5:8-14 refers to darkness and light, and urges us to live in the light. This passage gives us the following:

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) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Analysis: When we say that we are “light in the Lord” (v. 8), this means that we are redeemed believers...or we have been “saved”. And, since we are saved, we should “live as children of light” (also v. 8), meaning that the lives we *live* should mirror the lives we *have*, referring to the life of Christ. Notice the fruits of fellowship (or of the Spirit) in v. 9, which are these: goodness, righteousness and truth (understanding). And notice the solution to “darkness”, which is to expose the deeds of darkness to the light (v. 11). This calls to mind our study in 1 Jn. 1, in *Sin and Mercy*, where fellowship is linked to “walking in the light”. The light is the place where sins are exposed so they can be forgiven; this depicts confession and restoration (v. 13). When we live as children of the light, we will be alive and awake, and the fruit of the Spirit will shine through (v. 14). One of the “fruits” of the Spirit is love, which we are expected to show, but love cannot grow in the dark, as we shall see.

In Romans 13:9, we see all the “commandments” summed up in the phrase, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Then verses 11 and 12 direct us toward the “light” to find this love, as we see in the following:

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

The armor of light represents the “clothing” we should be wearing to put aside the deeds of darkness. We see the “uniform of the day” in verse 14, which says, “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” When we are in the light...in fellowship...we will love our neighbor and we will be fortified against the evil that destroys our fellowship. If we are in the dark, love will grow cold and evil will abound.

In *Being Devoted to Prayer*, in the chapter, “Walking in Jesus”, we discussed Rom. 13:14 more thoroughly, where we said, in part, the following:

As we have stated previously, deity and divinity have no truck with iniquity. God and sin will not mix. When we provide for the cravings of the sinful nature, we will be separated from the power of Christ....To deal with sin, we must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”. What does this mean? This means “clothing ourselves” with Christ in our daily lives, rather than serving our flesh. When we put on clothes, they are right next to us, up close, touching us. They conform to our shape and cover us. They *fit* us. Christ fits us and is close to us when we learn about Him and when we are in fellowship with His Spirit. This is similar to His being “at home” in us, living in us and being in charge of our minds and bodies because we are spiritually aligned with Him.

Christ arms us against the flesh and all other forces of darkness, when we cover ourselves with Him by staying in fellowship.

**Strength and Production in Fellowship (Under the Spirit's Control).** When we are in the light, sins are exposed and confessed, and we are in fellowship. When we are in



fellowship, the Spirit is free to operate through us, because sin is not dousing His fire. When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we are empowered by Him to do God's will. But what about *our* part? A question frequently arises as to where *self-control* comes in. The Bible is clear that self-control is a part of God's standards, and a required condition and practice for all believers. So where do self-control and Spirit-control meet and interact?

We will find an answer in Phil. 2:12-13 (NET). These verses say the following:

So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God.

Paul has apparently been working with these Philippians for some time, and it seems that they have developed a sort of attachment to or dependency on him that does not match the level of maturity and spirituality they have achieved. It seems he wants to remind them that their relationship and fellowship are with God, and that—in the vein of “every tub standing on its own bottom”—he wants them to focus on their own individual divine connections, independent of Paul himself. They are told to “continue working out their own salvation [deliverance] with awe and reverence”. He is instructing them to maintain their own personal fellowship through faith and humility, which are *components* of restoration and fellowship.

Whatever “deliverance” they are “working” on, it is **not** salvation from eternal condemnation, as if salvation could be earned by law-keeping or self-induced righteousness. The deliverance may be from nothing more than dependence on Paul, a subtle form of idolatry that they need to break free from. The result of their focusing on **their own individual fellowship** is that they will be enabled through the power of the Holy Spirit to get some *real* work done, because it will be God Who is doing it.

Repeating: “The one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of His good pleasure—is God” (v. 13). How much clearer could it be? God creates the desire for a believer in fellowship and God brings forth the effort in that believer...to do God's will. This is the beauty and the benefit of fellowship: God does the work. He has made this so easy...the “Easy” button is confession, followed, as we shall see, by ongoing faith.

Now, regarding self-control, you see in Philippians 2 above that God is the Motivator, and He is the Mover, so all that is left for us to do is to stay in His good graces so that we *let Him do what we can't*. Self-control is not a bad thing, but—as we shall see in an upcoming chapter—*anything* that is done *out of fellowship* will amount to nothing. Self-control that comes from Spirit-control is productive, satisfying, and meaningful. It is not conjured up or forced or artificial; it is just the outcome of fellowship. Without Spirit-control, self-control is nil.

We are establishing that fellowship and the control of the Spirit are inseparable, and both are central standards that are “super-commanded”. Eph. 5:18 gives a single standard regarding

the Holy Spirit, that—like two other standards we saw earlier regarding the Holy Spirit (viz., don't grieve, don't quench)—is surrounded by numerous other standards. The standard is this: "Do not be drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." This standard calls for us to be "controlled" by the Spirit, since whatever "fills" us will also "control" us.

Following Eph. 5:18, we see in verses 19-21 some immediate and specific results of this "filling", as follows:

- Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
- Singing and giving thanks to God for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

These things are evidence that—when the Spirit is in control—fellowship exists. We can extract from this list two major categories of *benefit* from Spirit-control: 1) mutual fellowship among believers, and 2) a spirit of thanksgiving and reverence toward God.

There are many other implications arising from the control of the Holy Spirit, not the least of which is a suppression of the sinful nature. Gal. 5:16-17 confirms this, saying 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.

The sinful nature keeps us from staying pure, which places the seeker-after-God into conflict with himself. We do not need to despair, however, because God has made a way for us to win this battle, and it begins with our realizing that **we can't**, but **He can**. And—by the way—when your preacher pumps you up to go out and face the dragons of the world, the devil, and the flesh, don't buy it. The battle is not yours...you will lose, regardless of how confident you may feel in your ability to fight. The battle is the Lord's. (1 Sam. 17:47; 2 Chron. 20:15). Victory comes only through fellowship, as we shall see very soon.

Fellowship, then, is key. Heb 12:14 says, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." Making an effort to live in peace is the same as saying, "Stay reconciled with God, so you can stay reconciled with other believers who are also reconciled to God." And "being holy" is the same thing as "staying clean", or "being sanctified" or "having our feet washed". Without "holiness", or God's cleansing, we will not "see" the Lord. One possible meaning of this is that those who have not received the righteousness of Christ by trusting in Him and being saved will not go to heaven. But there is an application to fellowship in this verse that must not be missed. For believers who are not "holy" or "purified" through confession, God will not be visible TO them, or FROM them. To live in peace and stay holy, we must stay in fellowship.

Finally, all service for God comes from being in fellowship and under the control of the Holy Spirit. 1 Pet. 4:7-12 gives the following avenues of preservice and inservice that are opened up when we are in fellowship:

- Being clear-minded and self-controlled.
- Praying in fellowship.
- Loving each other deeply.
- Offering hospitality to one another without grumbling.
- Using our gifts to serve others, administering grace in its various forms.
- Speaking as though the words come from God.
- **Serving in God's strength.**
- Directing all things toward praise and glory for Jesus Christ.

We will have more to say about the production of the Holy Spirit and the operation of our *gifts* in service to Him in the next chapter.

## **Fruits of Fellowship through the Control of the Spirit**

**Nothing is Impossible with God.** The thing that causes all of existence is God. He initially created, and now controls, **everything**. He is infinitely wise and strong, and there is nothing He cannot do, if He so chooses. He shares His infinity with us in the person of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us with unimaginable capability and strength...as long as He is in control. When God is in control of us, which is a condition we *choose* or *refuse*, the “impossible” becomes our possibility. Paul said, in Phil. 4:13, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” That’s because he knew the words Gabriel had given to Mary when the angel announced the virgin birth to her, as recorded in Luke 1:37, “For nothing is impossible with God.”

Armed with the idea that *nothing* is impossible with God, and that we can do *anything* through Jesus Christ, who shares His infinite strength with us, we can have confidence that no situation, or enemy, or disease, or financial collapse, or “accident”, or loss, or break-up, or criticism, or isolation, or unfulfilled wish will keep us from accomplishing our purpose for being alive, and our ability to do it joyfully, **if we get close to God...and stay there**. This is why our first and greatest pursuit is to get into fellowship, pray in the Spirit, grow in His truth, and trust Him for every step, and every breath, we take.

And this is why Paul told Timothy to pursue the filling and fruit of the Holy Spirit, as we see in I Tim. 6:11, which says, “But you, man of God, flee from all this [greed, etc.], and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.” These are clear markers for fellowship, because they are fruits of the Spirit. These are to be our focus, *regardless of our circumstances*. (As we write this we must make it clear: We do not say these things with insouciance toward the real suffering that Christians go through. They...sometimes “we”...need compassion and assistance, and believers in fellowship will have a heart for those who are suffering.)

**Bearing Fruit.** Eph. 6:1-18 gives a string of “expectations”, and then explains how they can be met. Here are some of the things this passage tells us we should do:

- Children, obey your parents.
- Honor your father and mother.
- Fathers, do not exasperate your children, but bring them up in knowledge of the Lord.
- Slaves, obey your masters, as you would obey Christ.
- Slaves (and, by implication, others), serve wholeheartedly, as if serving the Lord.
- Masters, treat your slaves without threats, because they are brothers and sisters in Christ.

These are reminiscent of the kinds of standards we saw earlier in this series from many parts of Scripture. These are things that are easily overlooked or violated, but they are things we are expected to do. So we must know how to do these things, or—even better—we need to find out where we can **get help** to do them. Verse 10 in Eph. 6 introduces the means for living up to God's standards. This verse says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." How many times do we attempt to do things in our own strength and in our own power? And how many preachers encourage this when they stand behind their pulpits or sit around the dinner tables of parishioners, proclaiming, "You can do it!" This is a disastrous declaration, and a tragic departure from the truth. Self-trust is *not* the key to "being strong". That is why we are told to be strong **in God's power**. This is why fellowship is so important.

As additional help, we are invited to put on God's armor and wield His weapons, which we desperately need, because we are not fighting against "flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (v. 12). We have no idea how strong these forces are, and *they are out to get us*. Without God's strength, we will be defeated by these, and our lives will produce NO FRUIT.

Prov. 11:30 tells us, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." This is what this verse means to us:

The spiritual production of a believer in fellowship (the "righteous") gives life...*eternal life*, by giving the gospel to unbelievers, and/or *spiritual life* by using one's gifts to edify fellow believers...and the person who does this shows that he is mature ("wise").

Fruit is seen in a variety of forms, but the objective for producing fruit is **more life**...eternal and/or spiritual.

**The Fruit.** Gal. 5:22 gives a good view of the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces. This verse says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law." These are direct outcomes of fellowship and the filling of the Spirit. When we see the term "goodness" (righteousness), or such terms as love, joy, and peace, we can know that the Holy Spirit is nearby as the One who *makes these happen*, because this kind of fruit is *supernaturally* produced. This requires us to have *supernatural connections* to participate in their production.

Col. 3:8-23 gives a contrasted view between the fruit of the Spirit and the deeds of the sinful nature. We saw the output of the *flesh* in this passage earlier, listed as "products of the flesh". Here we want to focus on the "fruit" that is listed to show the consistency in the kinds of things the Spirit produces in us. In verses 12-17, we see the following fruits:

- Clothing yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.
- Bearing with one another.

