

*Bible Studies on Sin and  
Mercy  
Pathway to Forgiveness*

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# *Bible Studies on Sin and Mercy: Pathway to Forgiveness*

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## Introduction

There is little hope for us apart from the mercy and grace of God. Everything we are—in all of eternity—depends on God arranging for us a way to be saved. And everything we will become—in time—is based on His constructing a plan for us to receive forgiveness in our daily lives. The essential component in God’s design to save us and to give us productive lives...is forgiveness. Without forgiveness, we cannot qualify for a relationship with God in eternity, or fellowship with Him in time. Forgiveness opens the gate to allow us into God’s kingdom...forever...and now. Forgiveness is the heart of our Christian lives, and so it takes center stage in this study.

Sin is the culprit that creates the need for forgiveness. Sin is the enemy of God, but a friend of the flesh, so when a believer operates under the dictates of the flesh he is also standing in enmity toward God. Sin has other proponents in Satan and the world, who want us to live in a state of sin. To avoid being caught in their traps, we must know more about all of these. And we must explore every resource we can find in the Word to help us *beat sin*. We must be aware of the power of sin...but we must also know the powers within God’s arsenal to help us defeat it.

Once we become believers, we cannot ignore our sinful thoughts and behavior. When we commit sins (and we will) we have to deal with them, or face the consequences that they trigger. Thank God He has provided a way for us to dispose of our mistakes...an event eraser...a divine delete button. He has provided confession. In this series we will highlight this provision.

We have seen many times that confession brings forgiveness, but there are elements in this doctrine that we have not understood before. We must know more about 1) the qualities of God that make confession and forgiveness possible, 2) the various forms of confession that we may not have recognized *as such* before, and 3) the importance of honesty and sincerity in the confession process.

And there is a step beyond confession, where we want to go...to a place where God invites us to abide with Him...a special place. We want God to be central, not a sideline or an after-thought. We want God to be everything in our lives, and that is where we believe this book will take us.

Based on the impact that compiling this book has had on me personally, I humbly predict that this book will move you in His direction, as it has me, and you will find yourself closer to God. I direct all credit and honor and thanks toward the power of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, for any good that comes through these pages.

## **Definition of Sin**

**Anything Not of Faith is Sin.** As per Rom. 14:23, anything not of faith is sin. This would include any act or thought not occurring within the realm of faith. The area outside faith is very large, and one which absolutely no one can avoid altogether. Any action or thought not ensconced by faith is sin, including anything we do (or don't do) that is not prompted and energized by the Holy Spirit. Our thoughts and actions are mere symptoms for the deeper problem of our condition. If we are controlled by the flesh, our condition, and thus our patterns, are characterized by sin.

Sin is our effort to satisfy ourselves or aggrandize ourselves by our own ability and initiative. It often violates God's clear commandments and proscriptions, but sometimes it can simply be self-effort, self-trust, and self-dependence. We will try to refine our understanding of sin and what to do with it as we proceed through these studies.

The late J. Hampton Keathley, III, gave an excellent discussion of sin in "Assurance of God's Provision for Sin", which is a chapter in his book, *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*. We draw on his studies to frame several categories of sin to help us understand what sin is. (Endnote 1)

**Rejection of Grace is a Sin.** First of all, sin can be the rejection of grace in favor of anything outside of grace. Heb. 12:15a (NET) says, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God..." Coming up short, or "falling short" means to actually "fail" God's grace, or to REFUSE grace in favor of some substitute for provision and sustenance. We have seen in previous studies many examples of believers attempting to live life their own way, or according to some religious code, and we have studied admonitions for avoiding self-produced righteousness by trusting in the Holy Spirit to produce the righteousness of God. When we attempt to please God through our own machinations, we do just the opposite. Failing grace is the opposite of "drawing near to God" where we obtain mercy and FIND GRACE (Heb. 4:16). And failing grace is a sin.

**Sins of the Heart (or Mind) and Sins of the Flesh.** Sins may originate in our hearts or in our flesh. Matt. 15:19 tells us, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts..." The heart is "desperately wicked", as we will see later. Regarding the flesh, or sinful nature, Gal. 5:19-21 says the following:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The sins we see here in Galatians are generally "overt" sins, or sins that can be seen. But these originate in our thoughts, while thoughts come from our hearts, and the heart harbors

our core *values* and what we perceive as our *needs*. Our *thinking* is what needs to change. Keathley summarized this condition very well in the following:

May I suggest that evil thoughts have their source in faulty beliefs or in the lies we believe. When we are envious and covet what others have, for instance, we are guilty of thinking and believing that we need what someone else has to be secure or happy. When we think like that, we have believed Satan's and the world's lie that happiness comes in the abundance of the things we possess whether it is popularity, pleasure, position, power, giftedness, or material things. The simple application of this means that, in order to deal with sin in our lives, we must learn to look beyond the surface sin and go to the root issues or we will never experience true and lasting change that begins deep in the innermost part of our being through faith. (Endnote 2)

We will have much more to say about these things as we proceed, but we are already starting to get a feel for the way sin operates.

**Sins of the Tongue.** Sins are seen in our words. Matt. 15:18 says, "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart; and these make a man 'unclean'." Thoughts precede words. If thoughts are bad or sinful, the words that come out will also be bad or sinful. Matt. 12:34-37 gives Jesus' strong warning against sins of the tongue, as we see in the following:

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

Sins of the tongue include such things as false testimony, slander, foolish talk, coarse jokes, obscenity, destructive speech, and comments that undermine the faith and walk of other believers. (See Eph. 4:25-5:4.)

**Conclusion.** Sin is defined very well in Scripture. So it is important to explore the Word to see what sin is and how it operates so we can deal with it. Generally, we tend to see sin as something others do...mistakes in behaviors or attitudes that we observe in them. We look away from our own sins to avoid culpability for them. As we shall see, this has the opposite effect on our sin. The cover-up is as bad as the crime, and the consequences are not good. We will see as well that sin holds many surprises...sin is not always what we think, and it is much more pervasive than we have realized.

We often fail to realize how easy it is for us to sin, and how narrow the margin of error is when it comes to violation of God's standards. We must accept the reality that we *do* sin. 1 John 1:8 and 1:10 make it clear that we all sin, and that we "have" sin within us. None of us can deny our sinfulness...not even the most mature and saintliest among us. But there is

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hope for us, and that is what we want to see. For a more thorough discussion on the topic of *sin*, see the chapter “Sin” in *Getting Closer to God*.



## **Sexual Immorality: A Prominent Example of Sin**

**We Are All Unclean.** Sexual immorality is so common among the human species that it is almost universal. Sexual immorality is at the top of most lists of sins in the Bible, probably because it is so common. It is certainly appropriate that it would be featured in a discussion of sin. But we must be clear: We all have weaknesses, and just because sexual sin is not your particular area of weakness does not mean you are free from sin. Even if you are not in the grip of sinful tendencies sexually, you are not thereby pure. You are still unclean. So don't get too smug if you are not plagued with this thorn like most of the human race.

Ps. 14:3 says, "All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." This refers to Israelites, of course, but there is a secondary application for us in that we all have a sinful nature, even as believers, and we *all sin regularly*. Rom. 3:23 gives us this: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Once again, reference is to Jews and Gentiles as both being guilty of "sinning" and failing to measure up to the standards of God, but the application we can make to ourselves is that ALL sin and ALL fall short, *including* us as believers. We have a new life and new weapons and tools, but we still sin.

It is perhaps shocking to some that we are not perfect, even though we have been born again. We are able to participate in God's plan because He shares His divine perfection with us when we believe in Him. We are coated with His righteousness...for *eternal* purposes. But since we still reside in time, we retain our imperfection. Beyond salvation, we still reside in our finite, self-preserving, and self-serving bodies. They are occupied by the Holy Spirit, but He is not always in control, because of the presence of sin.

We acquire permanent credit for righteousness at salvation, yet we have a performance after that time characterized by all kinds of iniquity. This requires us to access His perfection daily (or minute-by-minute) to maintain fellowship with Him. To do this, we must be "clean", and this cleanliness can come from God alone. We will have much more to say about this soon.

**Sexual Immorality is an Offense.** Sexual immorality is an offense against each individual member of the Godhead. We see this delineated in 1 Cor. 6:12-20. In verse 13*b*, we see the offense against God: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." In verse 15, we see the offense against Christ: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!" And in verse 18-19*a*, the offense that sexual immorality represents toward the Holy Spirit is given, as follows:

Flee from all sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

We sin against our bodies when we commit sexual immorality, because these bodies are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit within us.

**God Decrees Against Sexual Immorality in the Old Testament.** The forbidding of sexual immorality starts in the Old Testament, where the Law states God's standards for human behavior. Adultery and sexual immorality are cited as practices that are abhorrent to God. Ex. 20:14 states it plainly, as part of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not commit adultery." Leviticus 18:6-23 clarifies this and expands it with specific prohibitions (giving the male slant, but applying to females, as well):

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

Verse 24 shows where such behavior ends up: "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled."

**God Rules Against Sexual Immorality in the New Testament.** Sexual immorality is decried throughout the New Testament. For example, Col. 3:5-8 tells us to kill that part of ourselves that practices immorality. This passage says the following:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

We must be clear: Sin brings consequences. God cannot approve of sinful behavior, and will not ignore it. Sin brings His "wrath". The thing we must see at this point is that sin incurs discipline, which is God's way of correcting us. Discipline can be severe, up to and including physical death, and must not be taken lightly. 1 Cor. 10:8 says, "We should not

commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.”

The purpose of discipline is to get us to confess our sins and return to fellowship with God, restoring the good behavior patterns that fellowship produces. There are other things besides sexual immorality that we should “get rid of”, and these include such things as lying, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language. These will also result in discipline.

There are many sins, but sexual immorality is always at the top of sin directories. Eph. 5:3-4 demonstrates this, mentioning sexual sins first, followed by other prohibitions. This passage says the following:

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

No hint of sexual immorality: That’s what it says. If we are not sure whether certain “sexual” behaviors are sins, things that go on outside the private, exclusive bond of a married couple, these verses assure us that they are.

Sexual immorality is a fly-trap for believers...so much so that clear advice is given for us to RUN from it. 1 Cor. 6:18 says, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.” Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:22a to “flee the evil desires of youth”. Joseph (back to the Old Testament) gave us an example of “running”, with nothing figurative about it, when he scrambled to escape sexual temptation. This is reported in Gen. 39:12: “She [Potiphar’s wife] caught him [Joseph] by his cloak and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.” He RAN out of the house, without even considering his condition of being undressed. Escaping sexual immorality is desperately urgent business.

**More on the Consequences of Sexual Immorality.** We have suggested already that sexual immorality brings discipline. Sometimes sexual immorality is framed as impurity, which is said to stoke God’s wrath, as we see in Ez. 24:13. This passage says, “Now your impurity is lewdness. Because I tried to cleanse you but you would not be cleansed from your impurity, you will not be clean again until my wrath against you has subsided.” The condition that brings wrath is “uncleanness”, which will be a major topic in our discussion of *mercy* later in this series. Our focus now is on consequences derived from the creation of that uncleanness.

Job discussed the process of sexual immorality and its consequences in Job 24:15-24, which is worth quoting in its entirety, as follows:

The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, ‘No eye will see me,’ and he keeps his face concealed. In the dark, men break into houses, but by day they shut themselves in; they want nothing to do with the light. For all of them deep darkness

is their morning; they make friends with the terrors of darkness. Yet they are foam on the surface of the water; their portion of the land is cursed, so that no one goes to the vineyards. As heat and drought snatch away the melted snow, so the grave snatches away those who have sinned. The womb forgets them, the worm feasts on them; evil men are no longer remembered but are broken like a tree. They prey on the barren and childless woman, and to the widow show no kindness. But God drags away the mighty by his power; though they become established, they have no assurance of life. He may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut off like heads of grain.

Life goes on normally; the person committing sexual immorality believes he is “getting away with it”. He may even be prosperous in business or advance into upper echelons of society, but God is watching him, and the bitter outcomes that remain will haunt him for as long as he continues...and likely far beyond. In the meantime, he will be cooperating with Satan, the great destroyer. Mark Rutland said, “Lust steals the joy of human sexuality. Lust destroys homes, families, consciences, and minds. And...lust kills.” (Endnote 3)

There is a solution, which is true repentance, meaning honest confession, but someone caught in the powerful snares of sexual sin is unlikely to choose to come clean, because this would force him to give up his sinful behavior. Overcoming this condition will require the application of every technique God provides to make us stronger and equip us to do good things. Otherwise, the bad behavior will continue, and discipline will surely come. When it comes, it will not be pretty. And the consequences can last a long time.

Consequences for sexual immorality in the Old Testament were quite severe. One example of this can be seen in Deut. 22:22, which presents this: “If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.” (There are other examples of sexual immorality and the consequences they bring in Deut. 22.) Another place where sexual sins are designated as deserving punishment is Leviticus 20. As in Deuteronomy, death is the consequence for almost any kind of sexual misconduct. An example of this can be seen in Leviticus 20:10, which commands, “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”

Prov. 2:16-19 gives us an early hint at relief from slavery to sexual immorality, and suggests the severity of punishment that accompanies sexual immorality. This passage, taken with verses 1-15 and 20-22 in Prov. 2, offers *wisdom* as a primary key to overcoming snares set by the world and Satan, as follows:

It [wisdom] will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life.

We will see more regarding wisdom later in this series. But, once again, consequences can be expected when sexual immorality occurs. This is why we are conducting this series. We want to avoid the consequences of sexual lust and other sins, and find God's way to live fully...and to glorify Him in the process.

**Sexual Lust is Never Satisfied.** There is a quality about sexual lust and many other sins that we must understand: They are never satisfied. They never lessen, resulting in a pattern of always needing more in the hope of achieving some ultimate, sustained satisfaction. But sustaining the excitement of lust, especially of sexual lust, requires the creation of behaviors and experiences that are increasingly extreme. Lust is a tread mill of increased effort which leads nowhere, in spite of a sort of belief that the pinnacle can finally be reached, and that frustration can be quelled at last. The idea that the ultimate sexually-immoral experience is achievable is a lie from Satan.

Rutland described this well in the following:

The greater problem with Lust, however, is that in getting its object, nothing is "settled". Lust fulfilled "has" nothing. It must immediately start over. Hence, the law of diminishing return drives the lustful ever closer to the brink of sexual burnout. Jaded and seared, the lustful must constantly veer deeper into the bizarre and twisted for titillation. (Endnote 4)

Eph. 4:19 acknowledges the quick-sand-like nature of illicit sexual involvement, saying, "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." They want more because it takes more to keep the thrill going.

There is no end to it. Sexual sins tend to be addictive, and—like any addiction—they result in greater tolerance with each usage, with the result that more and more is required to mollify the lust. This is why even a "hint" of sexual immorality cannot be allowed. (See Eph. 5:3) The slightest deviation from our spiritual path of confessing, studying, praying, and trusting leave us vulnerable to Satan's use of the world to tempt us...and he certainly knows our weakest points. He knows the kind of mental suggestions, media images, or verbal lures that it will take to draw us into behavior that is sinful and destructive.

We are easy prey for Satan and the world. Our sinful natures are always at-the-ready to cooperate and produce sinful patterns. These are part of the spiritual warfare being waged against our spiritual walk. We are not assaulted in a frontal attack...the battle does not cast us as warriors facing the enemy directly in a parry-and-thrust pattern of visible opposition. That kind of battle, quite frankly, would be easier to deal with, because we could see the enemy. But the opponent we face comes softly with a beautiful face and the promise of total fulfillment. What harm could come from such attractive and innocuous qualities? The battle is against an opponent that destroys us by receiving and absorbing us into a deadly cloud of pleasure.

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So this battle is not going on in an open field, but in dark and quiet places, beginning in the secret chambers of the heart, where imagination joins the sinful nature to embrace Satan's alluring enticements. The enemy creeps in silently on cat's paws, and we never see him coming. Before we know it, we are gripped in the claws of a ferocious lion from which escape is unlikely. This is why Peter said, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Lions roar, but not when they are stalking their prey. By the time we recognize what is happening behind Satan's attack, we are headed down a carnal road of death and destruction.

We are personally helpless against Satan's craft and speed and power. It's like boxing in the dark. You can't hit what you can't see. But God can see the enemy, and—if He is directing us—we will be delivered. This will require full access to God's power to combat Satan's power, which is far superior to our own. This involves, in addition to the big four: confession, prayer, study, and trust...several things: ongoing acknowledgement of God, surrender to His will, yielding to His leadership, constant thanksgiving, true worship, and obedience to His Word. Purity will require so much more than we think.