- Forgiving grievances.
- Putting on love, which binds all of these together.
- Letting the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.
- Letting the Word of God live in you richly as you teach and admonish each other.
- Doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus [i.e., in fellowship], giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Can you see why these qualities, which we have observed so frequently in other passages, are so clearly associated with fellowship and the filling of the Spirit? The connection is unmistakable and undeniable. These are flashing lights wherever they are used in Scripture, calling attention to conditions created by the Holy Spirit. We want fellowship with the Spirit, because He is the one Who generates these favorable spiritual outcomes.

**Gifts from the Spirit and Fruits of the Spirit.** Gifts for service come from the Holy Spirit. We have discussed gifts in previous books, especially in *Getting Closer to God*, where an entire chapter is devoted to gifts. Please refer to that study for a detailed discussion on gifts.

Gifts from the Holy Spirit are provided as concentrated means and media for administration and distribution of His fruit. We will see fruit in a variety of forms as the Holy Spirit works through us in a general sense, but the Holy Spirit also gives us special gifts that are infused within us...abilities and attitudes that equip us for specific functions in the larger church, and/or the local church.

For these gifts to be effective and productive, we must be in fellowship, of course. In fact, we made a case in an earlier book that to even *get* the gifts, we have to reach a certain level of preparation and maturity. Some argue that gifts are received at salvation, which may be the case, but we know one thing: Our gifts will never *operate* as intended, apart from fellowship and maturity.

Gifts are listed in a number of places, but we want to look at some general truths about gifts, and refer you to previous studies for actual lists. 1 Cor. 12:4-7 cites the importance of being in fellowship for gifts to operate, because it is God who performs the actions generated by the gifts. We also see here the purpose for gifts. Here is what this passage 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. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

No matter what the gift, God is the one Who works it, and it is always for the common good of believers. What an ingenious system: a veritable commune of loving and serving saints, committed to the good of all, with each contributing to the benefit of the other.

This sounds familiar, because Satan has attempted to duplicate this system, while excluding Jesus Christ. This is summarized in Karl Marx's axiom for communism: from each according to his ability to each according to his need. This system does not work, because it depends on the most unreliable existential quality in the world: *human nature*. No system, not even a church, will work for long without God's power behind it. The same is true of individual believers. Humanity is powerless to replicate divinity.

To get the power going behind our gifts, we need the Holy Spirit to be in charge. Rom. 14:19 describes this process for us, where Paul instructs, "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." This small verse is packed with power. "Every effort that leads to peace" means "doing what it takes to stay reconciled with God". As a result of *reconciliation* (which is the meaning of "peace"...more on this later), or *fellowship*, we can be productive, resulting in "mutual edification" that will occur when our gifts are properly exercised.

Fellowship is crucial to the operation of our gifts, and the fruit that will be borne because of them. But if you have not been operating there, do not despair. No matter how long you have been out of fellowship, here is what you MUST KNOW: As long as you are still alive, God has a purpose for you. Great things are potential to ALL of us. It doesn't matter if you have been out in the spiritual hinterlands for thirty-five years...since you are still here, there is time for you to confess the sins you know and get back in gear to have your gift come alive.

So get ready. You have a job to do, and the need for your gift is greater than ever. Do this: Train by confessing, studying, and praying, and thereby strengthen your faith. By enduring God's training, your gift will be honed to equip you to become the warrior He wants you to be.

**The Victory of Spirituality.** The things that Paul went through to serve Jesus Christ are unimaginable to us. Given all the creature comforts and religious freedoms that we still have in the United States of America, it is hard for us to feature what it took for Paul to establish churches and spread the gospel. 2 Cor. 6:3-10 describes some of these things. We will present this passage a section at a time.

Verses 3-5: We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger....

This was not comfortable robes and clean sandals. This was dirty, stinky, painful, and scary work. Yet, we see next what Paul's attitude was, because of the relationship and fellowship he had with his heavenly Father:

Verses 6-7: ...in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left....

Could there ever be a more poignant statement of the power of fellowship? In the middle of immense suffering, we see purity, knowledge, faith, and fellowship, where love and truth and the power of God provided weapons of righteousness to defend against all kinds of evil. Paul held on to fellowship through all the pain, and was able to record great truths because of it. Every time we study, we share in the benefits of Paul's writings, which are concrete results of his submission to the control of the Holy Spirit.

In the last section from 2 Cor. 6, we witness the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit that turns darkness to light, and death to life.

Verses 8-10: ...through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing and yet possessing everything.

You see, with each horrible circumstance, there was victory for Paul through Christ, and Paul knew that God was with Him and for Him through every minute of his destitution. He felt rich and blessed...and even joyful...through all his suffering, because he was empowered by the internal function of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit strengthened him on the inside, and gave him a new view-point of all that was happening on the outside. This is what fellowship does. And that's why we're still talking about it.

This must be said: The comfort we have known for so long is likely to change soon, if Christ delays His coming. We need to get prepared the way Paul was prepared, and to engage the full power of the Holy Spirit to fortify us for what lies ahead.



## Joy as a Fruit of the Spirit

**What is Joy, and is it Necessary?** Joy means different things to different people, and has different connotations from one group or culture to the next. For some, being alive for another day is joy. For others, it is the cessation of pain. Some see joy as fulfilled wishes, dreams, or goals. For many, joy is living in harmony with their surroundings and the people in it. Hormonal and other chemical conditions in the body and brain are also believed to affect joy. So “joy” involves a variety of conditions that connote physical, emotional, psychological, and circumstantial projections. But the joy we want to know more about is “spiritual” joy.

Perhaps this short study will raise as many questions as it answers. The definition of “joy”, closely related to “happiness”, is admittedly hard to nail down, and we will not complete the task here. But even though we are hard-put to fully describe joy, the relationship between joy and spirituality is unmistakable in Scripture. Joy is a matter related to faith and fellowship, and it is certain that we are meant to have it as a result of our spirituality.

Our daily lives do not always appear to be overflowing with joy, which is the truth of our *experience*, but we will not rely on experience here to understand joy; we will look to God's *truth in the Scripture* to see what place it has in our lives. We are committed to knowing more about joy, and we hope that the gaps that persist regarding it will eventually be filled in. For now, we want to present what we see concerning joy as a fruit of the Spirit, and pray that what we learn now will move us toward fulfilling our requirement for having it.

The question arises as to whether joy is a human emotion. It seems inescapable that it is. After all, we can only speak in our own language; and in *our* vocabulary, joy is an exuberant “feeling” that people have. But *joy is also a fruit of the Spirit*, which is a *supernatural* condition, generated and sustained by the filling and control of the Holy Spirit. **Without** the control of the Spirit, the ways that joy is “felt” or “expressed” seem almost irrelevant, as such “feelings” will not have a spiritual underpinning. **With** the Holy Spirit, however, joy will be an expression of God.

We will admit that distinguishing our own natural or self-generated joy...from that derived from our fellowship with God...is difficult. But we will also acknowledge that we do not have to hold in our hands or thoughts or emotions every single thing God is producing within us...in order for it to be there. Our relationship with God is based on *Truth*, not on feelings...though it is certain that emotions are impacted in a number of ways when we “walk in the Spirit”.

One thing we can say unequivocally: Spirituality must precede *true* joy. Any other joy can only be worldly/fleshly-based, and will not be genuine. Understanding the exact lines between the two types of joy...human and spiritual...or how they may overlap, will simply have to wait for greater discernment, but we will present here a case for 1) the necessity and importance of joy, and 2) the way joy is acquired.

There is no question that we are commanded to receive and express joy. Phil. 4:4 says, "Rejoice always." And the command is so important that Paul repeats it, saying, "I will say it again: Rejoice!" This is not a suggestion or a recommendation...it is a direct command from God. And it is *not* something we are to do periodically or occasionally; it is something we are to do "always". So, can we overlook it or ignore it? Is it not important? Is it an optional feature of Christianity? Only if God has not called for it...and He has; therefore, we must pay attention to it and get as much of it as we can.

**How the Galatians Lost Their Joy.** In Galatians 4, we see Paul pleading with the Galatians to avoid returning to law-keeping for spirituality. In verse 6, he reminded them that we have the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit gives us freedom from the law (a topic of Galatians 5).

In the second part of verse 9 in chapter 4, he asks them, "How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?" Notice the word "miserable". These believers in Galatia had been pulled away from grace and into law-keeping by converts from Judaism, who were trying to mix law with grace, and were convincing others to do the same. Those who abandoned grace and embraced rule-keeping to please God were MISERABLE.

Perhaps we can see this in our own experience. When someone is trying to live out his Christian life and achieve spirituality by keeping the Law, or following a system of rules by whatever code or creed, he is always unhappy, without understanding why. "But I quit drinking, and I don't go to the brothels any more, and I even gave up cheating on my taxes..." These are excellent things to do, but get this: These, or any other acts of self-determined *compliance* from us, do NOT by themselves give us good standing with God, and they will not give us the joy that we are commanded to have. Law-keeping is a "miserable", ineffectual practice, and will never be a substitute for spirituality.

So we have a start on seeing how to *avoid* misery, which may be our first step in getting to "joy". Embrace grace, because there's a flaw in the Law. (The flaw, of course, is not in the Law itself, but in our inability to keep it.) Paul asked the Galatians, in 4:15, "What has happened to your joy?" And then he suggests the answer in the form of another question: "Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" They loved Paul, as he repeatedly exclaimed throughout this chapter (Chapter 4), so he is not referring to their attitude toward him, but to their rejection of the truth, and their attachment to legalism.

When we embrace false doctrine and find a system for living the Christian life that is not based on the Word of God, we are headed into misery. The opposite of this is also true: When we immerse ourselves in a search for truth in Scripture, we find comfort, consolation, and even joy in its teachings. There is no better antidote for fear, discouragement, shame, disappointment, and sadness than remembering or combing through the words of the Bible. There is joy in the truth.

**Joy is a Fruit of the Spirit.** In Acts 13:52, we see the following description of the disciples as they were ministering: “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” Luke 10:21 describes Jesus as being “full of joy through the Holy Spirit”. In Jn. 17:13-14, Jesus says the following, in context with His asking for His Father’s protection of the disciples:

I am coming to you [Father] now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.”

The full measure of the joy belonging to Jesus Christ is in view here. This is the joy we get now from the Holy Spirit. These verses tell us that the truth of the Word and the filling of the Spirit are the keys to joy. We see this again in a psalm of David (Ps. 8:11), quoted in Acts 2:28: “You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.” It is our knowledge of the paths of life and being in God’s presence that gives us joy. When we live in the Word and are filled with the Spirit, we will experience supernatural joy.

Gal. 5:22 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...” Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. It is not the product of self-induced righteousness, but is rather a supernatural condition infused by the Holy Spirit. Divinely-ordered joy **comes from the Holy Spirit**. 1 Thess. 1:6b confirms this, saying, “...you welcomed the message with the joy **given by the Holy Spirit**.” (emphasis mine) This is also found in Phil. 1:26b, where we see the phrase, “your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow.....” Real joy is in Christ, and comes from God.

Once again, we see joy as the handiwork of God in Rom. 15:13, which 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.” God fills us with joy and hope as we *trust in him*, so that we can overflow with “hope” (confidence regarding the future) *by the power of the Holy Spirit*. The concept we want to isolate from this powerful verse is this (once again): Real joy comes from God.

Finally, Jude 1:24 says, “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...” “Presence” here can refer to the judgment seat of Christ, but we are also in His presence here...now...on earth. We have in mind the second application of the word “presence”. Without reviewing again the entire doctrines of confession and fellowship, we make reference to these truths as God’s techniques for *presenting us* “without fault”, which occurs simultaneously with “great joy”. When we are clean due to confession, we will be faultless, and *great joy* will accompany our cleanliness. One more time: Real joy comes from God.