## **Allies of Sexual Immorality (and Other Sins)**

**The Axis of Evil.** The group of allies which sin embraces represents a true “axis of evil”. These are forces beyond the scope and capability of our will and strength to manage. This co-op of subtle but devastatingly destructive powers wrestle us to the ground spiritually, teaming up to CONSTANTLY overwhelm us with temptation and opportunities to sin. Their purpose is to rule us, control our thoughts and behavior, and entice us to ignore and dishonor our God. Any one of the allies of sin can defeat us easily, but we face all of them daily in their joint conspiracy to destroy us. For us to believe we can defeat them through our own goodness or determination is ludicrous to the point of being ridiculous. We need to get a clue about our enemies...and about our limitations.

The axis of evil includes 1) Satan, 2) our flesh/heart combination, and 3) the world. We offer these here as reminders of previous studies and not as thorough discussions of these topics.

**The Devil.** We have seen Satan in many lights in previous studies, so—as suggested—our present discussion of this evil planner will not be exhaustive. Satan is evil, but he is beautiful...attractive...appealing. From our perspective, he is irresistible. He is also tricky...deceitful...cunning. He makes us believe good is bad and bad is good. He loves to confuse us about God’s will and God’s ways. Ps. 10:13 suggests how this works, saying, “Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, ‘He won’t call me to account’?” Satan makes us believe God doesn’t “really” require the things He has told us. Satan deceives us the same way he did Eve in the garden, and we are just as gullible as she was. Recall Satan’s obfuscation: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” (Gen. 3:4) Satan will do anything to get us to doubt God and His Word.

Satan opposes God, and if we are moving toward God, Satan will throw up roadblocks to stop us. This is a difficulty we have that unbelievers do not encounter. Believers are under attack, and the more mature we become, the more intense Satan’s onslaughts become. This is why we must never stop growing in “grace and knowledge”; we must always stay a step ahead of Satan. For a more thorough discussion on Satan, please see “Resisting Satan”, a chapter in my first book, *Getting Closer to God*.

We are tuned in to Satan’s invitations, because we have a frequency in our evil-message receiver whereby we hear his messages. This receptor is called the “flesh”, which operates in conjunction with our hearts.

**The Flesh/Heart Combo.** The flesh and the heart work cooperatively to devise our submission to Satan’s influence. Jer. 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” Jesus embellished this by saying the following:

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You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt. 5:27-28)

The heart is the source for lust that results in adultery. On page 16 of my book, *Walking in the Spirit*, a chart is given showing the heart as the repository for the sinful nature, alternately called "the flesh". The term "sinful nature" seems to have a spiritual implication, while "flesh" suggests physicality, referring to the body. But there is no air in the seam between the sinful nature in the heart and the body in which it resides. What one does, the other embraces and applauds. They are conjoined.

Sin begins in the heart *or* in the body. Often, sexual immorality begins in the eyes, which feed the dark heart...or sinful nature. In 2 Sam. 11:2, we see how this affected David. This verse reads, "One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful." Sexual immorality is aided by "looking". The sinful nature has a memory system which records tempting images and builds a catalog of these to which it can refer in order to feed sensual and sexual impulses. These feed the sinful imagination of the heart and emerge as plans to act out what has been imagined. This puts us on the destructive path of sexual immorality.

James gives us the sequence for sinful behavior in the book by his name, in the first chapter, verses 14-15, which says the following:

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

The lust is ours, and it produces sin and carnality. And the heart is the processing center for all this sin. Matt. 15:19-20a reminds us of this, saying, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'."

And the core condition that makes the heart a place of sinful production, rather than the seat of spirituality, is the presence or absence of faith. Unbelief is always the beginning condition for sin, making faith sin's greatest opponent. Heb. 3:12 says, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." Unbelief opens the heart to sin. Incidentally, it is clear from this passage, if there was any doubt, that believers ("brothers") can have sinful, unbelieving hearts that turn away from God. This is what we are trying to avoid.

The flesh, partner-in-crime with the heart, engenders not a single intrinsically-redeemable quality. In Rom. 7:18 Paul proclaims, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." When the flesh is in charge, all spiritual strength is removed, and Satan and the world have a field day



in our hearts and in our lives. We want to do what is good, but are unable to follow through.

When we live under the power of the sinful nature, our hearts and minds will promote sin. When we operate under the power of the Holy Spirit, we will focus on God. The iteration of this concept has been rendered in all six previous series. Rom. 8:5 summarizes this for us, saying, “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.” Attention to the flesh leads to sin. Attention to the Spirit leads to life. Gal 6:8 says, “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Rom. 8:8 adds this: “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

These are the actions of the sinful nature:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (Gal. 5:19-21)

And these represent the fruit of the Spirit:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)

And this is where the difference occurs:

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.

Our emphasis at this point in our study is on the heart and the flesh as they relate to sin. These passages help us understand the role of these in initiating and sustaining sinful behavior. The heart/flesh unit is indeed an ally of sin.

**The World.** The world works closely with Satan and the flesh. (A thorough discussion of the role of the world related to sin is given in my series, *Getting Closer to God*.) 1 John 2:16 gives us this: “For everything that is in the world—the cravings of sinful man [the flesh], the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.”

The world sets the stage for Satan’s play, and draws our attention to practices and ideas that look good, but that will poison our Christian lives. Love for the world will pull us away from God, and will paint us with colors that will make us indistinguishable from unbelievers. The world pulls us in by successive approximations, meaning by imperceptible degrees. We not only have to *know* and *practice* God’s Word...we must be *trained experts* at

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spotting the spiritual traps and dangers that permeate our world. And we must never venture out alone. God will ride “shotgun”, if we let Him.

## Idolatry

**Introducing Idolatry.** There is no need to get technical. Idolatry is valuing anything more than we value God, or making anything we do more important than doing God's will. Idolatry is seen as worship of idols, which can be anything that distracts us from our preoccupation with God. When we focus on "idols", we look away from God. This is not complicated, and we do it all the time. We don't need a statue or some icon to bow before to be engrossed in idol worship. We have been studying sexual immorality, which can easily become an idol. Another idol is greed, often called "coveting" in the Bible.

Greed. 1 Tim. 6:9-10 tells us the following:

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

The impulse behind greed is to bring happiness and security, but the ultimate outcome of greed is "ruin and destruction", just as it is with sexual immorality. This sin branches into many other sins, as "all kinds of evil" are generated by greed. Murder, envy, stealing, lying, jealousy, slander, and hatred are just a few that come to mind. That is why this sin is seen as a "root". It produces copious amounts of rotten fruit.

Because greed has such serious implications, we should avoid it. In 1 Tim. 6:11, following the passage just cited, Paul tells Timothy, "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." These are obviously fruits of the Spirit, which come when the Holy Spirit, rather than the carnal nature, is in control. The intended outcome is to run as far away from greed as we can.

As much as we admire a system of free enterprise and the competition of capitalism, a danger that occurs when a free society lays aside its focus on Christ is that greed will abound, resulting in a moral break-down, which will eventually destroy the character (and economy) of a country. Unbridled greed results in anarchy and lawlessness, and the vacuum invites tyranny and loss of freedom.

This is one of many reasons why idolatry must be avoided. Paul warned the Corinthians, "Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry." Paul repeated this admonition to Timothy, as we saw earlier, in 2 Tim. 2:22, "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."

**Idolatry and Sexual Immorality.** Idolatry is often mentioned in Scripture in conjunction with sexual immorality. We see an example of this in Heb. 13:4-5a, which says this:

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Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have....

Both greed and sexual immorality are tied to natural instincts that have been distorted by Satan and adopted by the sinful nature. Greed is linked to a powerful instinct for survival, whereas sexual immorality is tied to a drive to perpetuate mankind. Both of these “instincts” are God-given, but the power they possess, when they are unleashed in connection with the sinful nature, become irresistible forces that drive Christians to horribly sinful behavior.

Sexual immorality, as well as greed, is often referred to as “impurity”, and impurity is seen as an idol. We see this in Eph. 5:5, which says, “For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of God.” Sexual sin and greed are “gods”. When sexual immorality is committed, or greed dominates, the believer will be worshipping them over God.

Forced to choose between sex and greed, we would probably pick sex as the worst offender. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah? Rom. 1:24-25 makes it clear that sex can become a god:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

So...who is your God? Or, who is your “god”? Choosing a path of sexual immorality (or greed) is making a choice to choose a god other than God. This is the result of a search for fulfillment apart from God. Acts 17:26-27 says that we will find God IF we search for Him. If we don't, we will poke around the trash heap of an uncaring world looking for answers. We will find them, and they will sound right...but they will be wrong, and they will lead us away from God. We must seek God first.

**Choose God or Idols.** Matt. 6:24 informs us, “No one can serve [worship] two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Ironically, by seeking God first, we get “things”, as per Matt. 6:33, which says, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” So we are to FLEE SIN and SEEK GOD. We cannot worship God and ANYTHING ELSE at the same time. Worship excludes all competing forces, behaviors, thoughts, and aspirations.

It is easy to turn away from God. Paul recognized this in Gal. 1:6, where he said, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.” This is always a tendency for believers, because the field of dreams is vast, while the path to righteousness is narrow and specific. And it can happen to any of us, as it did Solomon, where we see him turning away from God in the following: “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart

was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.” (1 Ki. 11:4)

We have a choice, and that choice must operate within the guidance and prescriptions of Scripture, which gives us the techniques that enable us to make RIGHT choices. We have to confess our sins, pray constantly, study the Bible daily, and build an abiding belief in the person and power of God and His Son if we are to sustain our spiritual walk and avoid sin...“that so easily entangles” (Heb. 12:1).

Christ said, “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” We must choose Him each day. Elijah presented this choice to the Israelites in 1 Ki. 18:21, when he said to them, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” Moses offered a similar choice to the people in Deut. 30:19, which says this:

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

By choosing God, we reject idols, as Joshua challenged the Jews to do in Josh. 24:15, saying this:

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

With choice comes responsibility. But choosing God will not be sustained if we do not use the procedures He gives us for accessing His power to accomplish His will. Choose God, and keep on choosing Him without stopping.

**Contentment: The Other Side of the Coin.** Contentment is the opposite of the grief that comes from greed or the disappointment of sexual immorality. Contentment is associated with peace and joy, fruits of the Spirit, and is the product of faith. When we are preoccupied with money or sex, we will be unsettled, but when we are preoccupied with Christ, we will be content. We quoted Heb. 13:5 earlier, where we saw the phrase, “...be content with what you have....” This is being content with God and His perfect provision. 1 Tim. 6:6 tells us that “...godliness with contentment is great gain.” In Phil. 4:11, Paul said, “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” This expresses trust and rest in God’s power and provision, where there is contentment. Paul also said for us to be content with food and clothing alone (1 Tim. 6:8), knowing that the proverb is accurate that says, “The fear of the Lord leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble” (Prov. 19:23). Contentment begins with trust, and

ends with God's care, for He says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5b).

**Attention to Idols Means Forgetting God.** When we chase any substitute for God, it is inevitable that we will forget God. Dr. Greg Herrick provided an article titled, "Anxious People and a Sovereign God". A sub-chapter is included in Herrick's study, labeled "The Reason for So Much Anxiety". In a sub-section within this sub-chapter, Dr. Herrick cites our forgetting God as the reason for so much insecurity. The title for the sub-section encapsulates very well the point we are trying to make: "We Have Turned to the Idols Our Hands Have Made in an Attempt to Forget God". Here is an excerpt from this section that elaborates on this theme:

Now it is not my point here to go through a litany of reasons as to the nature, causes, effects on the human body, chemical or otherwise, etc., of worry and anxiety. It is simply to go to the root and reason for its prevalence. I think the answer is simple (though in no way *simplistic*): we have turned to idols and forgotten our sovereign God! In short, then, in our misguided folly and zeal—being instinctively and incurably religious—we have run after other gods (sex, power, money, happiness, whatever, etc.). But these gods are puny idols, indeed impotent, and unable to save us from our miserable plight.... Face it! Our gods—if they even deserve that title—cannot help us. We have turned our backs on God and summarily forgotten the One and Only true and sovereign Lord of the universe! Therein lies the cause of our deep-seated angst. (Endnote 5)

This condition applies to individuals or to nations. When we turn to idols (non-gods) to meet any of our needs (financial, physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, etc.), we guarantee that we will not find the contentment that Satan and the world promise. These will be found only with the true God.

## **The Call to Purity**

**Being Cleansed.** 2 Cor. 7:1 says, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” Purifying from contamination is getting cleansed. This verse says we are to “purify ourselves”, which means we must take our hearts to the “heart wash” to get them cleaned. We must flee “youthful lusts”, of course, as we saw before in 2 Tim. 2:22, but remember that this verse also adds this: “...and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Those we want to emulate call on God with hearts that have been cleansed. The result is that righteousness, faith, love, and peace prevails in them, meaning that the fruit of the Spirit is produced in them BECAUSE they have been cleaned...and are PURE.

Cleanliness is everything...everything...everything. Christ died to make us clean. We cannot have eternal life without being cleaned at the time we are born again. We cannot have fellowship with God without being cleaned in our daily walk. We cannot produce “good” in the power of the Holy Spirit without being clean. The KEY to Christian living is staying CLEAN! Prov. 2:21-22 says it well: “For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.” This is spoken to the Israelites, of course, but it illustrates our fellowship with God, or “living in the land”. Righteous, good, upright, and blameless believers...clean Christians...can live there. On the other hand, the “unclean” will be cut off from this fellowship.

This is why we must keep ourselves pure, as we see in 1 Tim. 5:22b, which says, simply, “Keep yourself pure.” 1 Thess. 4:7 echoes this, saying, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” It is imperative that we understand: purity and holiness are not conditions we can manufacture by ourselves, even as believers. These are qualities that come from God alone, that we appropriate through confession and faith and all the other techniques God has given us to live holy lives. We are to be “sanctified”, or “cleaned up”, as per 1 Thess. 4:3, so we can avoid the pitfalls of impurity seen in 1 Thess. 4:3-6, including sexual immorality, which we are told the Lord will punish.

Jesus perfectly illustrated the cleansing process in John 13, where he started washing the disciples’ feet, to which Peter reacted with an objection, prompting Christ to tell him that the washing was necessary for Peter to be a “part” of Christ. Christ then added, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.” We are cleaned in whole at salvation, leaving us eternally purified and righteous. But, given the reality of sin in all of our lives, we need to “wash our feet”, which is taking care of the dirt that we pick up while walking on this earth. This gives a clear picture of the process of confession and forgiveness that keeps the road dust (accumulated sin) off of us as we live our lives and seek to get closer to God.

**Purity/Impurity.** The English word “purity” is used to translate several terms from the ancient Greek. One generally means “blameless”. Another means “clean”. And still another means “immaculate, chaste, or clean”. The last usage seen here appears in 1 Jn. 3:3, which says this: “Everyone who has this hope in him [of being like Christ, as per v. 2] purifies himself, just as he is pure.” When we “purify ourselves”, we must achieve a purity matching that of Jesus Christ. Do the math! Humanity cannot duplicate divinity! Only God generates God-likeness, so our objective must be to open all our spiritual gates so we can be a pathway for His purity. It is worth repeating: Purity comes from God, by our being cleansed through forgiveness. Purity will then be manifested as the fruit of the Spirit.

Sometimes we understand things by seeing how they contrast with their opposites. The opposite of pure is “impure”, which means “unclean” or lustful. There are many passages in which the idea of “impurity” is seen. Here are a few of them (all italics mine):

- Rom. 1:24—Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual *impurity* for the degrading of their bodies with one another.
- 2 Cor. 12:21—I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the *impurity*, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.
- Rom. 6:19—I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to *impurity* and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.
- Eph. 4:19—Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of *impurity*, with a continual lust for more.
- Eph. 5:3—But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of *impurity*, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.
- Col. 3:5—Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, *impurity*, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Impurity is the condition that needs to get cleaned up. We often get the sequence backwards. We want to “clean ourselves up” so we can be presentable to God. So what is the difference between us doing our own self-cleansing, or self-correction, and keeping the law to get points with God? There is none. We cannot keep the law to achieve righteousness that satisfies God, and we cannot clean ourselves up to meet His divine standards. We must first get God to *clean us up*, and then we can link up with His power to enable behavior that meets His approval.



**Additional Points on Purification.** Purification will either be seen in the foreground, or loom as a backdrop, throughout this series. Before we move on to related topics, we want to add a few points about the place of purity in our lives.

First of all, Jesus Christ is the reason and source for our purity. He GIVES us purity. Heb. 1:3b tells us, “After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Our purity comes from Jesus Christ, made possible by the cleansing agent of His blood. This purity is not a product of human initiative or effort.