We will see, as we progress through “peace” and “love”, which are also fruits of the Spirit, that these, as well as joy and other fruits delineated in Scripture, are actually bookmarks,

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or indicators, for the filling of the Holy Spirit. And, just as the filling of the Spirit produces the fruit, so the presence of the fruit indicates a condition of “filling”. If fruit exists, filling is assumed. And if the filling of the Spirit is producing fruit, *joy* will be there.

## Peace as a Fruit of the Spirit

**What is Peace?** “Peace” is a very important word in the Christian vocabulary, and one we must understand well to see its significance. Peace is often viewed as an inner state, a sense of calmness or being undisturbed, like the glassy surface of a still pool. The concept of peace tends to conjure up an image of meditation or a state of serenity, accompanied by pleasant thoughts and buoyant feelings. But that is not quite the image we get in our examination of “peace” in the Bible. Peace in the Scripture is not so much about “peace within”, as it is “peace between”. We will explain.

The surprising thing about the definition of peace is that its use in Scripture often conveys the concept of “reconciliation”, according to *Vine’s Concise Dictionary of the Bible*. (Endnote 5) This reconciliation results in “harmonious relations” between man and man, or between man and God.

When we consider peace as “reconciliation”, we immediately think of our being *reconciled* to God. This reconciliation takes place initially at salvation, at which time God does many things for us on the basis of our faith in the work of His Son. The result is this: We are eternally saved, become children of God forever, and have an eternal *position* in harmony with God.

But our *condition*, as believers in time, is that we are often in a state of discord with God because of our sins. So a second reconciliation process must take place, which is what happens when we faithfully confess our sins, thus “updating” our fellowship with the Holy Spirit. When we confess, *harmony* is *restored* between God and us through the action of God’s mercy, which results in our being forgiven. Peace is both a *process for*, and a *product of*, fellowship. We are restored to fellowship through reconciliation (peace), and we are “at peace” (in harmony with God) because we have been restored.

Peace can also mean “completeness”, which represents maturity. (Endnote 6) Maturity occurs as we study and go through God’s training program, whereby we grow in understanding, wisdom, and faith. Maturity equips us to *live* in peace (harmony), as we remember to confess and keep short accounts on our sin list, and as we trust in God’s power and provision to sustain us in all ways.

**We Cannot Fully Understand Peace.** Phil. 4:5b-7 describes how God’s peace comes to us, even without our understanding it completely. This passage says the following:

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Lord will not be near if we are not “at peace” with God, meaning that we are not in communion with Him. But when He is near, and we are in fellowship, we can shed

anxiety, pray with faith and thanksgiving, and experience true harmony with God. This harmony is beyond our ability to comprehend, but it will protect our hearts and minds *as long as we stay in fellowship* (“in Christ Jesus”). Understand it or not, we must have it. Ongoing harmony with God is *everything*, which is why we place it center-stage, and at the front, in all of our studies.

**Peace is Given, Not Self-Produced.** Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, and is something that is given as a benefit of fellowship and grace. When Jesus was promising His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to them to fill in the hole He was about to leave by ascending to the Father, He said the following about peace:

All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

The reason the disciples had nothing to fear was that the Holy Spirit was going to come to them, as He does now to each of us, and He will not only *give* peace...He *is* peace. When Jesus said He (through the Father) would send His Spirit, and in the same breath said He would send His *peace*, He was not speaking of peace as an abstraction, but as a Person. When He gave us His Spirit, He provided the Spirit of Peace, Who holds the power for reconciliation, fellowship, and spiritual good.

This peace is more than babbling brooks in the mountains, or serene sunsets in the desert, or restful and restorative music in secluded chambers. This is the Spirit of God filling us with His power to give us peace among all the bullets and grenades that Satan is hurling at us, so that we can stand fast in the middle of furious battles. This peace has power; this peace is ready for war. Understanding of peace prepares us to fight, and this preparation becomes part of the armor of God, as we see in Eph. 6:15, “...and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace [knowledge of peace].”

**Living in Peace.** Other scriptures tell us to receive and live in peace. Here are some of them:

- 2 Cor. 13:11—“Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.” We see two commands and a promise: Command 1 is to shoot for maturity; command 2 is to stay in fellowship with each other as you live in fellowship with God; and the *promise* is that the God of love and peace will be right there with you to help you make it happen. *Proviso* first; then *provision*.
- Phil. 1:9—“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Why would we want to try to pump up our own “peace”, when it does not come from us...it comes from God.

- 2 Thess. 3:16—“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.” The God of peace gives peace...and it is available at all times and in every way. Notice again: *proviso* first, then *provision*. With *peace*, there is *presence*.
- Jude 1:2—“Mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.” This is an invitation...and a lesson in forgiveness (mercy), fellowship (peace), and the fruit of the Spirit (love). “In abundance” means “more and more”. These are things we will never have too much of.
- Col. 3:15—“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” When the peace of Christ **rules**, that means we are in fellowship and the Holy Spirit is in control. As a result, we have “peace”...or fellowship...with each other.
- 2 Pet. 1:2—“Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Knowledge of the Word equips us to access grace through fellowship...and the more we know, the more we will have.
- 1 Pet. 3:11—“He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.” When we “turn from evil”, as this quotation from Psalm 34 says, we envisage repenting, or confessing, which results in improved behavior. By doing this, we are searching for peace, or pursuing fellowship and maturity.
- Is. 26:3—“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” Fellowship and the filling of the Spirit come through confession. Walking in the Spirit is maintained by faith. Here, we have a description of maturity, which is measured by the amount of faith that has been developed. When we are mature, our minds are stable, meaning we stay in fellowship, and operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s “perfect peace”: mature fellowship.

**No Peace Without Fellowship.** When we harbor sin, and—through rebellion or pride—refuse to confess our sins, we will not have the peace that God offers through His Spirit. Is. 57:21 says it well, as follows: “There is no peace’, says my God, ‘for the wicked’”. This is because sin separates us from God. Is. 59:1-2 says the following:

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Sin puts a barrier between us and the power of God...and only confession can remove that sin. Is. 59:12-13 follows the passage above, and shows confession at work, 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....” This makes possible the restoration we see in Is. 59:20, which says, “The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,’ declares the Lord.” Then we see this: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the

glory of the Lord rises upon you.” When we do this, we will enjoy the control of the Spirit, as expressed in Is. 60:17b: “I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler.”

**Peace is a Fruit of the Spirit.** Peace is listed right behind love and joy in Gal. 5:22 as a fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit produces peace as *reconciliation* when a believer is “cleansed”; sustains peace as *harmony* when a believer is walking in faith; and increases *maturity* when a believer faithfully studies the Word and endures God’s training. Peace is all about what the Holy Spirit is...and does...as we share in Him and His work by God’s mercy, forgiveness, and grace.



## **Love as a Fruit of the Spirit**

**Love is Required.** The command to love is urgent and repetitive, echoing throughout Scripture as the ultimate requirement for believers. Love is the ultimate test for our faith, and the greatest declaration of our fellowship. But, as we look at the commands to love, we experience a small sinking feeling deep within ourselves, because the prescriptions are prohibitively stringent. Are you kidding me? I have to do “that” (fill in the blanks)? When we reach the point of knowing how humanly impossible our assignment to love is, we can do one of two things: 1) quit, or 2) find a way to do it. Quitting is not recommended. And, of course, there is always a third option, which is to “fake it”...also not recommended.

The first thing we must remember is the same thing we have iterated from the beginning: We cannot do this alone. So, if we need help getting this done, where is the help and how do we get it? These questions are, of course, rhetorical; we already know the answers to them, as follows: The help is with God, and we get it by getting close to Him through fellowship and maturity. No mystery exists here, but we will see in this study some little-examined truths that can facilitate our preparation to fulfill the commands to love. Our purpose in this chapter is to frame ways to understand and apply these truths.

**The Standards for Love.** The standards for love given in the Bible are interwoven throughout its pages. We will give only a few of them here, to represent the kinds of love we are expected to exhibit. Here are some exemplary standards for love:

1. **Love each other deeply.** 1 Pet. 4:8 says, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”
2. **Put on the breastplate of love and faith.** 1 Thess. 5:8a states, “But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate....”
3. **Edify fellow believers, regardless of maturity-levels.** Rom. 15:1-2 says, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”
4. **Encourage fellow believers.** 1 Thess. 5:11 gives us this: “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”
5. **Love your brothers, lead quiet lives, mind your own business, and do your own work.** 1 Thess. 4:9 and 11 says the following: “Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other....Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you.”
6. **Show compassion and don't plot evil against your brothers.** Zech. 7:9b-10 says, “Show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the

fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of [or plot against] each other.”

7. **Show compassion to those who suffer.** Heb. 13:3 advises, “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”
8. **Avoid “faking” love.** Rom. 12:9a says, “Love must be sincere.”
9. **Love God with all your heart.** Luke 10:27a commands, “Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”
10. **Love your neighbor.** Luke 10:27b commands, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
11. **Live a life of love.** Eph. 5:2a admonishes, “Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us.”

The big carrier of the flag for love is 1 Cor. 13, where the standards and indicators for love are unequivocal. Here is what this passage gives us:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (13:4-8a)

We will have more to say about this passage later in this chapter, but—for now—we acknowledge the rigorous standards we are given for love.

**Love and the Law.** Love fulfills the Law, as we see in Rom. 13:10, which says, “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” So, if we love in the manner we are told to love, *we* will fulfill the Law. Sounds like a simple pathway to fulfilling the requirements of the Law...just love. But wait...we know already that we will not love the way we should, any more than we can fulfill the Law.

So, even though “love” fulfills the Law, this is not about *our* fulfilling the Law, because we can’t do it. It is not a big leap for us to understand by now that love is an exclusive fruit of the Holy Spirit...but we must also see that it is actually a *manifestation* of the Spirit Himself. As is true with “peace”, wherein the Holy Spirit *is* peace, He is also “love”. We are *excluded* as a *source* for love. The love we are commanded to have, the kind that fulfills the Law, can come only from the One Who has...and is...such love: the Holy Spirit.

Paul repeats the principle that love fulfills the Law in Gal. 5:14, which says, “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’.” The next verse warns that, if we do not live in love, or if we go on living in hatred, we “will be destroyed by each other” (v. 15). Then we see in the next two verses in Gal. 5 the two forces that either create love...or prevent it. The Holy Spirit creates it...the sinful nature prevents it, as we see in verses 16-17. Here is what these verses say:

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 Law is no longer a factor if we are controlled by the Spirit (in fellowship) because love will be produced by Him. The Law is fulfilled by the perfection of the Holy Spirit, and that perfection becomes ours, *for as long as we are controlled by Him*. So the Law can't touch us. And, as per Gal. 5:22, God's love will be produced through us...as an expression (a fruit) of the Holy Spirit.

**God is the Source for All Love.** God's supernatural love is commanded in Jn. 13:34, where Christ says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Notice that He is not saying, "*Because* I have loved you," but "*As* I have loved you," or "in the same way I have loved you." We are not to merely *imitate* the love of Christ, to be reciprocal or reflective; we are to actually *duplicate* it exactly. Can we manufacture the love of God? Of course not. The only way we can love as Christ loved is to have *His* love running through us.

In Jn. 15:9-12, this idea is repeated. Jesus explained in this passage that we are to love in the same way and to the same degree that He loves, and He tells us to remain in *His* love to do this. Here is what this passage says:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

If we are listening and obeying, we will do what He says, which is to "remain" in His love. When we are *in His love*, His joy is in us, and it is complete. The presence and power of the Spirit of Christ will be operational if we "remain in Him"...or remain in fellowship.

Love is the greatest production of all, and like all fruits of the Spirit, love will be found IN HIM, *not* IN US. If you read Jn. 15:1-12, you will see over and over the spiritual fruit that is "*in*" Christ Jesus (verses 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11). There is no room for *our* being the source of *His* fruit, anywhere in these verses. Only God is the source of divine love and other spiritual fruit.

**Passages on God as the Source of Love.** God is presented as the source of love in many passages; we see a few of them here:

- Col. 1:8—"...and who also told us of your **love in the Spirit.**"
- Eph. 6:23—"Peace to the brothers, and **love** with faith **from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**"

- 2 Thess. 3:5—“May the **Lord direct your hearts into God's love** and Christ's perseverance.”
- 1 Thess. 4:9—“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves **have been taught by God to love** each other”
- Rom. 5:5—“And hope does not disappoint us, because **God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit**, whom he has given us.” (all emphases mine)
- Gal. 5:22—“But **the fruit of the Spirit is love**, joy, peace....”

The *source* of love, the kind we are commanded to show, is—without question—*God alone*. What we want to know now is this: How can we get more of it?

**The Prerequisite for Love.** Eph. 5:2 instructs us to “...live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...” This passage then follows in verses 3-4 with a string of things that will stymie this love, such as sexual immorality, impurity, obscenity, coarse joking, and so on, which are *sins*, but are also indicative of a kind of *idolatry*. These things prevent fellowship, and therefore constrict the filling and control of the Holy Spirit, from Whom we get the love called for in verse 2.

So the contest boils down to “love vs. sin”. God's love does not co-exist with sin...or...sin kills love. This is why sin must be dealt with for love to be present. Love can only operate when we are in fellowship, as we see in 1 Cor. 16:24, where Paul projected this: “My love to all of you in Christ Jesus.” Paul was speaking of his love for the Corinthians, which was “in Christ Jesus”. This is where love resides, as we saw in John 15. Paul is saying his love is being given to them from his position in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Pet. 1:22, we see that purifying ourselves leads to love. This verse says, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart.” We were purified at salvation when we believed in Christ, and now we must follow the command given earlier in this chapter (1 Pet. 1:16) to, “Be holy, because I am holy.” This is a command for believers. Holiness for believers comes from sanctification, or cleansing, which must be done repeatedly and frequently throughout our Christian lives. This holiness, or purity, leads to love.

1 Tim. 1:5 also points out the condition we must meet to have God's love flowing through us. This verse says, “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” We must have hearts that have been cleansed, which will leave us with consciences that are clear, and a faith that is genuine and strong. From a clean heart will come God's love.

Finally, we see in Jude 1:2, Jude's prayer for his readers: “Mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.” He wanted to see his audience adopting all the provisions of grace that free us to love under the control of the Holy Spirit. Mercy implies forgiveness; peace suggests

reconciliation; and love indicates a walk in harmony with the Spirit. When these conditions are met, we will love “in abundance”...or “more and more”.

The prerequisite for love, then, is *being purified through the cleansing of honest confession*. The way it is sustained is by walking in the Spirit, which is the result of persistent and growing faith. We will have more to say about the “walking” aspect of spirituality in an upcoming chapter.

**The Greatest of These is Love.** 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13, is the continuation of a discussion on gifts begun in Chapter 12. Gifts are bestowed by the Holy Spirit on believers in the church for the sake of edifying, comforting, and supporting each other, and for the cause of advancing the gospel. After enumerating specific gifts in Chapter 12, Paul opens Chapter 13 with a statement: “And now I will show you the most excellent way.” He tells us that the most excellent way is “love”. We saw earlier the parameters for love, as indicated in Chapter 13, verses 4-8a, and established these as clear standards for the presence and operation of love. Now, we will see how important love is.

Paul tells us, in 13:13, that “...these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” But why is love greater than faith and hope? Here is one explanation: Love is a fruit of the Spirit. It is something God does. Faith and hope are things that, in a sense, *we do*. So what God does certainly trumps what we do. That which God produces is infinitely greater than anything that comes from us, even faith and hope. So love from God is greater than faith and hope from us. (I know...faith and love can be seen as coming *from* God, so this is a *softer* point, and not my main one.)

There is an important truth in 1 Cor. 13:1b-3, which clarifies, I believe, verse 13 about love being greater than faith and hope. This passage says the following:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Notice that speaking in tongues, prophesying, great knowledge and understanding, and gifted faith that can move mountains “gains nothing” if love is not present. Quite simply, this means that the operation of these outstanding gifts...indeed, **anything** that we do or attempt in the Christian life...will be null and meaningless without love.

Not having love cancels out the most phenomenal achievements imaginable throughout all of our spiritual conquests! This would mean that NOTHING done without love really matters! This is new. Does this mean that—without love—there will be no achievement? Best efforts are useless straw and dross now? Yes. They amount to zero. Without love, we are nothing. How can this be?

Read carefully: We have established many times that everything worthwhile comes from the Holy Spirit, and good can only come through us when we are controlled by Him. We have also learned that love is the primary indicator for fellowship and the filling of the Spirit. These premises prompt the following conclusion from 1 Cor. 13: **Anything we ever do, no matter how noble or great it may seem, amounts to absolutely NOTHING if we are not in fellowship when we do it.** We can offer our bodies to be burned...for the faith...and if we do not do this in fellowship, it will not be recognized by God as something good. We MUST make sure that fellowship precedes EVERYTHING we do...or it will all amount to nothing.

There is no escaping the need for us to confess continually, allowing God's Spirit to infuse His power and love into us, so that what we do will count for Him. Doing great things, and looking great to onlookers, is not the key to spiritual production; **the key is love...in the Spirit.** No gift or achievement will be honored or sustained without a connection with the Holy Spirit.

So when we seek spiritual gifts and want to achieve something for the Lord, we must begin with the first verse in the next chapter, 1 Cor. 14:1, which says, "Follow [first] the way of love and [then] eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." Whatever we hope to achieve must begin with the "way of love", or a condition of harmony with the Holy Spirit.

## Unity as a Product of Fellowship

**God Hates Division.** It is clear from Scripture that God hates division among believers, as we saw earlier in Prov. 6:19. He wants us to be united as one front in the battle against unbelief, sin, and Satan. Humanity, however, is clearly divided into two camps: believers and unbelievers. This “disunion” will stand for all eternity as part of God’s plan, which is manifested as the following: 1) grace for those who choose to believe in His Son, and 2) judgment for those who refuse to believe.

This is not the only division...there is another clear line of demarcation. This one divides the “believing” part of humanity into two groups, one consisting of those *in* fellowship...and the other consisting of those *out of* fellowship. And when we are out of fellowship with God, we are out of fellowship with each other, and this divides us.

The reason division occurs when we are out of fellowship is that love quits operating. This leaves a vacuum, into which all kinds of divisive sins are drawn, such as hatred, gossip, slander, criticism, judging, comparing, and so on. These do damage to the mission of the church, and escalate a condition of carnality among believers. This is why God hates divisiveness...because it halts righteousness, hampers fruit, and hampers spirituality.

We should also address *needless* disagreement, which can cause division. Doctrinal rancor often leads to clashes between titanic egos, with flesh taking on flesh in heated contests where lightning flashes and thunder roars, but little gets accomplished. Furthermore, bad feelings will probably accrue. God frowns on pointless hair-splitting, because it puts believers at odds. This does not mean that we should not “rightly divide the Word of truth”, as Paul advised Timothy. But our *focus* should not be on differences, but on commonalities.

We have said here that failing to believe in Christ is the big barrier to unity among people at large. But among believers, being out of fellowship is the big divider, causing a breakdown in peaceful association and a sense of common cause. If our *position* is checked off as “saved”, and our *condition* is stamped as “spiritual”, we are well on our way to meaningful participation as members of a unified team.

**Things That Cause Division Among Believers.** Division among believers is most commonly caused by believers who are out of fellowship (and other scoundrels). Rom. 16:17-18 says this:

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.

Obviously, these “dividers and deceivers” can be unbelievers, but keep in mind that anything an unbeliever can do, a believer can do also. What WE must know as believers is this: 1) We should *not* cause divisions ourselves, and 2) we should avoid people who are divisive.

When believers cause division, it is because they are trying to satisfy their own appetites...manifested as conditions of pride (ego) and greed (lust for money)...rather than a state of fellowship, which leads to harmony and meaningful service.

Here are some verses that show how believers, and sometimes unbelievers, cause divisions among Christians:

- Acts 15:24—“We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.” We must not listen to disruptive speech that troubles us and splits us apart.
- 1 Tim. 6:3-5—“If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.” Faithfulness to the truth in Scripture is essential, but egocentric verbal jousting *must be avoided* to prevent division.
- 2 Tim. 2:14—“Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.” Prideful arguing is unfruitful, and causes loss of fellowship with God, and with each other.
- 2 Pet. 2:2-3a—“Many will follow their ways [ways of false teachers] and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up.” God despises practices of distorting the truth and advancing false teaching and testimony. We should always be alert to avoid those who create distortion, division, and confusion.

These verses call for us to avoid being divisive, while they advise us to “divide ourselves” from those that “cause division”.

**Things That Promote Unity.** Eph. 4:3 introduces us to the “location” of our unity...the meeting place for all believers...the exact spot of our greatest communion. This place is the Holy Spirit. Eph. 4:3 says, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” The “unity of the Spirit” is fellowship among believers who are brought together through “the bond of peace”. The bond of peace is reconciliation, or harmony between God and a believer, also known as fellowship. Believers *in fellowship* have fellowship with each other...a supernatural bond and connection of love and mutual commitment. This is what we are to “work” toward.

There are so many verses calling for unity among believers that we will use a “list” format to present them. Here are some truths from Scripture dealing with unity:

1. As we are “built up”, or grow into maturity, we will become more unified. Eph. 4:12c-13—“...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.”

2. Unity is good. Ps. 133:1—“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”
3. Love binds all virtues together into a single unit, and love removes all artificial divisions (cf., Col. 3:11). Col. 3:14—“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”
4. Our unity is in Christ. Jn. 17:21-23—“...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”
5. Like all good things, unity comes from God. Rom. 15:5—“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.”
6. Living in love brings harmony and unity. 1 Pet. 3:8—“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”
7. When we are in fellowship with God, we will also be in fellowship with each other. 1 Jn. 1:3 and 7—“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Unity is called for, as we see unequivocally in Scripture. But it is clear, as we review this teaching: Unity, like all other “fruit” of the Spirit, comes from God and not from us. Unity is the standard and the goal; fellowship is the means.

Another extension of this truth is that—in aggregate fellowship—there will be *agreement* that leads to unity. Unity is communion around the Truth, based on communion with the Spirit of Truth. Haggling over doctrinal details will not be productive, but when a *common fellowship* exists, the Great Teacher that Christ has sent can teach us together as one.

**The Main Purpose for Unity.** The main reason that unity is so important is this: Unity intensifies edification and a mutual process of supporting and building up other believers. Here are some verses that highlight this important purpose:

- 1 Cor. 14:12—“So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

- Eph. 4:29—“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
- Eph. 4:12-13a—“...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....”
- 2 Cor. 12:19b—“We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.”
- 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.”
- 1 Cor. 14:26—“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”
- 1 Tim. 1:3b-4—“...so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith.”
- Rom. 15:2—“Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”

We all have different gifts, but one purpose, and one fellowship. When we are united through fellowship, the gifts interact and interweave to strengthen the fabric of our unity and service to God. This is why we must stay together. And this is why we must stay in fellowship. Unless we are controlled by the Spirit...every one of us...we will not be pulling together, and some of us will end up pulling the wrong direction, thus creating resistance to the Spirit-led service of others.