Another principle surrounding the purpose and presence of purity is that purity engenders purity. From purity comes more purity. Titus 1:15-16 illustrates the condition and direction of the “pure”, as compared with that of the “impure”. This passage says the following:

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

If it is true that these “corrupted” individuals that “do not believe” are actually carnal believers, then the application of this passage would be toward *believers* who deny God in their actions. They are “unfit”. On the other hand, from believers who are “pure”, more “purity” is generated. The contrast is clearly drawn: Corrupt (dirty) believers will do nothing good, and are seen as disobedient and detestable. Pure (clean) believers will display purity.

Finally, we must understand that purity and the purification process has been around a long time. Cleaning and cleanliness were a big part of the system of sacrifices implemented under the law. Num. 19:9 illustrates this, taking us into the middle of a sacrifice that used water for washing to secure the purification of sin:

A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for purification of sin.

The act of washing with water to clean and purify is used throughout Chapter 19 in Numbers. It is no surprise that the concept of purity in our daily lives centers on our being clean. But the water we wash with now runs red, leaving us white as snow.

## **Beating Sin**

**There is a *Right Way to Beat Sin*.** We want to do well. We want to love and support our brothers, and demonstrate a love for mankind that will prompt us to deliver the gospel to the lost. And we do NOT want to sin. These aspirations are noble and right and proper. But we must do these things in the *right way*, God's way, for them to get done effectively.

First of all, we want what we do to count. We know that God provides eternal rewards for righteous behavior, which is behavior that is energized and directed by the Holy Spirit. Secondly, we want what we do to honor God. This means that divine good will need to be generated in our lives so that our thoughts and actions will point to God and glorify Him. Finally, we want what to do to accomplish the purpose or outcome that God has in mind. This is our fruitful participation in God's plan, which allows us to be a part of His design, and His orchestration of events in the universe. This enables us to edify fellow believers and to implement the dissemination of the gospel...according to God's direction.

If we do not do things in the right way, they won't count, they won't honor God, and they won't do any *real* good. We have seen, and will continue to explore the *right way* to get things done in God's plan and program. To get it right, we will need to strip ourselves of worldly, human view point, and see things as God does.

**The World View.** Col. 2:20 says, "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules...?" The viewpoint of the world is convincing, recondite, logical, often brilliant...but verse 23 in this passage (Col. 2), tells us that the best solutions and ideas that the world can offer may "have an appearance of wisdom...but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence".

No system of morality or "self-help" that does not originate from God, or is not described in God's Word, or is not directed by His Spirit will do any good. In other words, it is NOT good, even though it may resemble or take on the appearance of being effective or somehow worthy of our attention. Worldly systems of morality WILL NOT STOP SIN, and pursuit of morality *for its own sake* is a waste of time. There is nothing that Satan would love better than for us to chase *moral issues*, rather than focus on the real spiritual walk that generates *true morality*. When we change our *spiritual* pattern, the *moral* pattern will follow.

The world also gives us "self-help" solutions. Self-improvement projects sound great, but they are suspect because they depend on human power and ingenuity, and will not produce a change that curtails sin. Human effort is no substitute for divine power, and we will not be able to beat sin using the world's programs. Deliverance from sin will be based on what God can do, not on the basis of our being intrinsically or externally "better" as the result of some world system.

Col. 2:8 says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather

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than on Christ.” This informs us that misleading philosophy, human tradition, and “principles of the world” are types of false information that not only fail to prevent sin (as per verse 20 above)...they actually contribute to it or lead to it. Why? Because these depend on the *flesh*, which is sinful by its very nature; confidence in the flesh moves away from and operates outside of faith in Christ (and in God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and the Truth of God’s Word). Our faith is not in ourselves or the ways of the world, but in the power of God. We can have assurance that He loves us, and that He wants to work all things together for our good. Our goal is to have full understanding and faith that He *can*.

Deliverance and Escape from Sin. Deliverance is the consequence of our being empowered to fight sin. 1 Cor 10:3-4 gives a look at this deliverance, saying the following:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Verse 5 then tell us that we are to “take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ.” We know from previous studies that obedience has to do with much more than mere compliance with the Law to demonstrate our subservience. This is not talking about behavioral change...this is citing *spiritual* change, which comes through the techniques we have learned. Once changes are made spiritually, they will be seen behaviorally. But notice the phrase “divine power”, which is pin-pointed as the quality of our weapons that “demolish strongholds”. The power is “divine”, and the weapons we are fighting with *are not ours*...they belong to God, and it is His power alone that makes them effective.

Step one in deliverance from sin is UNDERSTANDING that it is God Who does the delivering.

Once we know that God does the delivering from sin, and have cleaned ourselves to enable His power to work, we must work in advance, as early as we can and as often as we can, to increase in maturity to recognize God’s provision for our deliverance. 1 Cor. 10:13 tells us this:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

With temptation, there is a way for escape. Escape is always possible. But weak believers and believers operating in the flesh WILL NOT ESCAPE. The way of escape is this: establishing before-hand the conditions needed to keep “divine power” working, since that is the only power that can effectuate the escape. No escape takes place without preparation, and that means maturity. The “way” of escape is *maturity*. When the storms of temptation blow ashore, it’s too late to prepare. Preparation must be done before the storms hit.

Beating sin is a gargantuan project, much bigger than we and all the armies ever assembled can battle with any success. Beating sin requires maturity, not because we will then be tough

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enough to take it on ourselves, but because it is then that we will take full advantage of the divine resources God offers to help us beat it.

## **The Role of Christ in Beating Sin**

**It is Finished.** When we think of the work of Jesus Christ, we go back to the phrase, “It is finished.” These are the words He spoke when His work was completed on the cross. At that time, He declared that payment had been made in full, and that He now held the contract on the souls of all who accepted Him. The contract was indeed paid for, and it is now being executed as part of God’s plan. A main feature of the contract is the removal of our sins as far as the east is from the west. We have a seeming paradox, however, since sins have been removed, yet they still exist. We have to look at this more closely.

**We Are Not Through With Sin.** Sin will ultimately be non-existent, when we get our perfect bodies at resurrection. While we are in our current bodies, however, sin still exists in our hearts and lives. Meanwhile, God’s eternal view of our condition is that we are *righteous*, because Christ paid for our sins. But here we are, with sin persisting in both our nature and our practice. This is because we are still earth-bound and world-centered. While we have our feet on *terra firma*, we will be haunted by the Law, lured by the world, attacked by Satan, and disrupted by our own sinful nature. This is why God provides for us *in time*, giving us the work of Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the living power of His Word to equip us for true spirituality. We can be holy and spiritual, even while we are still in our temporal and carnal bodies, even though we are surrounded by—and often willing participants in—sin.

As we go through this series, we will be reviewing many ways that God offers to help us maintain closeness with Him so we can avoid impurity. For now, we want to focus on the help we get from Jesus Christ. We know He has done the “most” for us by giving us eternal life and His righteousness. His work continues presently, however, in a very important way.

**Christ is Our Advocate.** Christ is working for us now regarding sin by advocating for us at the right hand of the Father. 1 Jn. 2:1 tells us, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” The assumption in this verse is that the condition specified two verses before has been fulfilled. The condition is this: “If we confess our sins....” When we confess, we get the best Lawyer in the universe.

The scene in heaven may look like this: The accuser Satan points out our sins to God the Father, and instantly Christ turns to the Father and says, “Yeah, we’re working on that, but, of course, you recall, Father, that I covered these.” Case closed. Our sins have been removed by confession, which triggers Christ to successfully defend us before the Father, so we can receive a pardon. Help in heaven is a wonderful provision of Christ’s work, but we still need help *on earth* to resist sin, because it’s still all around us...and within us.

**Christ Triumphed Over Sin.** Christ has been defending us, and will continue to do so. Another way He helps is by removing the power of the Law, Satan, and our sinful nature to

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rule over us. This relief is possible for us *if we follow the path* that God has laid out for us. Col. 2:15 says, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” His work gave Him victory over all those enormous forces that can destroy our Christian walk, and He now offers that victory to us, if we do what is required to access His power and participate in His victory.

**Having the Mind of Christ.** One of the ways we participate in Christ’s victory is by “having the same mind that He does.” We have to think like He does. This thought pattern is available to us only in the Word. By studying and growing in wisdom and understanding, we mature so that our thinking becomes more like that of our Savior. 1 Cor. 2:16b tells us that “...we have the mind of Christ,” and 1 Cor. 2:10-13 tells us that the Holy Spirit gives this mind to us, as we see in the following:

...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

The truths that we are given in the Word beckon us to absorb and apply its principles in order to transform our petty human perspective into the divine thinking of Christ. With His thinking, we will be strengthened to deal with sin.

**Christ Offers His Power to Beat Sin.** Col. 2:6-7 gives us another angle on the role of Christ in our present lives as we deal with sin. This passage says the following:

“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.”

Christ is our Savior for all eternity, but for now, we are here in “time”, and must rely on Him to strengthen us for overpowering sin. Getting His strength is the result of “living in Him”, or walking in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and of being “rooted and built up”, which is the process of studying and growing through the assimilation of spiritual knowledge from Scripture.

The idea of Christ providing His power for us to beat sin is introduced again in Col. 3:1-16, which provides a call for us to put to death everything belonging to the sinful nature. Verse 17 tells us HOW we do this, saying, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” From previous series, we know that the phrase, “in the name of Jesus” means “in the power of Jesus”. When we do or say anything in His name, it is because He controls us, and we are thereby accessing His power.

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Rom. 6:11-12 confirms this, saying, “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.” The life we have in Christ Jesus enables us to refuse the reign of sin in our lives. Refusing sin is the objective; Christ is the means.

The power of Christ is all we need to get us through this snaky world in one piece. 2 Pet. 1:2-3 makes this completely clear, as follows:

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

Knowledge concerning God and Christ feed us and nourish us so that we can grow in our faith toward Him...and beat sin. We must always remember that it is His “divine power” that provides the wherewithal for us to achieve holiness and purity in our lives. Through His strength, we can “escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires”.

## Other Spiritual Provisions to Help Us Beat Sin

**Keeping in Step with the Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is our first and greatest resource for overcoming sin. Gal. 5:24-25 says the following:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit [NET Bible renders it, “let us walk by the Spirit”].

We have spiritual “life” because we were regenerated by the Holy Spirit at salvation, and now we can “walk by” the Spirit, so that our *position* of belonging to Christ will become a *condition* of walking in the power of His Spirit. Gal. 5:16 echoes this, saying, “So I say, live by the [power of] the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” So walking *by* the Spirit, like “traveling *by* car”, is done by a power other than our own. We “live” by the Spirit when “life” comes from the Spirit, not only at our re-birth, but for our entire lives. Our goal is to find His path, and walk in it.

Walking by the Spirit, or living by the Spirit is the same as walking in fellowship with the Spirit, which is the same as “walking in the light” in 1 Jn. 1. When we are clean through the confession of our sins (1 Jn. 1:9), we are turning control of our spirits over to the Holy Spirit, who will strengthen us to do good things and avoid bad ones. If we walk by the Spirit we WILL NOT gratify the desires that come out of our sinful natures.

We must address first the condition of our walk, and *then* we can address the issue of our desires. The desires will not change until we have taken care of our walk. In other words, it is futile for us to attempt to try to correct our sinful behavior by simply trying to be...or do...better. That is, in essence, law-keeping, and has the effect of making our spiritual condition worse than it was. Grace, liberty, and mercy are the components of change that will free us from the ravages of sin, as we shall see below.

Ephesians 4 and 5 give clear standards for proper Christian behavior. The new self that we get at salvation must operate freely and the old self must be put away. The new self is the self operating under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The old self is the self controlled by the sinful nature. Eph. 4:30 cautions us that we should not “grieve”, or disappoint, or stymie the work of the Holy Spirit in us, by doing the sinful things specified in Eph. 4. Instead, we are to be “filled” by the Spirit, meaning “controlled” by the Spirit, as we see in Eph. 5:18.

We must be sure that what we are saying is clear. We have said that the “old self” is related to the sinful nature, while the “new self” is linked to the control of the Holy Spirit. In context with Eph. 4 and 5, SIN is the issue, while CONTROL is the outcome. When we sin, control shifts to the sinful nature. And when we confess our sin, control is returned to the Holy Spirit.



One more point on the old and new self: The “old self” is “being corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Eph. 5:22), while the “new self” is created to “be like God” (Eph. 5:24). This creates a standard for us (being like God) that we cannot achieve independently. This is why the “new self” can only be a product of God, not man. Get this: *We do not produce the new self. God does!* When God is producing our “self”, the old self will be disempowered, and sin will retreat.

**Prayer.** Prayer is another asset in helping us resist sin. We have written an entire book on the topic of prayer, titled *Being Devoted to Prayer*. For a thorough discussion of the importance and processes of prayer, we recommend this series of studies. At this point, we simply want to look at prayer as it relates to managing sin.

Jesus Himself gave us a model for prayer, which includes a request regarding temptation. In Matt. 6:13 He taught His disciples to pray this: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” This has to do with evil in an extended view, which encompasses all sources of evil, including the world, Satan, and the sinful nature of man himself. We will not be able to confront and conquer these evil forces without being delivered from them. We need help, which is why we appeal to God for assistance by praying to Him.

Ps. 119:133 gives us a good prayer to pray when sin is lurking (which is most of the time). This passage shows the psalmist asking for help with sin: “Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.”

In this same connection Ephesians 6 exhorts us to put on the whole armor of God to take our stand “against the devil’s schemes” (v. 11b), and advances prayer as a crucial piece of the arsenal available to us to help us avoid being overrun by evil. Verse 18a admonishes, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Praying in the Spirit is, of course, praying in fellowship, which we are able to do when we are clean.

As we mature as believers, we must remember to pray at all times, or “on all occasions”, as we just saw. Fellowship with God, the control of the Holy Spirit, and constant prayer prevent us from being inundated with temptation. Ps. 32:6-7 says the following:

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him [the godly person who prays]. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

“Trouble” is evil. When we are in fellowship and pray for deliverance from sin’s temptations, God will hold back the “mighty waters” of temptation that come against us. Apart from this connection, we will be helpless against the tsunami.

**Sin vs. Faith.** Without faith, there is ONLY sin. We saw earlier in this series that “everything that does not come from faith is sin.” This would suggest that any act not done as a matter of faith is a sin against God. But we do so many things that are completely neutral morally. Can tying one’s shoes be a sin? Can taking a moment to look at the clouds

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in the sky be a sin? Can punching in at work be a sin? This is an important issue for us to consider: where is the line drawn between sin and “not-sin”, or between carnal activity and spiritual activity?

I believe that we can say with confidence that almost any act can be a sin, depending on the “state of mind” we bring to the act. It is possible that innocuous activities, harmless gestures, or even charitable actions can be sinful IF THEY ARE DONE OUT OF FELLOWSHIP, where faith cannot operate. When we function out of fellowship and outside the realm of faith, this means that everything we do will be accomplished in the energy of the flesh...flesh from which nothing good can come. Our *state* determines whether innocuous things can be wrong, and whether “good behavior” can be considered “righteous”. It all depends on our connection and our faith status. Who is in control? If the Holy Spirit is in control, we will not do wrong. If we choose to vacate that control and do wrong independently (and we always have a choice), then the sinful nature will be in charge and WE CAN DO NOTHING RIGHT.

**Faith to Beat Sin.** The first thing we must make sure of is that all sins are confessed, and then we can study and pray effectively and build our faith up to trust God more and more as we proceed across this plain of battle. If we are not controlled by the Spirit, we cannot be trusting God, since the flesh is powerless to do so; concomitantly, if our faith is strong, we will maintain the link of fellowship.

Heb. 11:6 says, “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.” Faith is the key to pleasing God and doing “right”. By increasing our faith, we will be able to please God, and—in the process—reduce the presence of sin in our lives.

When we have faith in God, trusting Him to meet all our needs, including our ability to resist temptation, He will show us the path to take. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6). Faith sustains us, as God directs us.

Faith, fear, submission, acknowledgement, rest...these are keys to power over sin. By being occupied with Christ and constantly seeking and thanking and trusting Him, we will get closer to God, where we will find “more grace” to help us resist sin. Heb. 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” When we take the path to the throne of grace by walking in faith (“with confidence”), we come to the place where we can find grace to help us do “right”, and mercy for forgiveness when we do not. Both seeking mercy and accessing grace are acts of faith.

In the following we provide several verses dealing with faith that remind us of the importance and role of faith in our lives, especially regarding its impact on sin:

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- 2 Cor. 5:7 says, “We live by faith, not by sight.” The carnal man sees with his eyes and sees the world; the spiritual man sees with his spirit and sees God’s truth.
- Gal. 5:5 says, “But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope”, and verse 6b adds, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Through the power of the Holy Spirit, true righteousness is produced, the greatest manifestation of which is love. The production of the Spirit is the opposite of the production of the sinful nature, which is sin. Faith helps us maintain that connection with the Spirit...so that—once we are “filled with the Spirit” through confession—we can then “walk by the Spirit” in faith.

- Heb. 4:1-2 says the following:

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

This passage goes on to say that believers should enter this rest by trusting in God. When we trust God enough to “relax” and let Him do the work, we will find that we are more active than ever in doing right and avoiding wrong.

- Heb. 11:1-6 rounds out our discussion of faith, and its ability to help us think and behave in ways that please God, as we see in the following:

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. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 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.

Faith does many things: opens our spiritual eyes, produces righteousness, brings rest, and pleases God. Faith keeps our spiritual bond strong. And where a strong bond with God has developed, sin will become less common.

**The Word of God.** As in any battle, preparation is the key to victory. Before we can hope to stand up against sin, we must first go through studying and training to sharpen the

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weapons and tools which will enable us to resist temptation. Resistance of sin is a mark of maturity. Fighting it takes enormous dedication to God, meaning strong faith, accompanied by surrender. By trusting God and surrendering to His Word and His will we tap into the arsenal that He alone possesses. We know that we are “dead to sin” positionally, but alive to it experientially, and we know our strength is inadequate to beat it.

1 Pet. 1:13 says, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Step one is preparation, which will be followed by self control (a sign of maturity), and an abiding hope for grace as we look forward to the Messiah’s return. Because of adversaries that want to bring us to our knees and drag us into all kinds of sin, we must be alert, as Peter reminds us in 1 Pet. 5:8, where he says, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Peter then suggests in verse 9 that we resist Satan by “standing firm in the faith.” Here “faith” means the Word of God...or the content of what we believe. By being well-versed in Scripture *that we believe*, we are able to take a strong stand against sin.

Knowledge from God’s Word and trust in His promises gives us stability and security. Ps. 119:165 offers this: “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.” The law, as we know, represents for us the Word, not a system of laws and regulations that we try to follow on our own initiative and strength.

When we consistently learn and embrace God’s teachings, it will be harder for sin to take us down. As we learn more from the Word, our wisdom increases, which fortifies us against sin. Prov. 2:16 makes this clear, saying, “It [wisdom] will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words...” This will prevent us from destruction, as we see in Prov. 5:1-23, which says, summarily, that the evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him in addiction, where cords of sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of self-control because of his great folly. Immorality and impurity will destroy him. This is why verses 1-5 in Prov. 5 give this specific charge and warning:

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.

Learning the Word of God has always been the way to improve behavior and resist sin. This learning is not just intellectual, though the “brain” is a gate to the mind, soul, spirit, and heart, as we saw in a previous study. Learning God’s Word is a “spiritual” activity. It is easy to understand then that we must be in fellowship with the Father for the Holy Spirit to teach us. When all cylinders are firing, and we are taking in the wisdom of God’s Word, and we mix that learning with faith in His truth, we will grow and increase our faith, and that will equip us to fight the constant war being waged against us.

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Faith makes us more effective, because it keeps us plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith sustains spirituality, while spirituality empowers faith. This is a mutually-beneficial partnership, which operates when we embrace all the techniques for holiness that God has given us in His Word. It's all there. We just have to dig it out...in cleanness, in prayer, in faith, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Please see the study, *Walking by Faith*.)

Prov. 6:20-24 confirms again the power of Scripture to strengthen us against temptation, saying the following:

My Son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life. Keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife.

We actually feed on the divine character of God (His thoughts) by taking in His Word, and this gives us moral and spiritual strength. It also acquaints us with the techniques God has prepared to help us draw on His power. (See the discussion of 2 Pet. 1:3-4 in the chapter, "What It Means to Feed on God's Word", in *Maturity*.)

Many other passages tell us how our knowing the Word helps us avoid sin. Here are a few of them:

- Ps. 119:9-11—How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
- Phil. 1:9-10—And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, fill with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory of God.
- Phil. 2:15-16—Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold on to the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.
- James 1:21-25—Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save [deliver] you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the

perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

- Deut. 6:6-9—These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

When should we pay attention to Scripture? All the time! Learning and growing in the Word of God is not an occasional or casual thing. If you are going to get serious about being a productive Christian, the Word of God must be your life, and you must devote every minute of every day in close proximity to its teachings. To get the maximum life, you must get the ultimate truth...without stopping or slowing down. When we do this, we will see sin diminish, as faith and knowledge increase.

**Being Conscious of God Strengthens Against Sin.** We frequently see such terms as “be alert” or “be careful”; these call for us to be on the lookout. Col. 2:8a says, “See to it that no one takes you captive....” The term “see to it” cautions us to open our spiritual eyes and to be on the alert. The implication is that we should be alert to the tactics of temptation and sin, but there is something we must do first to enable us to see sin coming: We must first LOOK AT...or be focused on...God. Here’s the view: when our eyes are on God, our awareness of sin will repel us from it, rather than draw us to it. When our hearts are filled with God, sin will have no place to lodge and launch. Awareness of God will give us a clearer view of our enemies.

Being focused on God is a form of “God-consciousness”, or preoccupation with our Creator. We introduced God-consciousness in *Getting Closer to God*, in the chapter, “Giving Thanks”. We quote in the following a piece of that study to help us clarify the place of God-focus, or God-consciousness, in our lives, as we prepare to battle sin:

There is an extension to this study on thanksgiving that we want to cite briefly. All the topics we have studied are linked. Thanksgiving, prayer, confessing, knowing Jesus, learning Scripture, participating in the power of the resurrection, praise, fear, acknowledgement, faith, love, and so on...these are all part of one process: *God-consciousness*. And the techniques within this process work together. You can’t pray to God without acknowledging Him. You can’t trust Him if you don’t believe He exists as God. You cannot praise Him without giving thanks. These coalesce within our consciousness of God...do one of these and you touch them all. They are all tied together in our hearts. God-consciousness is about opening your mind, your heart, to God. Hebrews 3:1 says, “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”

Our task is to stay focused on God...trusting, praying, studying, giving thanks, and so on. This awareness will help us sustain our fellowship through faith in Him, and we will

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constantly acknowledge His presence in us and around us, and relax in the comfort of His protection from evil.

When we are conscious of God, we will acknowledge Him. Acknowledging God is something we are instructed to do as part of our spiritual walk. When we *think* about God and His Word, we will *acknowledge* Him and His truth.

Acknowledging God is remembering God, as opposed to forgetting Him. When we forget God we become “other-conscious”, such as money-conscious, pleasure-conscious, status-conscious, or power-conscious. We stated earlier that when we forget God, we choose other gods, or “idols”, and by serving these idols, God becomes increasingly unimportant to us. This spiral leads downward. To avoid this, we should ask ourselves, as we look at our lives and behavior patterns, “Who is my God?” This is a question that we must ask *often*, and the answer we must give is this: “Jehovah God, the Creator of all mankind, is my God”. When confronted with temptation, our acknowledgement of God as *our* God will strengthen us, because it expresses our faith in Him.

Prov. 3:5-6 confirms that acknowledging God invites His aid in our Christian walk. This passage says, “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Endnote 6) Deuteronomy 4:39 also directs us to recognize God, saying, “Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.” We must have...and acknowledge...only one God. He alone is our defense...our deliverer.

## Keeping the Law Does Not Make Us Pure

**To Become Pure by Keeping the Law, We Have to Keep it Perfectly.** James 2:8-10 says this about keeping the law:

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

There is nothing wrong with the standards specified in the Law, as framed in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. The problem is that we can’t follow it. We are clearly unable to keep the law. It takes ONE sin to take us down, and—for most of us—that happens sooner, rather than later. We must begin any discussion of the Law with an admission that we can’t live up to it. You see, the Law is not the problem...we are.

**Attempts at Keeping the Law Will Fail.** When we as believers attempt to keep the Law, we become its slave. Gal. 4:9 says the following:

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

Becoming a Christian does not mean that we can go out and perfect our behavior through observance of rules. This is a trap. It’s tempting, because of our interminable faith in ourselves, but it will only dig our spiritual holes deeper...no good will come from these efforts. Fulfillment of the Law, as it applies to us...including the law of love...will be the *outcome* of a proper spiritual state, and not the *means* to that state. A proper spirit, in tune with the Holy Spirit, is the precursor to *any* good that will ever come through our behavior.

Gal. 5:4 confirms this, saying, “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” These Galatians have been justified forever, because they have been saved. But now they are trying to become “just” before God in their daily lives by keeping the Law. By attempting to achieve purity through law-keeping, they are stepping away from grace, which leaves them entirely on their own. The only thing they have left to work with while operating under the Law is their own flesh. This means that the *sinful nature* will be in charge of producing behavior that they hope will justify them before God. This does not sound promising.

The conclusion is inescapable: Any attempt we make to behave according to the standards of the Law will become a denial of grace, leaving us with only the energy and direction of the flesh...or the sinful nature. It is true, though it may seem counter-intuitive, that trying to do right is *wrong*, when it is done in a self-motivated, self-propelled way. The only way “right” can be *right* is for the Holy Spirit to produce it. Our relationship with the Holy Spirit is



based on cleanliness and faith, as we have studied thoroughly, and if we want to do well, we must attend to these first, so the Holy Spirit can direct our behavior and generate His fruit through us.

**Faith vs. Law.** Gal. 3:1-5 distinguishes very clearly the difference between operating under the Law, in our own strength, and functioning under the Holy Spirit, in *His* strength. We would like to quote this passage in its entirety, as follows:

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

Paul is downright frustrated with the Galatians, because they had been saved through faith in Christ's completed work, yet now they were going their own way, manufacturing their own brand of righteousness by keeping the law. If there has ever been any question about the conclusion that *our effort is not what pleases God*, it should be settled in this passage. We began with the Spirit, and must continue with the Spirit. He gave us the righteousness of Christ when we first believed. Now He produces righteousness through us on the basis of our continued and growing belief in Him. Note what Paul is saying: We CANNOT attain our spiritual goal "by human effort"! The means to spiritual achievement comes only from the Spirit of God.

**Conclusion Regarding Law-Keeping.** Keeping the Law will not be effective to make us pure. That must come through God's grace provisions. Understanding and accessing these provisions is our singular goal in all the studies we have done.

## The God Behind the Grace

**God is in Control of Everything.** In the study, *Living in God's Plan*, we looked at God Himself, and demonstrated in Scripture that God is the absolute authority over the entire universe. He is much bigger and more powerful than we imagine, and we must stretch our minds as much as we can to get a picture, albeit an imperfect one, of His greatness.

In our previous studies we concluded that God controls everything, but that—in His sovereignty—He decided long ago to give His created beings free will. He gave us choice. His plan then wraps around our choices in a perfectly-choreographed cotillion that always give us choice, while it also preserves the integrity of His authority. We cited God's foreknowledge as the primary quality of God that enables Him to plan each move around our choices. (For more on God's sovereignty and authority, as well as His foreknowledge, please see our book, *Living in God's Plan*.)

Rather than review or rewrite everything that was said in the book on God's plan, we will reduce this current study to several groups of verses that point out God's foreknowledge, sovereignty, and authority. These verses give us glimpses of the beyond-but-ever-near existence of God. Where it seems needed, we will provide comments on the scriptures quoted. Here are some must-see verses that acquaint us with the "God behind the grace":

1. God is the Creator of Everything.
  - a) Heb. 3:4—"For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything."
  - b) Is. 48:12-13—"Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together."
  - c) Dan. 4:34b-35—"His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'"
  - d) Rom. 11:36—"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."
2. God Alone Rules.
  - a) Ps. 83:18—"Let them know that you, whose name is the Lord—that you alone are the Most High over all the earth."

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- b) 1 Chron. 29:11-12—“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.”
  - c) Ps. 103:19—“The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.”
  - d) Ps. 135:6—“The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.” God controls everything, right down to the orbits of electrons around the nuclei of atoms.
3. God is Powerful.
- a) Ps. 89:11-13—“The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it. You created the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name. Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, you right hand exalted.”
  - b) 2 Chron. 20:6—“...and said: “O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.”
4. God Sees (and Foresees) Everything.
- a) Jer. 23:23-24—“Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the Lord, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the Lord. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the Lord.”
  - b) Ps. 139:16—“Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” God sees us—and all of our choices—long before we are born, and He plans our days from start to finish. He is infinite, but very personal.
  - c) Matt. 10:29-30—“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” God sees all of it, all at once, throughout all time.
5. God Plans Outcomes.

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- a) Jer. 27:5—“With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.”
- b) Prov. 16:33—“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”
- c) Ps. 75:6-7—“No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: he brings one down, he exalts another.”
- d) Rom. 8:28—“And we know that all things work together for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

6. God Controls Nations.

- a) Jer. 10:10—“But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.”
- b) Job 12:23—“...He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them.”
- c) Ps. 22:28—“...for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.”
- d) Dan. 4:25b—“Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.” God places nations and appoints leaders. This is under His dominion.
- e) Acts 17:26—“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”

7. God Gives Life and Death.

- a) Deut. 32:39—“See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.”
- b) Ps. 139:13-14—“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

It is impossible to read these verses (in fellowship) and not feel chills run down your spine, as you contemplate the limitless size and power of our Creator. All we can say, when we

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think about God's infinite greatness, is this: "Thank you, Father, that you deal with us in mercy."

## God's Unfailing Love

**God's Love Endures.** Psalm 136 has 26 verses. Every single verse ends with the assurance, "God's love endures forever." This is the most important thing we can know about sin (yes, "sin"): God's love endures forever, and trumps sin. Sin is designed to defeat us, most often by making us blind to our sinfulness, and causing us to think we are good, with or without God's love. Conversely, it is possible for us to think in terms of self-pity...that we are too "bad" to get God's love. Either believing we are too good to need God's love...or too bad for His love to reach us...is a faithless rejection of His love. Fortunately, God's love does not depend on our character, our self-view, or our performance.

God's love endures, even though we don't deserve it and have not earned it. Oddly enough, it is our attitude of acknowledging that we *do not deserve God's love* that most readily prepares us to receive it. It is hard for us to admit we are wrong...we have a tendency to defend and justify ourselves, and to say that we are really not all that bad. Jer. 2:31 says, "...you say, 'I am innocent; he is not angry with me.' But I will pass judgment on you because you say, 'I have not sinned.'" It is not good for us to say we have not sinned. Here, then, are the things we want to understand: God's love; our sin; the effectiveness of owning up to our sin and sinfulness; and the folly of our trying to fool ourselves, others, and God that somehow we are "okay".

God doesn't honor our saying to Him, "Look at what I've done right." He honors our saying, "Look at what I've done wrong." This is humility, and this is what brings mercy, forgiveness, and the ultimate expression of God's love into the daily lives of believers. God forgive us because we *face our failures and look toward His mercy*.

At the same time that we acknowledge our sins, however, we must not let our sins get us down. Even though our view of ourselves and our actions and our thoughts prompt us to bow our heads, we cannot dwell on the sins themselves. When we confess them, we must focus on God's love and forgiveness related to sin...and move forward without looking back.

1 Sam. 12:20 tells us that our sins should not make us give up. If we are tackled by Satan, the world, or our own despicable flesh, then we must dust ourselves off (by confessing) and get back into the game. This verse says, "'Do not be afraid,' Samuel replied. 'You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.'" The people of Israel were demanding a king, and committing many other "faithless" sins, but they had confessed them, which prompted Samuel to tell them to "stay in the game," even though they had indeed sinned.

If our sins get us down, and we spend time languishing in guilt and shame after we confess, we will lose time during which we could have been growing and serving. Guilt and shame

will likely occur when we sin knowingly (more on this later), but it is possible to have no guilt at all when we confess, and still be forgiven. As per 1 Jn. 1:9, feeling guilty is not required for forgiveness. Guilt is normal when we sin, and can be a form of humility, but guilt and shame should not persist after we have squared our wrongs with God. This will have the effect of halting, rather than facilitating, our service. We must trust God to forgive us when we offer a simple confession, with or without a sense of horror at our own behavior. We must believe His Word that He loves us, that Christ has paid for our sins, and that we are forgiven by simply confessing. And then we must get back on the track of praying, studying, enduring trials that test our faith, and building our trust in God and His Word.

Understanding God's love is essential, if we are to understand that we more than a "little-bit" do *not* deserve it, or that we more than a "little-bit" fail. We TOTALLY don't deserve His love, and we TOTALLY fail. *But our focus is to be on God, and not on our failure.* Our constant imperfections are not as important as God's love and forgiveness in our lives.