**Conclusion.** “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.” (Matt. 12:25)

## Faith and Fellowship

**Reference to Appendix A: Verses on Faith.** We have a list of quotations from Scripture that provide the parameters for faith, especially “operational faith”, or faith that applies to our lives *after* salvation. Please take time at some point to review these verses, which are found in “Appendix A: Verses on Faith”, which appears at the end of the body of this book.

**Filling of the Spirit and Walking in the Spirit.** We have written an entire book about the place of faith in our Christian lives: *Walking by Faith*. Please refer to that study for a more thorough examination of the topic, “faith and fellowship”.

The role of faith related to maturity and spirituality has been considered in every series we have done, and what will be presented now will not supplant those studies. In *Maturity*, “God Within Us”, we stated the following: “Faith is the condition that sustains the control of the Holy Spirit.” In *Walking in the Spirit*, in the chapter titled “Filling of the Spirit”, we described the role of faith, as it relates to spirituality, in more detail. We are inserting here a clipping from that study:

**Filling of the Spirit vs. Walking in the Spirit.** Here is the difference between these two:

1. “Filling of the Spirit” is the instantaneous occurrence of restoration of fellowship through the honest confession of our sins. We move from control of the flesh to the control of the Spirit, when this happens.
2. “Walking in the Spirit” is the condition of being under the influence of the Spirit...in an ongoing state of “being filled by the Spirit”...whereby sin is controlled and the fruit of the Spirit is produced. Our walk is sustained by faith; the consistency of our walk depends on the level of our faith.

We confess our sins to get them forgiven and restore the influence of the Spirit in our lives. Then we retain that influence by trusting in the resurrection power of Christ, the provision of the Father, and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. In other words, our walk in the Spirit is sustained by *faith*. And please note: Babies “crawl”; mature believers “walk”. This is more than a single step forward...walking is putting one foot in front of the other, and *moving forward*. Super believers like Paul can actually “run”, as in “running the good race”.

Faith is the key component in this walk. The more mature we are, the stronger our faith will be, and the longer we will walk in the Spirit before sin halts our progress. Behind faith are all the techniques we have studied for getting closer to God. We have built a long list of these, and have developed a shorthand protocol to encapsulate them. The shorthand terms for all the techniques we have studied that build and sustain faith are

these: confession of sins, prayer, study of Scripture, and—basically—enduring God's training program for building our faith.

Applied to our current study on standards, the message penetrates: The “pillars” of our faith (confession, prayer, study, and trust) all come into play to get us into fellowship and keep us there. “Being filled” is the beginning; “walking” is the continuation. We are *filled* when we continually confess, which means confessing “without ceasing”. And we *stay filled* when our growing **faith** causes us to rely more and more on God's strength to resist sin and produce righteousness. We must remember that it is quite easy to fall into sin and carnality (or fall out of fellowship), and we must closely guard our hearts by confessing *non-stop*, so that we can stay “clean” and thus be filled with—and walk in—the Spirit. Then the Spirit can produce the life of Christ, also known as the “fruit of the Spirit”, through us. Re-read this paragraph. This is the heart of Christianity.

**Faith is Connected with Spirituality.** “Spirituality” carries—in some cultures, especially in the Far East—a connotation of being connected with the “universe” in a way that aligns with its energy, stars, karma, “light”, and so on. But spirituality for us is a connection with the power of the Holy Spirit, which is available to us when we are “spiritual”, or *controlled* by the Spirit. We understand that spirituality will only occur for us when we “qualify” for it by being purified from all sin.

We have identified confession as the primary means for achieving this purity, and now we want to get a clearer picture of the role of faith in this process. Faith, first of all, is essential to confession. We *believe* God's Word, which assures us of this: When we confess, we will be forgiven (1 Jn. 1:9). And after confessing, we have faith that God has actually forgiven us, and that the sins we have committed will never again be an issue...to us *or* to God.

After we are in fellowship through confession, faith is the condition in our hearts that keeps us connected with the Holy Spirit. Virtually everything that happens, once we are in fellowship, is related to the condition of our faith. When things go wrong, meaning *when we sin*, it is the result of a change in our faith that causes us to direct our attention away from God and toward something...or someone...else, leaving us open to attacks from the sinful nature, the world, and Satan.

Loss of fellowship *begins* with loss of trust, whether it is subtle or strong. The result of flagging faith is sin or self-righteousness. We seek to please ourselves, and/or walk the path of pride. In either case, a drop in the indicator on the “trust meter” means that we are headed quickly into carnality, which constitutes slavery to the sinful nature. Stronger faith can prevent this, which is why the cultivation and growth of our faith is so important. If you have not done so, please read *Maturity* and *Walking by Faith*.

**Verses on the Connection of Faith and Spirituality.** Once again, we are faced with trying to cover a lot of “topical” ground without producing extraneous verbiage. So—for the sake of brevity—we will list verses and comments within a terse format. Here are some verses we gleaned regarding faith and spirituality:

- Eph. 6:23—“Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Love and faith often appear together in Scripture, which is a link not unintended. Love equals spirituality, as we have seen. And when it is presented as occurring “with faith”, we see that faith is a *prompt* for love. That means that faith is connected with fellowship and spirituality in a prompting or sustaining role.
- 2 Cor. 1:24—“Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.” We see “fellowship” in two terms here: “joy”, and “stand firm”. We have seen before that joy is a signal for fellowship, and “stand firm” means to stay in one place, or “abide”. This shows the process of moving into fellowship, and staying there...or *being filled* with the Spirit and then *walking* in the Spirit. And what keeps you there? Faith.
- 1 Tim. 1:19—“...holding on to faith and a good conscience.” *Holding on to faith* is sustaining our trust in God and His Word, as we *hold on to a good (clear) conscience* through confession. Confession and faith work together.
- Eph. 3:16-17a—“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.” We are strengthened by the power of the Spirit when He fills us, and then we maintain that connection for as long as Christ is “at home and in charge”, because of our ongoing faith. (cf., *Walking by Faith*, “Walking in Christ”)
- Rom. 15:13—“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.” God fills us with “joy and peace” when He fills us with His Spirit, and the next step is for us to go on “trusting in Him”, so that the power of the Spirit can operate in us to produce hope and—as we have seen—many other “fruits”. Fruit comes as we trust Him...or as we are “walking in the Spirit”.

**Conclusion.** We will have more to say about faith in the study that follows, but for now we see that faith is the means by which we maintain our walk with God after we have been cleansed. The rapidity of the confessing/trusting/maybe-backsliding oscillation can occur almost at the rate of a pulsar. We confess, then trust, look away, slip (easy to do until we mature), confess again (quickly, before discipline comes), trust, look away, slip again (less often as we grow), confess, and the beat goes on. We must confess, and then pray and study, to draw us closer to God and build our faith. Then, we can *rest* in His love, and *produce* in His power, as we *walk* in His Spirit.

## Faith and Righteousness

**Increasing Righteousness.** Everything about God's plan for believers is designed to equip them to do His will. He gives us written instructions, supernatural power, and a guaranteed good outcome for our lives. His Word, His testing, even His discipline, are designed to make us *better*, so we can perform His work, which is mostly to edify and support fellow believers, and spread the gospel through all possible means to unbelievers. He steers us toward improvement, and as we learn to trust Him—through studying and by enduring His training—we are refined and polished to reflect His love.

In the Old Testament, good behavior was required under the Law, but performance was largely without the assets we have in the Church Age. We have the Holy Spirit and the operation of exceptional grace, which offer us the power to produce righteousness. Our job is to *trust God* to produce His character and goodness *in us*. Righteousness will come from Him alone.

Heb. 11:39-40a says, "These [OT believers] were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us..." The kinds of opportunities we have, and the assistance we get *in the Church Age*, were hardly understood by OT believers. We now have the *power of the Holy Spirit*, and what a tragedy it is that we do not use what is offered. Preachers everywhere want to put us right back into the Old Testament and have us attempt to achieve "good things" by keeping the Law. Faith has always been the key to salvation, and trust in God has always been the way to access His favor...but faith has even greater importance to us now, because greater assets depend on it. We are saved by faith, but then we must also access the newly-available powers through faith. Only by tapping into these new powers will we have the ability to participate in the production of righteousness.

**Faith Produces Righteousness.** We have special provisions for improving our behavior and performance. Gal. 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Christ *justified us by faith* (Gal. 2:16), and now He *lives through us...on the basis of our faith*. By exercising faith in Him, we sustain our fellowship with Him, so that His life becomes ours, and His righteousness is produced in us. Or, as Heb. 10:38a says, "...the righteous will live by faith." There is NO righteousness apart from faith, because faith accesses the power of the One Who *is* righteousness.

1 Tim. 1:4b calls this "God's work", and adds, "which is by faith". Gal. 3:11 says it again, "Clearly no one is justified by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith'." We can offer this in the form of a question, by asking, "How do the 'righteous' *become* 'righteous'?" The answer is here: "living by faith". Rom. 1:17 adds more, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'." Faith is seen at the beginning, when we

accept Christ as Savior, and faith sustains us all the way through, as we trust God to fulfill His plan and perform His will through us.

Everything good comes by faith. Speaking to the Thessalonians, Paul said, "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." (1st Thess. 1:3) Love shows fellowship, and endurance reflects maturity. These were causing "work" (divine production) to be generated among these believers, *because their faith was operational*.

This idea is carried forward in a letter Paul wrote to the Colossians, from which we see this: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." (Col. 2:6; cf. Col. 1:3-9) Because of their faith, fellowship, and knowledge, they were satisfying Col. 1:10b-11a, where Paul is praying that they would "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...."

Faith produces fruit, and fruit demonstrates faith. James 2:18b says, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." If we are walking in faith, the fruit of the Holy Spirit will be produced. If we are going to live up to God's expectations, it will be on the *basis of faith*...not effort...and the evidence for faith will be visible.

Faith is the key to producing righteousness. Without faith, the power of the Spirit will not be sustained. This is confirmed in Gal. 5:5, which says, "But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope." Verse 6 even says that "the only thing that counts is faith."

**Or Who Will we Trust?** Paul told us in Corinthians where our faith needs to be placed. Let's face it, if we are *not trusting in God*, however we couch other objects and forces in our environment as things we believe in, we are basically trusting in *ourselves*...including the things we *pick*...as our basis for doing "good" and living well. This passage from Corinthians points our faith in the right direction, saying the following:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises from the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope [faith] that he will continue to deliver us.... (2 Cor. 1:8-11)

Here is the greatest danger: That we will trust in ourselves for provisions, for performance, for happiness, for life itself. When something happens to us as believers, regardless of how intense it seems, we can know this: **God is teaching us to trust in Him...and not in ourselves**. This brings on the tests, the trials, and the training that God uses to get our

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attention and refocus our awareness on Him. These are not given to cause us suffering for its own sake, but to build our faith, so we will know that He is God, and that He is the One to be trusted.



## **Fellowship in John's First Epistle**

**Introduction.** The first epistle of John was written to believers to strengthen them and encourage them by helping them deal with sin in their lives. We studied the first chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> John in some detail in *Sin and Mercy*. And chapters 2-5 have been discussed before, but not adequately. Now, we have the full story, and here is the “Rubicon we have crossed”, and the “gauntlet we are throwing down”, which is this: The *entire book* of 1<sup>st</sup> John deals with **fellowship**.