We are to keep our eyes on Him, and enable Him to convert our failure...into success...through the operation of His grace and the function of His Spirit.

**What Do We Earn?** God's unfailing love is the balance for immorality. It is also the solution. His mercy is there, not IN CASE we fail, but BECAUSE we fail. Without His mercy, which is exercised behind the curtains of Christ's blood, we would be condemned. THIS IS WHAT WE DESERVE. God's grace and the provision He has made...and continues to make...is necessary for our deliverance, both in eternity and in time. Eph. 2:4-10 describes this perfectly, as follows:

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Who does the work at salvation? God. And who does the "good works" that God prepared in advance for us to do? God. We do not *earn* God's grace and kindness, not when we were saved, not now as believers, not ever. God's view of us comes through the prism of His Son, who wipes us clean to make us presentable to His (our) Father.

**Our Hope is to be Directed Toward God's Love.** Ps. 33:18 says, "But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love." God looks favorably toward us when we trust and acknowledge Him, and when we attach our hope to His love. God's love is the one thing we can have total confidence in. God's love endures

forever, and it will be there when we acknowledge it through humility and confession. His eyes are on those who believe in His love, not on those whose behavior is supposedly “perfect” (...as in, “I have kept all the commandments from birth, blah, blah, blah”).

To be sure, God loves righteousness, but He love righteousness that is true righteousness, not a re-enactment of it. God is not looking for an actor’s performance; He wants a pure heart in real-life action. Ps. 33:5 shows God’s love interacting with His love for righteousness, saying, “The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.” God loves righteousness and justice, but these are surrounded by His “unfailing love”. Righteousness for eternity comes from Christ; righteousness in time comes through the Holy Spirit. And God’s undeniable justice is satisfied when His love, as expressed in His plan for eternity and time, are accepted by *willing* recipients. God’s righteousness is RECEIVED by those who believe in it, not GENERATED by those who believe in themselves.

The entire 33<sup>rd</sup> Psalm calls on us to hope in God’s love. God protects and provides for believers who continue to trust Him...who understand God’s loving nature. The first verse of this psalm calls for the “righteous” and the “upright” to sing and praise God. These terms apply to *believers* who have been cleansed, sanctified, and purified by God’s mercy and forgiveness. They are MADE righteous and upright. As a result, they can sing...and they can also pray the prayer seen in the last verse of Psalm 33: “May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”

**God’s Love Will Never be Shaken.** We see in Is. 54:9-10, the following:

“To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” say the Lord, who has compassion on you.

This verse has primary application to Israel, but—just as the entire 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah deals with the anticipated work of Christ—likewise, we make application of the 54<sup>th</sup> chapter to God’s love for us as believers today. We can take this promise to heart: God’s love for us will never be shaken. Paul said this:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Mountains can shake, even as indestructible as they seem to be, but God’s love for us will never be shaken. Death, spiritual forces, time, energy, physics, nor any other created thing can ever take this love away from us. Not even our sin. I am aware that some people get nervous when God’s love is discussed, because they do not want to entertain the notion that



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God might be “permissive”. But the point I will be bold in making is not that God loves sin, but that He loves us, and therefore He has provided for us a way to deal with sin so His love can flow, even though we fail.

We can conclude, then, that God is dealing with us, not in anger or disgust, but in love. His covenant of peace with us is eternal because of His love. Yes, He will lovingly and patiently discipline us as His children, perhaps even severely, but the focal point of His attention is not on our failure, but on His own grace and mercy. He simply wants us to *access* that grace and mercy. When we view God in a traditional “if I do wrong, God will be mad” kind of way, we may try to act differently, just to appease God. But when we understand God’s unfailing love, and access all that He offers, we can appreciate His kindness toward us, and we can be moved to live in His light, where there is righteousness and purity, as we see in Eph. 5:8-9, which says, “For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)....”

## God's Mercy

**Grace and Mercy.** When we talk about grace and mercy, the connection is unbreakable and unmistakable. These are extensions of God's love, applied in different ways as part of God's provision for our spiritual walk. Dr. John Brummett said, "Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve; mercy is God *not* giving us what we deserve." (Endnote 7) This is an apt distinction between grace and mercy.

The reason grace and mercy can operate in our behalf is because of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We do not deserve eternal life, but Christ has covered us with Himself to give us His righteousness and His life. And we do deserve punishment, because we are born in sin and practice sin. Fortunately, Christ has removed our punishment for sin by paying our penalty for it. When we believe in Him, we appropriate the relief from condemnation that He offers.

Ps. 103:2-4 and 9-12 make it clear what happens to the sins of someone who receives God's forgiveness. This passage says the following:

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion... (v. 2-4). He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (v. 9-12).

These verses apply to the status of 1) an unbeliever who turns to Christ for salvation and receives complete removal of his sins for eternity, and 2) a believer who turns to God to offer a confession of his sins in order to have them forgiven in the temporal realm. Removal and forgiveness are extensions of God's love, and that love is the reason he erases our sin record and takes that record an infinite distance away from us. East and west are near-infinite concepts, so when our sins are removed, they are not just boxed up or set aside...they are sent away to the limits of infinity. God is telling us that they are gone, and we should not try to hold on to them after we have exercised God's method for forgiveness. Guilt has no place after forgiveness; we must not hang on to the residue of our errors, which God is sending into outer space. Let them go...and *bon voyage*.

**Understanding God's Mercy.** God's grace and mercy make the removal of our sins possible. We are most interested at this point, however, in God's mercy, which—like grace—lasts forever. The phrase, "His mercy endures forever," is seen repeatedly in the book of Psalms. For example, Ps. 106:1 says, "Praise Jehovah! Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever." (Endnote 8) Another example is seen in Ps.

103:17, which says, “But the mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting, even to everlasting, on those who fear Him....” (Endnote 9)

Mercy is the term used most often to translate the Hebrew word, *checed*, which is also translated “goodness”, “kindness”, and “faithfulness”...and even “love”. These terms give the sense of mercy, showing us a benevolent and patient and giving Father Who is dealing with His children in patience and tenderness, and even offering to overlook their wrong-doings. Ps. 103:8 says, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” How can we not appreciate such magnanimous generosity? How can we not want to know this Father better, and get as close to Him as we can? How can we not embrace such love in every possible way? James 5:11b confirms this quality in God, saying, “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” When we see and understand this mercy, we will be drawn inexorably to its beauty.

**The Reason We Get Mercy.** 1 Tim. 1:15-16 says the following:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

“That very reason” follows “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The reason Paul received...and we now receive...*mercy* is that Christ came into the world, where He completed the work of paying for our sins, so that we can be saved from eternal condemnation. The reason we—fallible humans who have rejected God from birth—receive mercy from God, is because of the opening created for us by His Son.

Now that Christ’s work is complete, and our sins are forgiven for all eternity, in bulk and *en toto*, God is free to express the love He already had for us, and that love will flow freely toward us, whenever we receive it by continuing to keep ourselves clean from sin through confession. That love is expressed as mercy, translated into forgiveness, which is necessary because we are still sinners, even though we have been saved. Our sin requires God’s mercy. God’s mercy is given 1) because His Son cleared the way for it, and 2) because we are sinners that need it.

**God Delights in Showing Mercy.** Because of Christ, God’s justice and righteousness are satisfied, and because of His Son, the Father loves to show mercy. There is something about His forgiving us, dealing with us in leniency, and drawing us close to Himself that *pleases* Him. Micah 7:18-19 views God this way:

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but *delight to show mercy*. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Italics mine.)

Mercy has to do with our sins, which God hurls into the depths of the sea when they are confessed. God loves to use this gracious process of forgiveness, and smiles when we come to Him in honesty to spread out our failures before Him. He doesn't wince and look away, and say, "Tsk, tsk." He looks at us in compassion, and declares, "You are forgiven." That's mercy!

**The Administration of Mercy.** For God to show us mercy, we must be prepared to receive it. Christ has done His part to make it available, God wants to give it, and the Holy Spirit is waiting to use it. The only hold-up is us. If we harbor sin, by hiding it, or perhaps by not caring about it, then we are not prepared to receive God's mercy for us as believers.

Micah 6 discusses ways to approach God in search of forgiveness. After going through a list of possible courses of action to get God's mercy in this passage, the final and correct method is cited, which is this: "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (v. 8). These three conditions need more explanation, so we offer the following, as viewed within the context of Micah 6, which discusses sin, mercy, humility, and discipline.

**"Acting justly"** is acting according to justice, which—for believers—is facing the justice of God with the justification received from Christ. Since we were justified when we accepted Christ, we are now qualified to act in accordance with His justice. When we confess, He is faithful and *just* to forgive us, as per 1 Jn. 1:9. "Acting justly" is not creating our own justice, but submitting ourselves to the justice that is granted through Christ.

**"Loving mercy"** is just that...embracing God's love and forgiveness with deep appreciation and thanksgiving.

**"Walking humbly"** is disclosing our sins and failures and weaknesses to God, so He can forgive them and heal them.

The way to get mercy is clear: confess, love forgiveness, and walk humbly. When this happens, Heb. 8:12 is fulfilled, where God declares, "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

**Praying for Mercy.** The way to mercy is confession, repentance, and humility. But a case can be made from Scripture that we can *pray* for mercy as we confess (more will be added on this later in this study). This means that it would *not* be inappropriate to mix in the phrase, "Be merciful to me, Father," as part of our confession. And prayer can be an acknowledgement of God's mercy, an expression that we know He is merciful. We see several examples of prayers related to mercy in the Bible. We offer some of them in the following list:

- Ps. 86:3-6—"Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my cry for mercy." By lifting up our souls, which is synonymous with

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confessing our sins, we appeal to God for forgiveness and mercy, knowing that He is “forgiving and good”.

- Ps. 52:8—“But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.” (Endnote 10) When we trust God’s mercy, we will “come confidently before His throne to obtain mercy and find grace” (Heb. 4:16).
- Ps. 85:6-7—“Will you give us life anew, so that your people may rejoice in you? Cause us to see your mercy, O Jehovah, and give us your salvation.” (Endnote 11)
- Ps. 9:13—“O Lord, see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death....”

Most of these prayers were uttered by David, who understood very well God’s mercy and forgiveness. David sinned repeatedly in His life, but take a look at him in the “after” shot, and see what David looked like after he received the mercy make-over:

Solomon answered, ‘You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

Was David “righteous and upright in heart” because he was sinless? No. It was because he understood God’s mercy and knew how to be credited with righteousness through God’s love and forgiveness. That’s what we need to learn. We need to embrace mercy to engage forgiveness. Then we will be righteous and upright in heart, as David was.

## God's Forgiveness

**The Source of Forgiveness.** Mercy is the nature, condition, and expression of God's character. Forgiveness is the outcome or extension of His mercy. Because God has (and in a sense, *is*) mercy, He has made a plan whereby He can forgive us. Mercy, rooted in God's unfailing love, is the prompt; forgiveness is the result. In the last chapter, "God's Mercy", we introduced Ps. 103, which presents God's mercy and compassion as the driving force behind the benefits He provides for us, especially His forgiveness. Mercy produces forgiveness.

Indeed, God's *character* generates forgiveness, as Scripture makes clear. Consider Ex. 34:6-7a, which says the following:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

This passage goes on to say that God also punishes the "guilty", but we have been assured that believers will never be condemned, and that any unconfessed sins in their lives will bring, not punishment, but discipline (See 1 Cor. 11:32). The term "punishment" goes along with "condemnation", implying an eternal state and destination. Unbelievers are condemned and will be punished throughout eternity. If you're splitting hairs, then—yes, discipline could be looked at as a form of "punishment". The objective of discipline, however, is *improvement*, not chastisement.

**The Fact and Certainty of Forgiveness.** Believers are forgiven forever at salvation, which gives them an eternal destiny with God. But they still sin, as we have stated many times. God, then, must make a special provision for believers to be forgiven for sins that they commit within their temporal existence. We have seen—again, many times—that this provision works through confession. And then...when we confess and God forgives...He never says, "Well, I forgive you, but you know you are building up quite a record here, so just try a little harder to keep your 'priors' down, okay?" No. When God forgives, it is absolute.

Ps. 85:2 assures us that God actually *does* forgive. This verse says, "You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins." He really does practice forgiveness of sins, and *that is the most important doctrine we will ever learn*, because it not only affects our eternal destination, it impacts our Christian lives at every step along the way. Without constant forgiveness, we are sunk. Thank God He has provided a way for us to be forgiven. Thank God He forgives. God's whole plan revolves around forgiveness.

We saw in the last chapter that forgiveness puts our sins an infinite distance from us. We see this idea again in two passages that tell us God cannot even *remember* our sins, once they have

been forgiven. He not only cleans our record, he erases His memory of what we have done, as we see in the following:

- Jer. 31:34—“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”
- Heb. 10:17—“Then he adds: Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

Do you see why we should not hang on to sins, once they have been confessed and forgiven? When we approach God and say, “Yeah, I’ve been thinking about that time I was so stupid, and committed that awful sin...,” God can only reply, “I don’t know what you are talking about. Your record is clean, and I don’t remember anything about it.” God forgets our sin!

Isn’t it interesting that three of the most prominent players in God’s plan for mankind were also murderers? Remember the history of Moses, David, and Paul? Murderers. Yet they were “upright”, God’s leaders for great events, and mouthpieces for His truth. See the impact of forgiveness? It is pure and complete, allowing the sorriest among us to do great things under the flowing spring of God’s cleansing. And there is no sin He will not forgive.

**Qualifying for Forgiveness.** Since forgiveness is the key to everything, we must be sure we understand how it works and where we get it. Jesus Christ is our “qualifier” for forgiveness. Without Him and His work on the cross and the shedding of His blood for our sins, there would be no forgiveness. He earned our forgiveness and He puts it into effect. In Matt. 9:6, Jesus performed a miracle to demonstrate His power, proclaiming, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” Christ has the authority to enact forgiveness. Acts 13:38-39 further establishes that forgiveness comes through Jesus. This passage says the following:

Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses.

Rev. 1:5 (NET) cements this provision, saying the following:

...and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth. To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood.

Matt. 26:28 adds these words from Jesus: “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins...” His blood is the cleansing agent that avails us the opportunity to be forgiven. Heb. 9:22 says it again, “In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” So the conditions have been met. The table is set. Forgiveness is being served, and all that is left is to partake of it. For unbelievers, this means faith in Christ. For believers, this means confession of sins. Forgiveness is then guaranteed. It is

unequivocal...an absolute certainty. John tells us, “I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name” (1 Jn. 2:12).

Because Christ qualifies us to receive forgiveness, we have life. Col. 2:13 gives us this: “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins...” We are alive with Christ because we have been forgiven. Without this forgiveness, we could not have His life.

**Deliverance Depends on Forgiveness.** When we think of deliverance, we think of being rescued or saved from some bad outcome. Deliverance from eternal death comes from believing in Christ at a point in time, with results that last forever. That is the big deliverance, called “salvation”. Salvation also marks the beginning of a time during which we will live out our lives as His children. While this is going on, we will still need deliverance, so we will still have to seek forgiveness.

Without forgiveness in our daily lives, we could not be “delivered”, which means that we could not receive God’s spiritual and material provisions, and things would not work together for our good. For the promises of God to work, we must be operating in a “forgiven” state. When we ignore God’s methods for us to be forgiven, we cannot expect God’s favor and God’s blessing to come to us. The calculation is simple: To be provided for in all ways, including psychologically, spiritually, emotionally, socially, romantically, financially, politically, physically, medically, and mentally, we must be FORGIVEN.

On the other hand, when we are forgiven, God’s power, production, and prosperity (prosperity is much more than money) will be forthcoming. Is. 38:17 (NET) captures the kind of relief forgiveness brings, saying, “Look, the grief I experienced was for my benefit. You delivered me from the Pit of oblivion. For you removed all my sins from your sight.” When we make things right with God, as Hezekiah did in this passage, we will be *delivered*. Without forgiveness...no deliverance!

Is. 1:18-20 gives us the process for forgiveness, and the outcome of our conditions based on that forgiveness. This passage says the following:

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

If we obey God’s procedures for obtaining forgiveness, our sins will be as white as snow, and we will “eat the best from the land”. But if we do not follow the path to forgiveness, and go our own way in search of blessing and prosperity, we will eventually be destroyed. The key to deliverance is forgiveness.

**Repentance Pleases God.** Nothing melts a father’s heart more than a child that comes to him in penitence, honestly confronting some wrong the child has done, and looking for a



reprieve, and perhaps even forgiveness. The father recognizes a heart-felt admission of guilt and softens in his anger toward his child. This happens on a relative scale, as we know, with some fathers behaving more in this way, and some less. But with God, the behavior is predictable, concrete, and absolute. When God forgives, it is complete. And because of the finished work of His Son, according to the Father's plan, God is more than happy to forgive us when we approach Him.

Without going too far in analyzing the verse, we want to look at Lk. 15:7, particularly on the issue of the "rejoicing" that goes on in heaven when "repentance" takes place. This verse says, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." Repentance, for the purpose of this study, can be taken to have in view a "believer" who repents, or who changes his mind about his sin from that of the one who participates in the sin, to that of the one who self-judges the sin. This refers, of course, to the confession of sin. But notice the result: There is great joy in heaven over this confession, much more joy than for those who are already doing the right thing.

There is something about God's grace and mercy and love that causes Him to derive more pleasure in correcting a wrong than in recognizing a right. Perhaps it is because when a person confesses and returns to fellowship, the number of right acts from that person will multiply, resulting in much great fruit. It could also be that He particularly loves to apply the perfect work of His Son in its ability to cover our sins. All we can say for sure is that God delights in showing mercy, and He takes great joy in forgiveness.

**Repenting (Confessing) for Forgiveness.** We will look at confession in more detail later in this study, but for now, we want to spotlight the need for confession...or repentance...to get forgiveness. Here are a few key passages relating to the need for confession to get forgiveness:

- 1 Jn. 1:8-10 (NET)—"If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us." Forgiveness in the Christian life comes through the confession of our sins to God the Father. This re-establishes the fellowship we had with the Father before we sinned.
- Jn. 13:6-10a—"He [Jesus] came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. 'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.' 'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus answered, 'A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean....'" When we accept Christ as Savior, we are

washed entirely. After that time, we “wash our feet” through confession (repentance) to stay clean. We do not have to be saved all over again.

- Ps. 32:1-5—“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” Confession of sins gets forgiveness and removes any discipline that might be going on in connection with the wrong that has been done.
- Ps. 51:1-5—“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” This confession fulfills 1 Jn. 1:8-10. David is recognizing both individual sins and his sin-tendency. Later in this passage, we see assurances that David receives forgiveness and is restored to his work for the Lord.
- Prov. 28:13-14—“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble”. When we confess our sins, we are expressing our faith in God, and in His ability to send our sins an infinity away. But if we block God’s truth and refuse to admit our wrongs, we will not prosper.

**Forgiveness Induces our Loyalty.** When we understand the loving and tender nature of God’s forgiveness, we cannot refuse to thank Him and love Him, amazed at His mercy. When we are in a mode of thanksgiving toward the Father, sin will not find a landing place in our hearts. When we access His wonderful forgiveness, and are walking close to Him because we are clean, then we can perform good acts in His power with a great sense of love and adoration for Him.

## Comments on Forgiveness

**Forgiveness is Primary in the Lives of Believers.** Here's the thing: Forgiveness is crucial to our becoming Christians initially, and central thereafter to our walking in fellowship with the Spirit of God. The focus of all my writings is on the teachings of God's Word as they apply to *believers*. The gospel is discussed occasionally in these writings, primarily as part of what believers need to know about the work of Christ and the salvation it avails, but the heart and purpose of all my writings is to teach and strengthen believers. Specifically, the topic now being considered is the process of forgiveness as it applies to believers.

Here in a nutshell is why I think forgiveness is so important and necessary in the lives of believers: It is because we sin. Something has to be done with our sin, since everything we ever accomplish as "exercisers of the gifts" of the Holy Spirit depends on sin being dealt with. If sin is present, the power of the Holy Spirit and the provision of the Father will be absent or limited. We will be operating on our own steam to emulate "good", but the flesh will be taking us deeper and deeper into the darkness and destructiveness of sin.

Without forgiveness, we can do nothing worthwhile in the Christian life. We cannot pray, we cannot understand Scripture, we cannot trust God, and we cannot produce the fruit that comes from the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness precedes everything else in the lives of believers. FORGIVENESS MUST COME FIRST.

**Confession Results in Forgiveness.** We have established quite clearly that confession of sins gets forgiveness for believers. With forgiveness, we can get on with all the rest of the things we need to do to mature and be productive. Quite often, unfortunately, either because we don't know enough to recognize our sins, or because we are so preoccupied with the details and routines of life that we forget to do it, we go through periods of time when we do not confess. The more often we confess, the more consistently we will be operating in the "forgiven" category, which will make a difference in our lives.

The question might come up, "How frequently should I confess?" Here are some possible answers:

- Every so often when communion is observed.
- On Sunday morning as I sit in church.
- Each morning when I get up, or at the end of each day.
- Hourly, as the alarm on my cell phone goes off to remind me.
- Whenever I have trouble and need help.

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I believe all of these are inadequate. We must confess *continually*, just as we are told to pray *without stopping*.

The purpose of confession is to keep us clean. When we drive through a torrential downpour, which is a good analogy for the constant inundation of sin, we depend on the wipers to keep our windshields clear so we can see where we are going. They operate continually to remove anything that obstructs our clear view of the road ahead. (If what is falling is volcanic ash, which is more like sin, the need for constant clearing is even more important.) Sin is like this...it just keeps on coming...so we will never be able to let our guard down. As we mature, we will get better at avoiding sin, but without forgiveness, the things we have to do to mature will never happen, so we will remain infantile in our ability and strength, and will be at the mercy of sin throughout our lives. To deal with sin, we must get forgiveness NON-STOP, which means we must confess NON-STOP.

**Asking for Forgiveness.** If we can't remember all our sins, or if we are in the heat of battle on the job, or in traffic, or in the hospital, or in a complex relationship...then we might have to resort to a streamlined version of confession, seen as a simple request for God to forgive us for "whatever" we've done. Confession is naming, but maybe we can identify our sins *generically* at times, simply lumping our sins into a plea for forgiveness. Jesus did this in the prayer He taught His disciples: "Forgive us our sins..." (Lk. 11:4). No specific sin is named in this appeal for forgiveness. David did this repeatedly in his psalms. For example, in Ps. 51:2, he said, "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." David may have had a specific sin in mind, but he did not actually voice it.

It is my opinion that simply asking for forgiveness can work to get it for us. The reasoning for this position is clear: God knows and evaluates our motives...He sees our hearts...so He is well aware when a shorter version of confession is actually an attempt to hide or minimize the wrongs we know we have done. If hurrying a confession is an effort to be dishonest, forgiveness will not happen. That is why we use the term "honest confession", whether this means scouring our hearts to make a complete list of sins to be displayed before God, or just asking for forgiveness for all of our sins. At least two things get forgiveness for believers: 1) a simple, honest request for forgiveness, OR 2) a complete review of all *known* sins. But whichever process is used, it must be *repeated frequently* to keep up with the sins. Using the abbreviated form of confession, this would mean saying, with great regularity, "forgive, forgive, forgive, forgive, forgive".

Constant confession suggests a life of humility and surrender. This is what God wants to see. He wants us to turn to His mercy, draw on His grace, and accept His forgiveness. And we must seek it all the time...with every breath...forgive, forgive, forgive. When we have an opportunity to consider our unconfessed wrongs, we can thoroughly disclose them to God by name. In a storm, however, we can seek the port of His forgiveness by simply holding our souls up to Him and asking for it. In either of these we see acts of faith and humility that

recognize God's power to forgive, and He will be wiping our slates clean, and putting them out of His mind forever.

**Forgiveness Makes us Pure.** When we get forgiveness, we are purified, and when we are pure, we have God's favor and provision. Things will work together for our good. We will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And we will live in ways that bring glory and honor to God. He has done all the work...all we have to "do" (using the term loosely) is the non-meritorious act of admitting our sins to Him to get forgiveness. God's grace has given us full access to forgiveness. It is wide open to us. How can we ignore it or refuse to use it, when to access it will keep us pure?

**Avoiding Pitfalls Associated with Confession and Forgiveness.** Before we go further, we should issue a caution: Use forgiveness, but don't abuse it. Is there a danger that we will abuse God's grace? Maybe...if we use grace and forgiveness as *excuses* to sin. But the act of using our freedom of choice as an opportunity to sin is itself an action of the "flesh" or the sinful nature, and the only way we can neutralize that sinful nature is to confess. If we confess continually, we will have the power to avoid sin, including the sin of using grace as a way to beat the system so we can sin at-will. (Rom. 3, 4, 5, and 6 give this topic full treatment. See especially 5:20 and 6:1-2, which tell us that grace increases as sin increases, which does *not* mean we should produce *more sin*, so God can show *more grace*.) If we are playing games with God, He will know and we will not get forgiveness.

We must understand the clear line between *liberty* on the one hand, and the operation of forgiveness-producing *mercy* on the other. Liberty cannot be a license to sin. We cannot give ourselves permission to operate as *libertarians* when it comes to mercy and grace. We must not feel free to sin with impunity, believing that somehow grace "has our back" and will excuse us. This is a distortion of grace.

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

**Confession Brings Power.** The work of Christ is complete and universal, and is offered for the implementation of divine good. As we have seen, His work is appropriated individually by using the methods God provides (faith for salvation; confession for fellowship). Regardless of our motivation for sinning, we must use God's technique of repenting, or changing our mind about our sin, in order to get forgiveness. Only then can we be placed back on the road to growth: prayer, studying the Word, and building up our faith in the Word and Person of God.

I believe very strongly that proper access to the grace and mercy of God PRECEDES any improvement in our Christian performance. We apply the grace method of confession to

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receive the mercy offering of forgiveness, so that we will be given the gift of spiritual empowerment. If we start out trying to “be good”, we will fail. But if we start off in humility, acknowledge God’s method of forgiveness, and believe in His power to remove our sins, we will be enabled to move along a path of growth that will increase our power (His power imbued) so that we can learn to resist sin and produce His righteousness. This will happen, because we will be STAYING CLEAN and OPERATING IN HIS POWER.

## Sanctification and Sanctified Behavior

**Introduction.** There is no question that God wants us to be sanctified...or clean, pure, and holy. Being sanctified means having all sins removed, and we have clearly demonstrated that cleanliness for believers comes through confession. But good behavior is the end result of cleanliness, and there can be no doubt that God wants this from His children.

At the outset, we must remember that there are two kinds of sanctification: 1) the cleansing that takes place at salvation, which gives us an eternal state or position of being sanctified, and 2) the cleansing that goes on while we are still alive on earth, through honestly confessing our sins to God. We are addressing the second type in this chapter, considering sanctification and its effects in the lives of believers.

**1 Thess. 4:1-8.** This passage tells us what sanctification and sanctified behavior look like. We will go through these verses to look at the important messages they present. These will basically tell us that we have to take care of *first things first*, meaning that we must begin with God, His power, and His grace, in order to be equipped to do what He wants...so we can act in ways that please Him. We will comment as we go through these verses to show the significance they hold:

- V. 1—“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.” Paul is telling them, not just how to live, but *how to live in order to please God*. This is something we will do more and more as we receive “more instruction”.
- V. 2—“For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” Believers in Thessalonica had received complete teaching on the issue of sanctification. That teaching had been given and received in the *authority of Christ*, as implemented by the Holy Spirit. This means that these believers were equipped for spiritual living.
- V. 3-6a—“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.” Here’s God’s will: that we be pure and clean. This is the condition He wants us to have, because it is only in this condition that we can do what He wants. He wants us to *do* the following:
  - Avoid sexual immorality.
  - Control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in lust.

- Don't wrong your brother or take advantage of him.

These requirements place us at the heart of Christian living. We want to “do good”, but we often start with our own view of what is good, much of it imposed from others in our past or present lives. Or perhaps we have put in great time and effort to achieve behavior that we believe is pleasing to God. But notice where God *wants* us to start: with BEING SANCTIFIED. Before we take one step toward “pleasing God”, we must make sure we have been cleansed through confession. We must see the sequence: *Be* clean first; then *live* clean. Cleansing (sanctification) gives us the power to beat sin. And notice what takes place even before we are sanctified: *instruction*. Before being sanctified, we must be instructed, so that we will understand that Christ paid the price for us, that we were saved by grace, that the Holy Spirit is within us, that control of the Spirit comes through humble confession of our sins...and so on.

- V. 6b—“The Lord will punish all such sins.” In case we have forgotten, no matter how loving the father, spankings hurt! Sins have consequences, as we have seen well in previous studies.
- V. 7—“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” The holy life comes from a holy God, and this is the life we live through the sanctification performed by the Holy Spirit. He calls us, not to purity alone, but to Himself, where we find purity...and that purity from God eventually becomes purity in living as we mature in His knowledge and grace.
- V. 8—“Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.” When we reject instructions to get clean, so that we can live clean, we reject God, and spurn the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because by trying to “behave purely” without being “made pure” by God is to choose our own flesh over His Spirit, thus choosing our own strength and rejecting His.

**Sanctified Behavior.** Does verse 8 say that whoever rejects the instruction in v. 7 (to “live a holy life”) rejects morality and righteous living? No. It says they *reject God*. He has given us His Spirit to enable us to live in a way that is “holy”, which means we are in a holy condition while we are living. But *being* holy precedes *living* holy. Clean “being” comes before clean “living”. Sanctification must occur before sanctified behavior can take place. A believer who is sanctified will avoid sexual immorality, uncontrolled lust, and mistreatment of fellow believers, not because that is his scheduled routine, but because this is the righteous behavior that God produces. If God is in charge of the believer, meaning the believer is controlled by the Holy Spirit, then that believer will avoid immorality, lust, and mistreatment of fellow Christians. If God is controlling him, he can do nothing less. (Gal. 5:16: “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”)



## One View of Inheriting the Kingdom

**Definition of the Kingdom of God.** There are numerous definitions or applications of the term, “Kingdom of God”, and much has been written about them, but we want to adopt here a narrower usage of the term more closely connected with our present study. The two major topics of this study are 1) sin, which is the most serious problem we face, and 2) God’s response to sin, which is His plan for mercy and forgiveness. We want to see the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the sin/righteousness dichotomy, and determine how these correlate with forgiveness.

“Kingdom of God”, as a term, conjures up all kinds of usages and images, and these are worth looking at, but we believe a larger look at the topic of “Kingdom” will not fit the scope of this study. The usage we want to make of this term is suggested by Vine, as follows:

In the “Kingdom of God”, in its broader aspect, God is in antithesis to “man” or “the world”, and the term signifies the entire sphere of God’s rule and action in relation to the world. It has a moral and spiritual force and is a general term for the Kingdom at any time. (Endnote 12)

The time we are most concerned with is the Church Age, and the application we want to make is related to the *moral* and *spiritual* force of the Kingdom. We want to see the Kingdom of God in *our own spiritual lives*.

Vine also says that “the kingdom is the sphere in which, at any given time, His [God’s] rule is acknowledged.” (Endnote 13) The picture is beginning to form that the Kingdom has to do with spiritual conditions, as influenced by the rulership of God and His Son...or His *control* over everything, including our lives.

A definition from Thayer that fits the idea of the Kingdom as a “spiritual” entity is seen in the words, “royal power and dominion”. Thayer gives two usages under this definition (among others), as follows: 1) as the royal power of Christ the Messiah, and 2) as royal power given to Christians in Messiah’s kingdom. (Endnote 14)

Our focus is on the term “power”, as it is seen in both of these usages (the power of Christ, and the power He gives to Christians). The studying I have done on the Kingdom of God has suggested two occasions when the power of the Kingdom is prevalent during the present time. They are these:

- 1) At the new birth, when the Holy Spirit is acquired, giving us the new self, righteousness, forgiveness, etc., with all else that occurs at that time, such as adoption, anointing, sealing, and so on. This gives us our eternal position, based on a one-time event of faith in Christ. We are brought into the Kingdom at that time.
- 2) During the Christian life, when the Kingdom is to have dominion over our lives. This is the time when our condition will be spiritual or carnal. When a believer is

spiritual, the power of the Holy Spirit will be in operation, giving us power for living, and dominion over sin.

**The Kingdom of God On Earth At the Present Time.** The application we are making of the Kingdom of God is to our own lives...in the present...here on earth. This application sees the Kingdom in its *spiritual* connotation, wherein we see spiritual *power* as the outstanding quality. Spiritual power comes only from the Holy Spirit, so we readily see that the power suggested in connection with the Kingdom is the power of the Holy Spirit. When we are “in the Kingdom”, we are inside the sphere of God’s power.