The purpose of all of our writing has been to find truths in Scripture that provide pathways for us to get closer to God, to know His ways, and to live in His light. We don't want tradition, church doctrine, or even astute scholarship to stand in the way of our seeing what God is really like, and what He wants us to do. We simply want to know His truth...i.e., we want His Spirit to teach us His Word, so we can find that narrow way to the fullness of Christ and to the strength that only He can give. As a result of intense study and prayer, we discovered rich lessons in 1<sup>st</sup> John regarding fellowship and our spiritual walk with God.

**Introductory Concepts from J. Hampton Keathley, III.** The late J. Hampton Keathley provided clarification of 1<sup>st</sup> John, as we see delineated in the following synopsis of his discussion, which condenses an article he wrote on this epistle:

- 1) Keathley saw 1<sup>st</sup> John as being addressed to believers, as indicated in the following:
  - a) John addressed his readers as “little children”. (2:1, 18; 3:7, 18; 5:21)
  - b) Other references show that his readers were “believers”. (2:12-17; 3:1-3)
- 2) Keathley isolated some terms from 1<sup>st</sup> John that state or imply “fellowship”, as follows:
  - a) Fellowship. (1:3, 6, 7)
  - b) Abide, abiding. (2:6, 10, 14, 17, 28; 3:6, 9 14, 15, 17, 24; 4:12, 13, 15, 16)
- 3) Keathley also saw other key terms connoting fellowship, most of which are discussed later in our study of this epistle. These include the following:
  - a) Righteousness
  - b) Light/dark
  - c) Sin and lawlessness
- 4) Keathley saw God presented in 1<sup>st</sup> John in the following ways:
  - a) God is light. (1:5)
  - b) God is love. (4:8, 16)
  - c) God is life. (1:1-2; 5:11-13)

- 5) Finally, Keathley presented a framework for 1<sup>st</sup> John, showing what John was attempting to do with and for his readers in this epistle, as follows:
  - a) Provide a way for them to stay in fellowship with God and each other.
  - b) Ask them to stay in fellowship to resist lies and produce love.
  - c) Assure them that they have eternal life. (Endnote 7)

**Defining our Terms.** There are several terms in 1<sup>st</sup> John that seem to imply that the topic is “saved/unsaved”, rather than “in fellowship/out of fellowship”. We will look at these as a preface to our study, to establish why these terms have been misunderstood, and to see what John was really saying when he used the terms.

First of all, *if* 1<sup>st</sup> John dealt primarily with *salvation*, John’s claims that sin will virtually stop would be disconcerting, rather than assuring. Believers would have to live in essentially sinless perfection to be considered “saved”, if John’s references in this epistle were to salvation, rather than fellowship. This is especially evident when He used such terms as “abide in Him” and “born of God” as the status of those who “will not sin”. This creates a dismal outlook for Christians that looks like this: If you sin, you aren’t saved.

We need to understand what these terms mean, and see how John is using them. Just as the terms “sanctification”, “life and death”, “righteousness”, and “forgiveness” can have eternal OR temporal applications, so it is with “abide”, “born of God”, and other terms that we will see. “Abide”, “born of God”, and so on, can apply to our *position* (eternal) OR our *condition* (temporal). We need to know when John is referring to “position”, and when he is referring to “condition”, when he uses these terms.

If we take these terms to always mean a permanent state, or an eternal *position*, then John is very confusing and hard to explain. For example, in 1 Jn. 1:8 and 10 we see unequivocally that we DO SIN, without reference to the number of times we sin or the intensity of our sins. Our sins actually seem almost limitless, and if we say we don’t sin that much, we don’t understand yet the standards God requires.

This much is clear: We, as believers, SIN. So when John states that we won’t go on sinning if we “abide” in Him...AND if “abide” means only “saved”...we become aware that NONE OF US CAN BE ABIDING IN HIM, BECAUSE WE ALL SIN. So is no one saved? That would be the implication if “abide” meant only “abide forever”. This is obviously unacceptable, so another explanation must be given.

In the sense of our eternal position, we “abide in Him” forever, so John is not thinking about this kind of abiding when he says we won’t sin if we “abide”. He is thinking of “temporal abiding”, which is fellowship, a topic he introduces in 1 Jn. 1. John’s message is that God imbues believers in fellowship with divine power to love, practice righteousness, and discern truth. The outcomes seen in this epistle are related to the Fruit of the Spirit...those things He produces in us, and things we can’t produce by ourselves. Without fellowship sin

will proceed unchecked, but when fellowship is present, sin will be overcome. This is what John wants us to see.

So we begin by understanding the terms. The term “abide” or “abiding” means—in the Greek—to “stay” or “remain”. The process of “remaining” can have permanent implications, or can be seen as temporary. Many times the use of the Greek term translated “abide” implies time limits, such as we see in Luke 1:56, which says, “Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.” We see this again in 1 Cor. 16:6a, where Paul says, “Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter....” These are “temporary” applications, both using the word “stay” to translate the Greek word for abide to mean “staying for now, but not forever”.

But “abide” can also mean a “permanent” remaining, as shown by its usage in 1 Pet. 1:25, which says, “...but the word of the Lord stands forever.” The term, as it is translated here (“stands forever”), carries a suggestion of eternity. The point is that “abide” may involve “eternal position”, or it may be citing our “temporal condition”. Context will determine which is true.

“Born of God” is another term John uses to show fellowship. This term reminds us of the term “born again”, and carries with it the impression that John is talking about redemption and justification, resulting in the “regeneration” of salvation. “Regeneration” is the correct synonym, but the reference is not to *eternal* regeneration, but to *spiritual* regeneration IN TIME, when we are returned to fellowship through confession. Here are some verses that give convincing evidence that “born of God” can mean a *temporal* occurrence. If you apply these to yourself, and believe that “born of God” means only “saved”, you will probably feel unsettled. This is the opposite of the effect John intended. Here are some verses using “born of God”:

1 Jn 3:9 says, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” In preparation for this writing, we distinguished two distortions of this and similar passages in 1<sup>st</sup> John. Here they are:

1. The first distortion is that believers will not sin and can’t sin. If this is true, there is no such thing as salvation, and no one can be...or stay...saved. The truth is that only *certain* believers will not sin. We will explain this shortly.
2. A second distortion is that those who are “born of God” are believers *in general*, who may sin *a little*, but they will not sin “continually”...or, as it were...*frequently*. But the line between “sin” and “continue to sin” does not exist. Sin is sin, and if you sin after you are saved, you are “continuing” to sin.

The best interpretation of this verse, and those like it in this epistle, is that those “born of God” are those who are *in fellowship*, because when we are “filled with the Spirit”, we *will not sin*, a condition that will be sustained until we hit a faith vacuum and drop out of fellowship (as per an earlier chapter, “Faith and Fellowship”).

1 Jn. 5:18 says “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God [Christ] keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.” Like 3:9 above, this verse applies to conditions of fellowship, not salvation.

We see “born of God” again in 1 Jn 4:7-8, which says the following:

Dear friends [believers], let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Love is a sure marker for fellowship, and only when we are in fellowship can we “love God”. Verse 11 says we should also “love one another”. This is also about fellowship. Just being a believer does not mean that we will possess a warm, glowing love for God or for each other all the time. When the sinful nature is in charge, love is *cut off*, even though we are *still saved*. We will say more about “knowing God” a little later.

1 Jn 2:29 also shows “born of God” in a context that shows fellowship. This verse says, “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” When we are in fellowship and walking in faith, righteousness will be generated in us by the Holy Spirit, as we showed in the previous study, “Faith and Righteousness”.

Conversely, “born of God” can also mean “born again”, as we see in 1 Jn. 5:1a, which says, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...” This is the regeneration of salvation, not the regeneration of restored fellowship. Once again, context and usage will determine which applies.

**References to Sin in 1<sup>st</sup> John.** John draws a sharp contrast between sin and fellowship. Sin is on one side of the coin; fellowship is on the other. Over and over, John shows how sin does not fit in with our relationship with God, and states plainly that he is writing his epistle so that his readers will avoid sinning. In 2:1a he says, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” We see also in this verse a clear statement that sin *will* exist in the life of believers, and that God has provided a way to deal with it...WITHOUT REMOVING OUR SALVATION. Our part is confession; God’s part is forgiveness, through the efficacious work of Christ, which is the basis for His defense of us before His Father.

John talks a lot about sin, making dozens of references to sin in this epistle. Here are a few of them, given as summaries, rather than quotes:

- 1:7—Christ purifies us from all sin.
- 1:8—We can’t claim to be without sin.
- 1:9—If we confess, sin is forgiven.
- 1:10—We can’t claim that we have not sinned.

- 2:1—John was writing so his readers would not sin.
- 2:2—Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
- 3:4—Everyone who sins breaks the law.
- 3:5—Christ appeared to take away our sins.
- 3:5—No one in fellowship will keep on sinning.
- 3:8—He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil sinned from the beginning. Sin is of the devil.

John proposes that we deal with sin...not to excuse it or overlook it, but to *see it and remove it, both as a record and as a practice*. When sin is removed through confession, the “record” is removed; when we walk by faith, the “practice” changes, because the control of the Spirit is maintained. The idea is to GET SIN OUT, and 1<sup>st</sup> John helps us see how to do just that.

**Fellowship Terms in 1<sup>st</sup> John.** We offer some terms below that are synonymous with fellowship. These might be missed if we don't point them out. We also provide some references where these terms appear in 1<sup>st</sup> John. Here are the terms reflecting “fellowship” in this epistle:

1. **“Fathered by God” or “born of God”** refers to regeneration, or giving life to. This is spiritual life, or the restoration of the control of the Spirit in the heart of the believer, who is “dead” when the sinful nature controls. “Life” is seen in the following ways in a believer *in fellowship*:
  - a. 2:29—practices righteousness
  - b. 3:9—does not practice sin; not able to sin
  - c. 4:7—loves
  - d. 5:4a—conquers “worldliness”
2. **“Abide”** is to reside, stay, or remain in. When we are “in him” and He is “in us”, as it is used many times in 1<sup>st</sup> John, this means that He is “at home” in us, or in control of us, because we are in fellowship. If we are out of fellowship, we move away from grace, and lose the “good times at home with our Father”, but—of course—we are still in the family. “Abide”, as it refers to fellowship with the Spirit, is not the same as the “indwelling” of the Spirit. We NEVER lose the indwelling, even when we are out of fellowship.

We see “abide” in the following verses:

- a. 2:24—we abide if what we heard abides in us
- b. 2:27—John's readers had been taught to abide

- c. 2:28—our command to abide
  - d. 3:6—he who abides does not sin
  - e. 3:15-17—hatred, murder, and lack of compassion are indications for “not abiding”
  - f. 3:18-24—markers for abiding: confidence in His presence, getting what we ask for, keeping commandments, pleasing Him, assurance from the Holy Spirit
  - g. 4:8-14—love is perfected if God “abides” in us
  - h. 4:15-21—we confess the Son and love is perfected
3. **“Of God”, “Know God”, “Child of God”.** These terms indicate an intimacy that allows us to represent God in the world, and to be on “familiar” footing with Him when we are in fellowship. We see these terms in the following verses:
- a. 3:10—in fellowship, we “do what is right”. If we do what is wrong, we are serving Satan and not God. We don’t even look like God’s “family” when we sin.
  - b. 4:8—out of fellowship, we do not love God, and do not even recognize Him. This is the tragic and lonely separation of carnality.
  - c. 2:3-4—if we know him, we obey His commands. As long as we are sinning, we “do not know Him”. “Know” implies the intimacy of fellowship; “obey” is a verb showing the result: divine production.
4. **“In the light”, “fellowship”, and “death to life”** are terms that refer to fellowship, as we see in the following:
- a. 1:3-7—shows walking in the light of fellowship
  - b. 2:7-11—also shows walking in the light
  - c. 3:11-14—we pass from death (being out of fellowship) to life (being “regenerated” spiritually, or restored to fellowship)
5. **“In Him” and “live in Him”** are terms that correspond with “abiding”, as seen in 2:5-6. These verses give us a clear picture of fellowship. Here is what this passage says:
- But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

These terms will help us watch for “fellowship” references in 1<sup>st</sup> John. Now we want to describe the things John tells us we will *do* in fellowship.