The Kingdom for us at this time is seen as the following:

- Fruit of the Spirit. Rom. 14:17-18 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.” This description of the Kingdom has all the markings of the fruit of the Spirit, which is generated by believers who are in fellowship.
- The will of God being done. Matt. 6:10 includes the following invitation to God by Jesus in the prayer He taught His disciples: “...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Usually when we read this verse we think of the second coming of Christ, which fits, but there is a second application that we can make, which is this: In the process of God sending a special presence of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of Christ, His kingdom was coming to earth in a spiritual sense, and His will would be done to the degree that the “Kingdom” was operating supremely. In other words, when the Holy Spirit is leading, God’s will can be done in the lives of those who are following.
- Power of the Spirit through fellowship. 1 Cor. 4:20 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power.” This power is offered by the Holy Spirit to the believer who has applied the blood of Christ through the confession of sins, and is walking in the Spirit. As long as the believer is controlled by the Holy Spirit, that believer is operating inside the Kingdom of God, where the walls are high and strong, and where provisions are readily available.
- The Kingdom of God within us. Lk. 17:20-21 says, “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’” The kingdom, for us, is an internal spiritual experience that we participate in by being cleansed from sin. This will qualify us for the empowerment of the Spirit of the King within us.

Here are some additional verses that establish the role of the Kingdom in our present lives on earth:

- 2 Th. 1:5—“All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.” To be counted worthy, God must make us clean through forgiveness, so that we will be equipped to endure whatever trials He brings to us to help us mature.
- Heb. 12:28-29—“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’” The kingdom we are getting now is spiritual, and it can equip us to show fear and faith, as we acknowledge God in our daily lives.
- James 2:5—“Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” There are many catch phrases in the Bible for those who are “humble”, the descriptor “poor” being one of them. “Poor” means humble. And we know that humility is a form of confession, acknowledgement, and trust in God as provider. The “humble” love God, because they are controlled by the Holy Spirit and are able to produce this evidence of fellowship with Him.

**Inheriting the Kingdom.** We have shown that the Kingdom of God represents the power of Christ, through His Spirit, in our lives. But what about the term, “inherit the Kingdom”? Can this be significant in terms of the process for our participation in the Kingdom?

For the definition of the word “inherit”, we turn again to Thayer, who gives us this meaning (among others): “to possess, partake of, or obtain.” (Endnote 15) The meaning of inherit, then, can convey a process of simply taking possession of something. In this study we see this possession as occurring during a time *after* salvation, that period when we are walking on earth, bound for heaven, but stuck in these weak and frail bodies. The question arises: Can we inherit, or possess, the *Kingdom* here? Now? If so, how? And if not, why not? This is what we want to know.

We believe that inheriting the Kingdom of God is possible here and now, since the Kingdom is the filling and control of the Holy Spirit in a believer. We can *obtain* and *possess* this condition. Taking possession of the control of the Holy Spirit is the result of our being sanctified and clean, thus qualifying us for His empowerment. On the other hand, the thing that will prevent our inheriting the Kingdom is sin.

Here are some verses that show that the presence of sin prevents us from inheriting the Kingdom of God in our daily lives. This is bringing the concept of the Kingdom really close to home, where we live. These verses say the following:

- 1 Cor. 6:9—“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?” This means that the presence of sin prevents possession of the power of the Holy Spirit.

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- 1 Cor. 6:11—“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” These believers had confessed, so they were washed and sanctified in their temporal state, and they had been sanctified and justified forever in their eternal state. Because both of these were true, they qualified to participate in the *power* of the Holy Spirit.
- 1 Cor. 15:50a—“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God....” The flesh, referring to the sinful nature, cannot possess the Spirit of God. Only a *clean spirit* can be empowered by the Spirit.
- Gal. 5:19-21—“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This passage, compared with surrounding verses, gives a clear distinction between being controlled by the sinful nature, and inheriting the Kingdom...or possessing the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- 1 Th. 2:10-12—“You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” God invites us to participate in His kingdom, so that we can live worthy of God and experience the blamelessness that comes from forgiveness, thus exhibiting His righteousness in our walk.
- Tit. 3:5c-7—“...the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” After we are justified by grace because we have accepted Christ as Savior, then we can become heirs, living in the power of the Holy Spirit, having an ongoing belief in our eternal future with Christ.

**Conclusion.** Heb. 1:8 tells us this:

But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

The sign for the presence of Christ’s Kingdom is righteousness. This is the “scepter” of His Kingdom. Righteousness comes from the Holy Spirit, so the sign that the Kingdom is in us...the evidence for its ruling our lives...is righteousness produced by the Spirit. God loves

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and favors righteousness, so when we walk in the Spirit, we will share in the dominion of Christ, right where we stand, as heirs in His kingdom.

“Inheriting the Kingdom”, then, means “receiving the power of the Holy Spirit through fellowship”. This is the primary application of this phrase for Christian living...today.

## Sin Brings Discipline

**Introduction.** We learned earlier in this series that God is not dealing with us in “anger or disgust”, but in love. He will lovingly and patiently discipline us as His children, and His attention toward us proceeds out of His own grace. At the same time, we stated in an earlier study that “spankings hurt”. Discipline seems hard at the time, but the result of it is *correction and improvement*, which is what we need. Spankings bring about changes in behavior. The behavior God wants to see changed is our *spiritual* behavior, so that we will be empowered to change all other (mis)behavior. Our attitude toward discipline should be one of thanksgiving, though that can be very hard, which is why we are including here this review of the principles and processes of discipline.

**God Applies Discipline for Unconfessed Sin.** Ex. 34:6-7a shows us God’s mercy and forgiveness, but suggests that sin brings punishment (for us that would be “discipline”). God will not ignore (unconfessed) sin. This passage says the following:

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

We cited this passage earlier when we talked about forgiveness, but we did not include the last phrase, “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished”, because we were describing the forgiving nature of God. The object was to feature forgiveness and draw believers toward the process for getting it. But now we are looking at discipline. Forgiveness is conditional. We get forgiveness first of all at salvation by believing in Christ. Then we get forgiveness during our Christian lives by confessing our sins. For believers, unconfessed sin is *unforgiven* sin, and when we are the bearers of unforgiven sin, God will deal with us to bring about correction to get us to confess. The “dealing-with-us” part is called discipline, which is designed to TEACH us to confess, so that we can pray, learn, and trust.

Many other passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament indicate that God provides discipline for sin. Ps. 39:11a is an example, saying, “You rebuke and discipline men for their sin.” Another example is seen in Heb. 13:4, which deals with sexual sin: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” Immorality brings God’s judgment, which, for believers, is discipline, since we will never receive eternal condemnation.

Sin will not be swept under the rug. It cannot be hidden from God. It must be dealt with...either by us...or by God. It will not just “go away” if it is ignored. If we do not deal with it, God will say to us, “Why should I forgive you?” (Jer. 5:7a)

**Punishment of Unbelievers vs. Punishment of Believers.** Punishment for unbelievers is eternal condemnation and separation from God. Punishment for believers is

discipline...correction through lessons and consequences. So believers get off light, right? Wrong. Punishment for believers in time is actually worse than punishment for unbelievers in time. As long as we are tied to this earth, we have less leeway for aberrant behavior than do unbelievers. Their punishment is being reserved for eternity, and they might actually do quite well and live pain-free while they are in the world. We cannot envy the success and seemingly care-free latitude we might witness among unbelievers. It's all they have.

1 Tim. 5:8 suggests a distinction between believers and unbelievers. This verse says, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." We will not try to give the functional significance of this verse. What we want to glean from it is that a believer can be worse off morally than an unbeliever. Not only that, but the punishment accruing to a believer can be much worse than that given to an unbeliever. We see this again in 2 Pet. 2:20-22, which describes what can happen to believers. This passage says this:

If they [believers] have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it [in sin] and overcome [by sin], they are worse off than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

So it is possible for believers to go right back to the vomit and mud of sin. But notice what it says about them: "They are worse off than at the beginning," and "It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs" on it. This cannot mean they will go to hell, because we know that believers will go to heaven. This can only mean that their punishment (even though it is seen as discipline and *not* eternal punishment) will be worse than any punishment received by unbelievers while they are still alive.

So we must understand this: unbelievers can "get away" with things that we can't. They can, for example, ignore their families and get away with it (for now). They can commit immorality or practice greed and go right on. But this is not true for us. We must endure punishment in ways not required of unbelievers. This is because we have a way to beat it, if we choose to use it. Unbelievers do not have the privilege of confessing it, forgetting it, and moving on. Only believers can do that.

**Don't Despise Discipline.** Should the fact that our punishment on earth is worse than that given to unbelievers cause us to despise discipline? No. We are told NOT to despise discipline in Prov. 3:11a, which says, "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke..." Job 5:17 echoes this charge, telling us, "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty."

There is a reason we should not resist and avoid and despise discipline. It is because it teaches us, makes us better, and gives us a better life. Prov. 15:32 says, “He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.” When we ignore God’s administration of correction and lessons to us, we are acting in ways that represent self-hatred and self-destruction. But if we will pay attention to God’s correction, we will learn and gain understanding that will enable us to operate with greater peace and comfort in the spiritual realm, and all other realms, as well.

Therefore, we should actually “love” discipline. We are told to do this in Prov. 12:1, which says, “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.” We are actually choosing a dumb and unnecessary path of pain and isolation when we choose not to respond to God’s correction. But if we accept the discipline, and say, “Oh, yes, Father...thank you for the reminder,” followed by confession, we will have all learning gates opened and we will learn from the lesson and be wiser and better for it.

**God Disciplines Those He Loves.** God does not condemn believers, but He does punish them through discipline. This is because of His special regard for His children. Prov. 3:11-12, which we began above, says, “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.” We have discipline, and—if we respond to it with thankfulness—we also have His goodness and provision as a loving Father.

**The Outcome of Discipline.** Heb. 12:7-11 gives a full cross-section of God’s love, His discipline, the outcome He has in mind when He administers discipline, and the right response for us to make when discipline is given. This passage waxes a little lengthy, but take time to read it. It is full of lessons. Here is what it says:

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. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 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.

When we are disciplined, it is because we are God’s children. This should be encouraging to us, because it means that we are in God’s family. We should not become brazen and bold when the discipline is light, and we should not be crushed when it reaches the level of “rebuke”. Regardless of the method and the intensity of the discipline, it is still an expression



of God's love, and our response to it should reflect that we understand that. It is NOT pleasant, but it will lead to our correction through confession, so that we can do the following: 1) share in his holiness, which is made possible only by our being pure, and 2) produce a harvest of righteousness and peace, which are fruits of the operation of the Holy Spirit within us.

**Correction (Discipline) vs. Training.** Not all suffering is "discipline", as we have learned in previous studies (see "Faith is Strengthened by Testing and Training", in *Walking by Faith*). An event that might be called "suffering" can be either 1) correction due to bad behavior, or 2) trials and training to provide the means for growth and spiritual production. One major difference between these two is that there is a vast distinction between the way *correction* feels, and the way *training* feels.

If we are being "trained", it will be because we are in fellowship and our faith will be operable; this faith gives us hope and confidence. But with "correction", we have only the flesh, and we will probably be confused and dismayed. We can endure training with God's strength, but when we are out of fellowship and are being chastised, it can be a bitter experience, as we see in Jer. 2:19, which says this:

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

The correction and rebuke of the Lord are lonely and painful, even though they are given by the Father in pure love.

**The Disciplinary Sequence.** Rev. 3:19 is a quotation of the words of Christ given to the apostle John. This verse says, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." This is a perfect picture of the divine sequence for God's dealing with us in discipline. Here's the order: 1) love for believers; 2) discipline or rebuke, as needed; 3) repentance (confession); and 4) forgiveness, restoration, and fellowship.

Christ loves us, therefore He disciplines us so we will honestly reflect on our sins and repent, meaning we will change our minds about our sins with the result that our view will match His. The result will be forgiveness, and we can then sit with Him, eat with Him, and fellowship with Him at a loving and peaceful family table. When we are disciplined, we should be listening for a knock at the door, because it will be Christ, wanting to restore His fellowship with us.

## God and Righteousness

**Some of the Things That Come to Righteous Believers.** There are many benefits that come to believers, as a result of their staying in fellowship...walking “in the Spirit” or “walking by faith”...allowing righteousness to be produced in their lives. Here are a few of them:

- God provides special care for the righteous. Ps. 33:5 says, “The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.” Ps. 33:18-19 says, “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.” Ps. 34:9 adds, “Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.” Ps. 34:19-20 continues this thought, saying, “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.”
- God hears the righteous. Ps. 34:17 says, “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.”
- God brings long life to the righteous. Ez. 18:21-22 says, “But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.” Doing “what is just and right” is obtaining mercy and finding grace...this is our decree and command. When we do this, and let Christ wash our feet, we will stay completely clean, and our lives will be long.

Ps. 91:14-16 brings all these together in one passage, as follows:

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

Fearing God, acknowledging Him, loving Him, and “being righteous” are all indicators for a condition of fellowship with Him, based on sins being forgiven. It is then that we see His provision, have His ear, and enjoy long lives.

**Righteousness Comes From God.** Righteousness comes only from God. We want to see ourselves as major players, so we have a tendency to magnify our abilities and output...we tend to think that WE are capable of producing righteousness. That is a grave error. The truth is that righteousness can come *through* us, which gives an appearance to the outside world that it comes *from* us, but we must not buy in to this image of ourselves as generators of righteousness. If there is righteousness, it comes from God.

Righteousness is the quality with which we are credited as a result of our believing in Christ. His righteousness becomes ours...for all eternity. That takes care of eternity, which is no minor thing, but we are still stuck in time, and want to know how righteousness can characterize our lives while we are here. And one thing we know: we don't manufacture righteousness...either at salvation or in our lives.

Rom. 9:30-32a says this about the righteousness we get at salvation:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as it were by works.

It is clear that “works” do not generate righteousness. This passage says this is true at salvation, and—as we shall see—it is also true in our daily walk. Works don't cut it.

Another example of righteousness that comes at salvation is seen in Rom. 4:4-8, which gives us this clear depiction of justification by faith, not by works:

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

The gospel reveals this righteousness, which is given to us when we believe. Rom. 1:17 describes it this way: “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’” Notice that the righteousness comes from God, and that the “life” we get is a result of faith.

Phil. 3:9 says it again in the following: “...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” The question then becomes, “If we can't generate righteousness for our own salvation, why do we think we can whip up a can of it now...in our lives?” We will discuss this next.

**The Production of Righteousness in Life.** When we think of “doing good”, we think of keeping God's commandments. But this is not righteousness, because we cannot produce righteousness by keeping the law. Good behavior will not make us righteous. Ironically, *being* righteous (being in a *state* of righteousness) will produce good behavior...or *righteousness*. As we have stated before, good behavior is not the *means* to righteousness...it is the *end product* of it.

We must remember that the righteousness we seek is not our own, but God's. Matt. 6:33 compels us to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness. “Kingdom” is representative

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of God's power, and when we properly seek His power, we will find "His righteousness". Notice: this does not say "our righteousness", but *His*. This is REAL righteousness, as opposed to what we might produce, which is a facsimile...an imitation...of righteousness.

Hos. 10:12 says the following:

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.

To plant the seeds of righteousness, we must break up our "unplowed ground". This is "unearthing" our sins, which have been buried...unexposed to the light. When we seek the Lord by exposing our sins, we will see the "fruit" of His unfailing love (fruit of the Spirit), and righteousness will absolutely rain down on us.

A harvesting of righteousness takes place when we humbly expose our weaknesses to Him and acknowledge that He alone is the Holy God. We can act like we are righteous, but we cannot do what God does. When we are dependent on ourselves for spirituality and divine good, the rain dries up, and there is no harvest.

God is the perfect being, whom we are *created to be like*, "in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). But since we can't REALLY be like an infinite and perfect God, the only thing we can do is to accept the "God-likeness" that He shares with us.

Gal. 3:2-3 reflects the futility of our trying to achieve spiritual goals, such as producing righteousness, by our own strength and effort. This passage, cited earlier in our discussion on "law-keeping", helps us see our limitations when it comes to the production of righteousness. In this passage Paul asks the Galatians the following questions:

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

There it is: human effort. Unfortunately, if you listen to messages given by preachers across the land, you will hear that human effort is all we need...we just need more of it. Yet you can be sure that human effort will never produce the righteousness of God...dependence on the flesh will not result in spiritual achievement. There is a better way.

## **The Keys to the Kingdom: Part 1**

**The Kingdom is Within Us.** As we discussed earlier in this series, the “kingdom” is God’s power and rulership in our own personal lives. The kingdom, or power, of God is experienced internally as a spiritual experience, and is the basis for every good thing we will ever do. We are told to seek God’s power and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33), and to make that the most important thing in our lives.

We have learned that the power of God is seen in the Person of the Holy Spirit, and that His control over us is the central component for the operation of that power within us. If the Holy Spirit is in charge, His power will be expressed through us in ways that promote the creation of His fruit from us. We have also learned that sin blocks that power, or “quenches” it, leaving us with the flesh as our only resource to do anything good. The removal of sin through forgiveness removes the block of God’s power, and places the Holy Spirit back into control in our hearts and lives.