**Things we do in Fellowship.** The things we do in fellowship are phenomenal. The fruit of the Spirit that is buried in the passages of 1<sup>st</sup> John would not be understood or appreciated, if we did not see the real issue of this epistle, which is “fellowship”. Here are some of these wonderful things that will be seen *in us*:

1. Obey his commands and His Word. (2:4-6)
2. Have God's love perfected in us. (2:5)
3. Walk as Jesus did. (2:6)
4. Love our brothers. (2:9-10)
5. Be confident and unashamed at His coming. (2:28)
6. Do what is right. (2:29)
7. Have hope (faith) that we will be like Him. (3:3)
8. Stop sinning. (3:6)
9. Pass from (spiritual) death to (spiritual) life. (3:14)
10. Loving to the point that we are willing to lay down our lives. (3:16)
11. Have pity; love with actions and in truth. (3:17-18)
12. Hearts do not condemn us, so we have confidence before God. (3:21)
13. Receive what we ask for. (3:22)
14. Live in Him. (3:24)
15. Overcome false prophets and spirit of antichrist. (4:4)
16. Love one another. (4:7-8)
17. Love is made complete in us. (4:17)
18. Love God. (4:21 and 5:3)
19. Carry out His commands. (5:3)
20. Overcome the world. (5:4)
21. Confident that God hears us. (5:14)
22. Get what we ask for. (5:15)
23. Will not continue to sin. (5:18)
24. Kept safe from the evil one. (5:18)
25. Can overcome idols (5:21)

Are you beginning to see why it is *extremely important to Satan* to convince us that this epistle is addressing our ability to “stay saved”, rather than “the way for us to be victorious”? If he can keep us focused on ourselves and *our own ability* to “produce the fruit”, he will have us in

a weakened position, which is where he wants us, so that we will do *his* work, rather than the Lord's. Satan likes nothing better than for us to believe our salvation is in jeopardy, because it sends us in pursuit of self-effort to save our souls, and we end up missing the point—and the power—altogether.

John did not leave us with just one view of fellowship, however. He went to considerable lengths to show us what being “out of fellowship” looks like, as well. Here are indicators for “carnality” and the verses where we see them:

1. Walks in darkness. (1:6)
2. Does not live by the truth. (1:6)
3. Self deceptive and devoid of truth (1:8)
4. God's Word has no place. (1:10)
5. Does not do what God commands. (2:4)
6. Does not walk as Jesus did (2:6)
7. In darkness. (2:9)
8. Hates his brother. (2:11)
9. Does not know where he is going, because of the darkness. (2:11)
10. Will be ashamed when Jesus comes. (2:28)
11. Absence of righteousness. (2:29)
12. Keeps on sinning. (3:6)
13. No righteousness, only sin. (3:8)
14. Serving the devil. (3:8)
15. Will continue to sin. (3:9)
16. Does not do what is right. (3:10)
17. Does not love his brother. (3:10)
18. Remains in (spiritual) death. (3:14)
19. Is a murderer. (3:15)
20. Has no pity for others. (3:17)
21. Does not obey and does not please God. (3:22)
22. Prayers are not answered. (3:22)
23. Does not love or know God. (4:7)
24. Does not know God, because he hates his brother. (4:20)
25. Does not love God or obey His commands. (5:2)



26. Does not overcome the world. (5:4)
27. Faith is insufficient to overcome the world. (5:4)
28. Continues to sin. (5:18)
29. May become a victim of idolatry. (5:21)

The things we do and that happen to us when we are out of fellowship are tragic all by themselves. Add to these the discipline that will come to us, and we can see that being out of fellowship leads only to trouble and misery.

**References to the “Saved” and the “Unsaved” in 1<sup>st</sup> John.** To fill in the blanks we have left in this study, we want to cite those references that seem to refer to salvation, or its absence, in this epistle. In explaining the place of sin and deception in the world, some of the descriptions John gave highlighted the patterns of unbelievers, so his readers would know what to watch for. So sometimes, John is referring to the *saved* and *unsaved* issue. Here are some passages that deal with salvation, or a person’s *position* before God:

1. 2:17—The person who does God’s will, according to 2 Pet. 3:9, is a believer. God’s will is that all of humanity will come to repentance and receive eternal life.
2. 2:20—A person who is saved has an “anointing from the Holy One”.
3. 2:23—Those who have acknowledged the Son and “have” the Father are believers.
4. 2:25—Those who received the promise of eternal life have been saved.
5. 3:1—Believers are called the children of God...*forever*.
6. 3:1—The world does not know believers.
7. 3:2—Believers will “be like Him”.
8. 4:9-10—God sent His only Son so that we (believers) might live (forever).
9. 4:13-15—Believers live positionally “in God” for all eternity, because He has given us His Spirit.
10. 5:1a—Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ *is* “born of God”, which refers to the regeneration of salvation.
11. 5:5—Only believers can overcome the world...that is, those who are also in fellowship (5:4).
12. 5:6-12—Anyone who believes in Christ believes God’s testimony that He gives us eternal life in His Son. Those who have received the Son have eternal life.
13. 5:13—John writes this to his readers to assure them that they themselves have *eternal life*.
14. 5:19—We know that we are the eternal children of God, and that the world is controlled by Satan.

15. 5:20—Christ gives us understanding as believers, and we are in Him for all eternity.

John guaranteed to his readers that they were safely and permanently ensconced within the certainty of God's salvation. God did not save them, and then change His mind about it. They are saved forever. But John challenges them as believers to access the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to enable them to live in ways that honor God's standards and produce His righteousness and love.

**Conclusion.** The purpose of 1<sup>st</sup> John is to equip us to stop sinning...which we do by confessing and living in fellowship. This will bring the power of the Holy Spirit into our hearts, so that we can see the fruits of 1<sup>st</sup> John exhibited in our lives. These fruits are not automatic extensions of salvation. They are the products of constant confession, perpetual prayer, committed discipleship (being students of the Word), and a flourishing faith. These are the conditions that cause us to mature, which will enable us to rally all the forces of heaven to help us combat sin. The routines that John has given us, coupled with those offered by other authors of Scripture, is powerful, but simple, as follows:

1. The first thing we must do is recognize our sinfulness.
2. The second thing is to confess our sins, so that we can be forgiven.
3. The next thing is to embrace the joy of fellowship that comes through forgiveness.
4. The last thing is for us to do the following while we are in fellowship:
  - a. watch and wait in prayer
  - b. wash in the water of the Word (study!)
  - c. welcome God's training
  - d. walk by faith
  - e. walk in the Spirit
  - f. witness the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, etc.

These are the things we are conscripted to do. This is the path to holiness.

**Transition to the Next Chapter.** Love, joy, and peace are internal conditions which will be *manifested* if they are present. If they exist on the *inside*, they will be visible on the *outside*. It is certain that we can fabricate outside conditions to resemble or portray an internal state of love, etc. We can *imitate* behaviors in ways that make us seem authentic. *But there will no fruit.* Matt. 7:16, 20 says, "by their fruit you shall know them."

Many *actions* are called for in Scripture. These actions indicate *internal cleanliness* and *spirituality*...and these show to bystanders that we are walking in the Spirit. It is obvious, of course, that we may not be as we seem. But it is not ours to judge the actions of others or to try to determine others' motives, since only God knows the heart (1 Cor. 4:3-5). But if fruit is being borne, from us or other believers, we will probably see it. This is the point of James, which will be the source for our next study.

## Fellowship in the Book of James

**Introduction.** To the surprise of some, James is about confession, purity, fellowship, and fruit. A clear contrast is drawn in James between conduct of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. James emphasizes the *visible* manifestation of spirituality, yet he makes the following very clear: confession of sins is required for us to draw near to God; study and training are essential for our growth; and faith is necessary to maintain our spiritual walk.

When we confess (as we will see in James 4:6-10) by showing humility, we will get more grace, and we will see God coming closer to us as we draw closer to Him (James 4:8). Once we are close, we can stay that way by continuing to trust in God and His promises (James 2:14-26). This is the sequence we have seen quite well in this and previous series: confession gets us into spirituality, and faith keeps us there. In addition, study and trials build our faith so that we will mature and lack nothing. (James 1:2-4).

James has it all:

- Confession
- Trials for growth
- Faith for living
- Study for building faith
- Fruit of the Spirit through cleanliness and faith

Missouri is the “show me” state, where an attitude is reflected that embodies and preserves the spirit of James, e.g., James 3:13, which says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”

**Principles for Living Found in James.** James brought the “spiritual” to the “practical”. The main problem with “active” Christianity is that the emphasis is placed so strongly on practical living that spirituality is often crowded out or overlooked. James united the practical with the spiritual in the form of *principles for living*, which can be seen in the following list, with applicable references:

- Principle of believers growing by persevering through many trials. (1:2-18)
- Principle of acceptance and application of the Word. (1:19-25)
- Principle of not showing favoritism, which is a sin. (2:1-13)
- Principle of “works”, as a result of “faith”. (2:14-26)
- Principle of avoiding sins of the tongue. (3:1-12)
- Principle of “wisdom” to secure spirituality and produce righteousness. (3:13-18)

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- Principle of overcoming attachment to the world, and the consequences for failing to do so. (4:1-4)
- Principle of cleansing (washing our hands and purifying our hearts) in order to receive more grace. (Includes forgiveness, fellowship, spirituality, resistance to evil, and nearness to God...4:5-10)
- Principle of not judging. (4:11-12)
- Principle of never planning without considering God's will. (4:13-17)
- Principle of not putting our faith in riches, which will only disappoint. (5:7-11)
- Principle of not taking oaths through blasphemy or profanity. (Oaths are not always bad, but "bad oaths" are bad...5:12)
- Principle of the power of prayers that are prayed in fellowship and faith...i.e., "prayers of faith". (5:13-18)
- Principle of restoring carnal believers to fellowship. (5:19-20)

These principles give us an outline for the book of James, and provide a framework for discussing the points he intended to advance.

**James' Purpose in Writing.** We see two separate conditions denoted in James, which give us his purpose for writing this epistle. These conditions are opposites: *spirituality* (control of the Holy Spirit) and *carnality* (control of the flesh). Even though James did not use these exact terms, we see plainly two sets of conditions in James: one consisting of behaviors that correspond with spirituality, and another showing conditions portraying carnality. We offer both lists below.

**List One: Results of Spirituality as Seen in James.** Here is a list of outcomes related to being spiritual, or "fruits of the Spirit", as indicated in James:

1. Joyful patience (perseverance) and growth. (1:3-4)
2. Wisdom from prayer and faith. (1:5-8)
3. Acceptance of humble circumstances. (1:9)
4. Blessings in perseverance because of a love for God. (1:12)
5. Acceptance of the Word of God in cleanliness (1:19-21)
6. Following the Word and applying it. (1:22-25)
7. Looking after orphans and widows in distress. (1:27)
8. World cannot pollute. (1:27)
9. Inheritance of the kingdom (power of God through fellowship). (2:5)
10. Friendship with God. (2:23)

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11. Production of divine good and “delivery” through faith. (2:14-26)
12. Control of the tongue and body through cleanliness, faith, and maturity. (3:1-12)
13. Good deeds visible because of wisdom (product of spirituality). (3:13)
14. Humility through wisdom. (3:13)
15. Fruit of the Spirit through heavenly wisdom: being pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. (3:17)
16. Peacemaker (in fellowship), sowing in peace (producing in fellowship), to raise a harvest of righteousness (divine good). (3:18)
17. Humility, submission, and resistance to the devil...and a drawing nearer to God with clean hands and a pure heart. (4:8)
18. Singular focus and stable, purposeful mind that trusts and does not doubt. (4:8, cf. 1:6-8)
19. Wanting to seek God's will and plan according to it. (4:13-17)
20. Patient, waiting on the Lord. (5:7)
21. Patient in suffering; persevering. (5:10-11)
22. Praying in faith and according to God's will, which gives power to prayer and gets results. (5:13-18)
23. Helpful to weak and carnal believers. (5:19-20)

So one may ask, “Is *every good thing* called for in James to be done by the power of the Spirit?” Well...yes. In fact, *every good thing called for in the Bible* is to be done in His power. When *we* do it, it isn't really “done” at all...it isn't even close to being done...only Deity can do the divine.

**List Two: Results of Carnality as Seen in James.** Here are characteristics and qualities that we see when we are out of fellowship and under the control of the sinful nature, as found in James:

1. Receive nothing when we pray. (1:7)
2. Double-mindedness, not trusting. (1:8)
3. Preoccupied with money and position; proud. (1:10-11)
4. Dragged away by evil desire, when temptation comes...ends up sinning. This *may* result in physical death, as the ultimate discipline, and *will* result in spiritual death, which is loss of fellowship. (1:13-15)
5. Given to anger, from which righteousness cannot come. (1:19-20)
6. Plagued by moral filth. (1:21)
7. Rejects God's teachings and deceives self. (1:22)

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8. Does not apply Scripture. (1:23-24)
9. Unable to control the tongue, even though religion may be practiced. (1:26)
10. Favors certain believers over others. (2:1-7)
11. Shows favoritism; does not love neighbors. (2:8-9)
12. Is not merciful. (2:13)
13. Actions do not support claims of faith and fellowship. (2:18-19)
14. Faith is not productive (weak); faith not growing. (2:22)
15. No fruit is evident, though faith is proclaimed. (2:24)
16. Faith is dead. (2:26)
17. Tongue is boastful. (3:5)
18. Tongue is untamed. (3:7-8)
19. Bitter envy and selfish ambitions lead to boasting and lies, resulting in disorder and evil practices. (3:14-16)
20. Selfish passions lead to coveting, quarrelsomeness, and a combative spirit. (4:1-2)
21. Prayers are either not given, or are not answered due to wrong motives. (4:2b-3)
22. Friendship with the world, causing enmity toward God. (4:4)
23. Involved in slander and judging. (4:11-12)
24. Self-dependent in planning and business. (4:13-16)
25. Can't do right, thus sinning. (4:17)
26. Greedy and dependent on money for life and happiness, leading to ruin. (5:1-6)
27. Takes oaths profanely and/or with blasphemy. (5:12)
28. Healing prayers (and others) will not be heard, because they are not coming from a righteous person. (5:13-18)

Without a doubt, these outcomes are the products of carnality. Looking at this list makes us want to make every effort to achieve and maintain “spirituality”.

James approached spirituality from the angle of wanting to see its fruit, with the assumption that God is the one Who produces the fruit. We want to see how James viewed *behavior* as a means for assessing our *spiritual condition*.

**Use of “Behavior” to Reflect “Spirituality” in James.** James cites specific behaviors or outcomes that will be evident if we are “spiritual”, as follows:

1. Faith is prompting spirituality and producing work. (1:1-16)
2. The Word is being learned and applied. (1:19-27)

3. Love, not favoritism, is being shown. (2:1-12)
4. Good works are getting done on the basis of faith. (2:14-26)
5. The tongue and the body are under control due to spiritual maturity. (3:1-12)
6. Boasting, pride, and preoccupation with money and goods are avoided, because they are sins that disrupt spirituality. (4:13-5:6)
7. Patience in suffering and enduring God's training are bringing God's blessings, spiritual and otherwise. (5:7-11)
8. Prayers are getting results. (5:13-18)

These conditions signal a positive spiritual state. But what can James give us that will help us improve behavior so that our "achievement" will reflect God's power and grace? Can "practical" James help us become more "spiritual"? And can James give us some tips on how to meet God's standards?

**The Means to Meeting God's Standards, as Seen in James.** James has, indeed, provided ways for us to improve our performance, become more spiritual, and satisfy God's standards. The following shows how we can achieve this:

1. Build our faith and maturity through perseverance during God's training. (1:2-12)
2. Receive wisdom from heaven through learning and applying the Word, and praying for wisdom in faith. (1:21-25; 3:13-18)
3. Show humility before God. (4:6b, 10)
4. Submit to God in faith. (4:7)
5. Confess sins to draw near to Him. (4:8-10)
6. Pray in mature faith with sins confessed. (5:13-18)

All the pillars are there: confess, pray, study, and trust, while enduring God's training. These lead to maturity, spirituality, and blessings. All of these are provided as gifts of God's grace, as per James 1:17, which says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

**Conclusion.** James 4:5 says the Holy Spirit "envies intensely", which shows His divine desire for fellowship with us. He wants our full focus on Him, not on the world (4:4). In spite of our attention often being split, He will give us more grace if we humble ourselves, submit to His will, and draw near to Him (4:6-10).

Obtaining grace and living by faith will begin with humility and confession, and end with God lifting us up, which is an elevation from being "sin-laden" to "forgiven". And when we are forgiven, and turn our eyes heavenward in faith, we will satisfy the longing of the Holy Spirit to fellowship with us, and we will have Him to energize us to avoid evil and produce

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righteousness. Our good deeds will then be visible, and God will be glorified through the work He does through us. James will be “shown”, because God’s standards will be met.

James 3:18 gives us our summary, as follows: “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” “Peacemakers” are believers in fellowship. “Sowing in peace” is growing and serving in fellowship. And what is the result? A “harvest of righteousness”. And where does righteousness come from? You know.



## Conclusion

**Summary and Conclusion.** We have seen God's standards; reviewed the pre-eminence of, and the process for, restoring fellowship; examined the link between fellowship and the filling of the Holy Spirit; and cited the role of faith in our walk in the Spirit. We understand the power of God and the weakness of man...His bigness and our smallness. At the same time, we are coming to know what God expects from us, i.e., His standards...and this creates in us a sense of urgency to *do* what He expects.

We acknowledge the importance of meeting the standards God has given us, but they are daunting and formidable. We see these standards, and know in our inner selves that we can't meet them, which gives rise to a new question: If we can't live up to the standards, why would God require them of us? He has set the bar too high for us to clear, and now He is demanding that we jump over it.

Pay attention...We must begin to fathom how fervently God wants us to learn that His way of dealing with us is not through some capability inherent in us...but in bringing us to an understanding that the only way we can clear His bar is for God to lift us over it. All He wants from us is our trust that He can and will do it.

Everything God requires, He provides a way to fulfill. When we read the Bible and see God's standards, these should be seen as *alerts* for us to reach out for grace assets. The standards are *calls* for us to confess and trust.

"Negative" standards call for us to confess our sins. When we see God's proscriptions ("negative" standards), if we tend to feel a little panicky, it is because we are reverting to a belief that we have to figure out a way to have the courage, the determination, and the initiative to avoid the bad thoughts and behavior that God prohibits. We believe in *ourselves*, to do what God requires, while the correct response is for us to admit that we cannot live up to God's standards, and that we are dependent on His mercy.

From a different perspective, when God presents "positive" standards, such as those commanding that we love and rejoice, we can know that these are calls for us to be "filled with the Spirit" and to "walk in the Spirit", because positive standards are "fruits of the Spirit". And Who produces God's fruit? Only God. After we confess, which satisfies the negative standards, we then move toward fulfilling the positive standards by walking in faith, which means trusting His Word, His promises, His power, His love...and, yes...His forgiveness. As we do this, we will be studying His Word and enduring His training, so that our faith will become stronger and stronger.

We understand better now what God wants and how God works. Our path will not be an easy one, and we will often *not know* where God is taking us, but we can *be sure* that He wants to give us His best, and that His grace is always sufficient to meet our needs. He guarantees it...in writing.

## Endnotes

1. *The Interlinear Bible*, ed. And trans. By Jay P. Green, Sr., p. 905. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Lafayette, Ind., 1985.
2. *Interlinear Bible*, p. 885.
3. *Interlinear Bible*, p. 934.
4. *Interlinear Bible*, p. 940.
5. *Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, by William E. Vine, p. 272. Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN, 1999.
6. *Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 272.
7. "First John", a study in the series, *Concise New Testament Survey*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, published in 2009. This article is published by Bible Studies Foundation, and is available at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org), under the author's name.

## **Appendix A: Verses on Faith**

What follows here is a string of verses dealing with faith. The case to be made for the importance and function of faith could fill shelves of volumes...indeed, it does. We will condense this larger view into a few short pages of Bible quotes, largely without elaboration.

What we want to present in this section is a compilation of verses that enunciate and delineate the parameters and purposes of faith. It is my prediction that these verse will hammer your soul, as they did mine, and leave you wanting to move quickly toward a stronger faith, one that will give you access to the best that God offers, to equip you to become a willing vessel for His holiness and righteousness.

Here is a cross-section of scriptures dealing with faith:

- Heb. 11:1—"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."
- 1 Pet. 1:21—"Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."
- 1 Cor. 2:4-5—"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."
- Rom. 3:28—"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."
- Heb. 11:6—"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."
- Rom. 14:23—"But the man who has doubts is condemned [self-condemnation, as per v. 22] if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin." When in doubt...don't.
- Eph. 6:16—"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."
- 1 Jn. 5:4—"...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."
- Rom. 5:2—"...through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we not stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."
- Eph. 3:12—"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." By being in fellowship and walking in faith, we can approach God with freedom and confidence.

- Gal. 3:9—“So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”
- Rom. 4:20-21—“Yet he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”
- Heb. 6:12—“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”
- Rom. 4:16—“Therefore the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.” The promises of God are accessed by faith, as exemplified by Abraham.
- Gal. 3:12 and 14—“The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”
- Gal. 3:25—“Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”
- Rom. 4:14—“For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless.”
- Rom. 3:27-28—“Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”
- 1 Tim. 1:14—“The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”
- 2 Tim. 3:10—“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance....”
- 2 Cor. 4:13—“It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.”
- 1 Tim. 3:13—“Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”
- 2 Thess. 1:3—“We ought to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.”

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- 2 Pet. 1:5—“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and 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.”
- 2 Tim. 1:13—“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.”
- Jude 1:20—“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.”
- Col. 2:7—“...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”
- 1 Pet. 1:5—“...who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”
- 1 Thess. 5:8—“But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”
- James 5:15—“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”

These verses each carry truths that beg exploring, and many have received treatment in previous studies, especially in the book, *Walking by Faith*, which is recommended reading.

## 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 service for Jesus Christ. Much of his career in education was spent developing programs for at-risk students. His work now is targeted toward 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 clear studies 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 (of which this is one) are the culmination of his experiences in life, his professional career, and—more recently—his studies in the Word.

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.