God has provided confession of sins as the means by which sins are forgiven for believers, so that the Spirit will take over. When this occurs we are said to be filled with the Spirit, and we will “walk in the Spirit”. Implicit in the process of walking in the spirit is the function of our faith, as we express our belief in the person and power of God, in His greatness and ability, and in the truth and promises of His Word. This faith sustains us, to keep us walking in the Spirit, for as long as sin is continually dealt with. As we mature through prayer, study, and God’s training, our faith will get stronger, and our walk in the Spirit will become more consistent.

The result of our walk in the Spirit is that we will produce righteousness, and the gifts which God has given us will operate to provide mutual strengthening among believers. In addition, the mission and message of Jesus Christ will be exemplified in our lives, and the gospel will be advanced into a lost and dying world.

This is living in the kingdom, and the kingdom ruling within us. This is where we want to be, where we will be close to God, learn more about Him, acknowledge Him, pray to Him, thank Him, glorify Him, and trust Him. This is the *summum bonum*, the ultimate good, the greatest outcome.

To fully grasp this process, to a degree that we never have before, we want to dissect the methods and outcomes of confession. This doctrine is absolutely essential to our spiritual progress and production, yet it has been woefully neglected from our pulpits. Confession of sins is the primary key to the kingdom.

God is the One Who Purges Sin. We are reminded of God’s forgiveness in Ps. 65:3, which says, “When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.” Jeremiah also proclaims God’s forgiveness when he speaks of Israel’s restoration due to forgiveness. He shows us that God indeed *forgives* in the following: “I [God] will cleanse them from all the sin

they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.” Isaiah also experienced God’s forgiveness, as we see in a passage we have seen before, Is. 6:6-7, which says this:

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” God is the One Who forgives, and He *does* forgive.

The reason for God forgiving us is so that we will trust Him, as we see in Ps. 130:4: “But forgiveness is with You [God], in order that You may be feared.” (Endnote 16) Another outcome of forgiveness is our becoming productive, as per Is. 1:16-18, which we see here:

...wash and make yourselves clean. Take away your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

Step one in achieving spirituality is confession, that time when we “wash and make ourselves clean” by exposing our sins to God and agreeing with Him about them. The result is that the stains of sin are completely removed, leaving us “white as snow”. And because we have been cleaned, we will then see good things coming from our lives. The examples of “good things” seen in the foregoing passage are these: learning to do right, seeking justice, encouraging the oppressed, defending the cause of the fatherless, and pleading the case of the widow. These are outcroppings of cleanliness.

**Pleas for Forgiveness and Prayers of Confession.** As we stated in the chapters on forgiveness earlier, we believe that confession is a broad-enough umbrella to include such acts as praying for forgiveness, with or without a specific listing of sins. (Penitent prayer is the only one God hears, when we are out of fellowship.)

The key component in confession is a true spirit of humility toward God, and an admission that we have failed. God looks at the heart, and knows when a truthful acknowledgement of our sinfulness exists. And He knows when a spoken confession is insincere or dishonest...when we don’t really believe we are bad...and don’t see that we have done wrong.

But assuming that the heart matches our confession and prayer, we can find forgiveness by asking for it. Ps. 25:17-18 gives a prayer of David, who is looking for forgiveness and relief. This is what he prayed: “The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.” In this same psalm, David had also prayed, in verse 11, “For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.” In Ps. 51:9, he prayed for forgiveness and restoration, as follows:

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

One more case of asking for forgiveness can be seen in Ps. 79:9, which says, “Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name’s sake.” If the heart is right, “Forgive my sin, O Lord,” is enough.

The verses we have seen here exemplify praying for forgiveness as a means for getting it. This does not match the view of those who think that the only form of confession is “speaking the name of the known sin”, but we must honor what we see in Scripture, which provides a broader base for confession. We DO firmly believe that simply “naming our known sins” remains a central and true means of confession, one we have espoused from the beginning.

**Daniel’s Prayer of Confession.** Daniel 9 shows us a classic prayer of confession, appealing to God’s mercy, love, and forgiveness. Sins are often presented “in bulk”, as part of a confession. These “sin packages” can be characterized by such terms as “my sins”, “my wickedness”, “my weakness”, “my not obeying”, “my rebelliousness”, “my turning away”, and so on. These are replete throughout Scripture. And, of course, confession can also be a listing of specific sins. We actually see both of these types of confession in Daniel 9, which is reviewed in the following:

- Daniel admits wrongdoing in verse 5: “We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name.” As we see, this part of the prayer begins with a generic confession, “we have sinned”, and ends with a specific listing of the wrongs that had been done.
- Daniel expresses shame for unfaithfulness to God in verse 7: “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame...you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.” He expresses shame again in verse 8: “O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.” Shame may be a part of the plea for forgiveness or the prayer of confession.
- God is merciful and forgiving, as acknowledged in verse 9: “The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him....” Mercy and forgiveness and sin: We thank God for His grace in regard to these.
- Daniel acknowledges God’s discipline and the reason for it in verse 11b: “Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.” The cause for all punishment or discipline is sin.

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- Daniel cites Israel’s initial response to discipline, which was inappropriate, in verse 13: “Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.” They did not confess and return to their study of the Word of God, as they should have, so the discipline continued.
- Once more, Daniel must admit that wrong had been done, and he asks God to forgive and restore. That is what we see in verse 15b, coupled with 16a: “We have sinned, we have done wrong. O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath. . . .” A general admission of having sinned is given, and an appeal is made to God’s mercy.
- A final, stirring plea for forgiveness is made to God in verses 18 and 19. Is there any question about the honesty and sincerity in this plea? We give these verses here in their entirety:

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

What a heart-felt cry for mercy! And it paid off. The initial purpose for Daniel’s prayer was to get the interpretation of a disturbing vision he had seen. God’s response to his confession and request is phenomenal, as we see in verses 20-22:

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.”

And the vision was interpreted, as Daniel had requested. Confession opened the gates for effective prayer, understanding from God, and clarity regarding God’s plans. What a powerful tool this is! We must continue to examine it more closely.



## Keys to the Kingdom: Part 2

**Confession is Key.** We have established the centrality of confession as a key to our Christian walk and our spiritual production. We know that righteousness is a gift, made available for eternity when we believe in Christ, and provided to believers when they confess their sins. Since confession is so important, we must make sure that we have the full picture of what confession is and how it works. There are subtleties within the doctrine of confession that may be missed. We want to look at these truths, which are not readily obvious, and at the larger process of confession, as well.

**“Other” Forms of Confession.** We have learned that confession is naming our sins. The term “naming”, drawn narrowly, means just that. Call out the name of our sin, with recognition that it is wrong and offensive to God. (We will have more to say about this below.) We have also seen in previous studies that many terms *point to* confession, even if they are not used as pure synonyms for it. There are some surprising forms of confession, “other” forms, which may elude the casual reader of Scripture. It will help us to apply the methods of confession if we understand the various ways that confession takes place. My prayer is that God will protect us from any misunderstanding or misapplication of His truth as we examine this crucial doctrine.

For ease of use and access, I am going to present these “other” forms of confession in a bulleted list. There are still others beyond this list, but the following are good examples of conditions that can be characterized as “confession”:

- **Being sorry for sins.** Some pastors claim that sorrow and anguish has no place in the process of seeking forgiveness. If 1 Jn. 1:9 is applied independent of all other Scripture, this position is defensible. But there are numerous instances in the Bible of sorrow being expressed for sin, in connection with a plea for forgiveness. In Ps. 38:18 David said, “I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin” Paul also suggests the role of sorrow in confession, saying the following to the Corinthians:

...yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Cor. 7:9-10)

Self pity or disappointment with outcomes in life is not “Godly sorrow”. Sorrow is proper when it is directed toward our sins, seeing them as we know God sees them. By being sorry for them, we agree with God that they should not have happened and should not be there. That is confession.

- **Turning from, or “forsaking”, evil.** Turning away from evil is *not* being suddenly free from the influence of our sinful tendencies. For us to claim to be able to abandon our sinful natures flies in the face of all that we have learned about the interminable, uncontrollable propensities that we have in our flesh. We cannot just walk away from our nature, Turning from evil can only mean that we look at our behaviors, see the sins in them, and do a one-eighty in our view of them.

We must recognize our sins, and turn away from them by adopting God’s rejection of them. When we reject our own sins, we agree with God about them, and are thus confessing. Jonah 3:10 says, “When God saw what they did [in Ninevah] and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.”

The idea of “turning away from sin”, or “forsaking” it, is seen again in Is. 55:6-7, which says the following:

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

We must understand the process: Forsaking and turning away from sin are *events of the heart* that bring about forgiveness. As always, real change begins on the inside.

When we “confess and forsake”, as we shall see shortly in Proverbs, we observe two things: 1) Confession: When we “confess” we can use our restoration of fellowship and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to enable us to walk by faith and avoid sin, and 2) Forsaking: As we just saw, “forsake” is a form of confession in which we forsake our notion about our not being sinful. But “forsaking” can also mean accepting our forgiveness, and *forgetting* the sins that have been removed. We “forsake”, or leave behind, our forgiven sins. Finally, forsaking is an outcome of fellowship after we are restored, as the sin that took us out of fellowship will be stopped, at least for the duration of our fellowship.

Prov. 28:13 (NET) calls for us to confess AND forsake. This verse says, “The one who covers his transgressions will not prosper, but whoever confesses them and forsakes them will find mercy.” Confession and forsaking are part of a single event in which three things happen: 1) we change our minds about our sins, 2) we present our sinful state to God for forgiveness, and 3) we trust Him to remove our sins “an infinity” away from us. Behavior will change, then, not because we willfully abandon a certain faulty pattern, but because we will have regained the enablement of the Holy Spirit.

- **Lifting up our souls to God.** When we lift up our souls to God, there is an almost wordless submission to God’s mercy and grace. This is expressed perfectly in Ps. 86:3-5, as follows:

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.

David lifted up his soul to God and knew that he had been forgiven. This is instant, effective confession...lifting up our souls to God...exposing our sinful hearts to him.

- **Showing humility.** Lk. 18:13-14 gives a clear example of humility bringing forgiveness. This passage says the following:

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Without getting into the details of this parable, the principle is well-established: Humility engenders forgiveness. Other forms of humility can be seen in such descriptors as “broken-hearted”, “contrite”, “poor in spirit”, and “down-trodden”. When we approach God, we must do so with an awareness of His greatness and holiness, and our own inadequacy and weakness. Humility is a form of confession.

- **Repentance.** We have seen many examples of repentance in our studies, and have presented it as a form of confession. We see this again in a passage we will quote that calls for repentance as a way to confess. We see also “other” forms of confession in this passage, where Solomon includes a prayer for forgiveness as part of a longer prayer of dedication for the completed temple. At the end of the prayer for forgiveness, he says the following:

When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to his own land, far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their conquerors and say, “We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly”; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea and uphold their cause. And forgive your

people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed against you, and cause their conquerors to show them mercy....  
(1 Ki. 8:46-50)

The first thing these Israelites will need to do, from among the long list of things that can be considered as ways to confess, is “repent”. This is a “change of heart”, or “change of mind”, the adoption of a new view-point toward their sin. This will result in forgiveness.

- **We Can’t Cleanse Ourselves.** There is a tendency for us to rationalize our own behavior, to excuse our own mistakes, and to justify our own actions. Sometimes we want to wrap ourselves in a cloak of self-righteousness and convince ourselves that we are really okay, and that we deserve God’s favor and blessings. But we are mistaken if we think we are not sinful, or that somehow we can manage our own cleansing. It is crucial that we understand that we cannot excuse ourselves, and we cannot cleanse ourselves. God is the only One Who can forgive sin and remove it. Jer. 2:22 confirms this for us, saying, “Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,’ declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Confession to the only One Who can cleanse us is the way to forgiveness. David understood this, as we see in Ps. 32:5: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” We confess only to God, the only “Forgiver”.

- **Two Ways to “Name our Sins”.** We have identified two categories of confession: 1) “other” and 2) “naming our sins”. When alternative or “other” methods of confession are seen, they will be viewed as the natural outcropping of a sincere response to our sins. The “standard” method of confession, or deliberately naming our sins, may or may not include one or more of these other forms. Most confessions will probably be of the standard sort, often accompanied by other forms, but whether confession is formal and scheduled, or spontaneous and unplanned, it will still be effective, if it comes from the heart. We want to look, now, at the traditional, “main-stream”, perhaps *primary*, form of confession—naming our sins—as seen in two types.

When it comes to naming sins, there is 1) *generic* naming, and there is 2) *specific* naming. We looked at naming sins in a general (generic, all-inclusive, sweeping) sense in our discussion of forgiveness, and gave examples. Here are a few more examples of sins being named generically, or “in bulk”:

- 2 Sam. 12:13—“Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’”

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- Ps. 51:3-4—“For I know [KJV, “acknowledge”] my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”
- 2 Sam. 24:10—“David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.’”

We have also seen many times in previous studies, an application of the form of confession known as “naming our sins”, or “agreeing with God about our sins”. But this category needs refinement and further exploration. We have not plumbed the final depths of this doctrine yet. We must keep digging to see the full scope of confession as seen in the technique of “specific naming”.

## Keys to the Kingdom: Part 3

**Confession Proper: 1 Jn. 1.** Confession proper involves *naming* our sins explicitly, including those sins we *remember*...and those that we *know* are sins. By naming the sins we know and remember, ALL sins are forgiven, leaving us completely clean.

To help us further frame the processes and effects of confession using the “specific-naming” method, we want to give full treatment to 1 Jn. 1. This chapter, perhaps more than any other, specifies the means for and the benefits of “confession by naming”. 1 Jn. 1 is about fellowship with God and how we can have it. It answers the question: What qualifies imperfect man to be on intimate and friendly terms with the infinite Creator?

The translation we are using to study this chapter is the *Interlinear Bible*. (Endnote 17)

Our prayer: Father, we ask for clarity in writing and reading this study of 1 Jn. 1. Open our eyes to its complete spiritual significance in our lives.

**1 Jn. 1:1-2** says the following:

We announce to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld, and what our hands touched, as regards the Word of Life. And the Life was revealed, and we have seen, and we bear witness, and we announce to you the everlasting Life which was with the Father, and was revealed to us.

This chapter begins with John citing his first-hand experience with Jesus as a real person, someone that John had actually seen and touched. He had also “heard” Him, and we will see what he heard in verse 5. This is the Person John was featuring as the “Word of Life”. John proclaims that the life in that Word is eternal life...the everlasting life of Christ. He had been with the Father in eternity past, yet He appeared to John and others in time...on earth.

**1 Jn. 1:3** says, “We announce to you what we have seen, and what we have heard, that you may also have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”

In this verse John is telling his audience about Jesus Christ—or what he had “seen and heard”—so that they can have fellowship with him (John), *as they have fellowship with God*. The fellowship bond between him and them depends on their mutual fellowship with God...if fellowship with God is broken by either party, the fellowship between John and them will also be broken.

Fellowship among believers can be tricky. Voltaire said, “If you wish to converse with me, define your terms.” In light of Scripture, when we are dealing with fellow believers, perhaps we should say, “If you wish to converse with me, confess your sins to God.” This idea is stated in Amos 3:3, which says, “Will two walk together unless they are agreed?” (Endnote

18) If one or both believers in an encounter are out of fellowship with God, true fellowship between them will not happen.

Our primary objective is to keep fellowship with God intact. Fellowship between “fellow-fellowshippers” is a *byproduct* of the more significant fellowship with the Father. Fellowship between believers is highly desirable, but the initial goal and drive is *fellowship with God, and with His Son*. Before this chapter is finished, John will tell them *how* that fellowship is acquired.

**1 Jn. 1:4** says, “And we write these things to you, that your joy may be full.”

Almost all translations provide “your joy” as a viable alternative for “our joy” in this verse, stating that many reliable manuscripts use “your”, instead of “our”. Both can be true, of course, as John would certainly have been *delighted* (as in “our joy”) for his readers to benefit from his writing, but it is, I believe, *their* joy (seen as “your joy”) that prompts his writing. Joy frequently connotes the operation of the Holy Spirit, so when John said, essentially, “full of joy”, he was implying, “full of the Holy Spirit”. What he is writing in this chapter is designed to bring about their being filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit, a primary benefit of fellowship with God.

**1 Jn. 1:5** says, “And this is the message which we have heard from Him, and we announce to you: God is light, and no darkness is in Him—none.”

This is what John had heard: God is pure, holy, perfect, and totally above any wrongdoing of any kind. Everything about Him is absolutely flawless and good. This is light...God’s perfection. He has no faults or bad qualities by any measure; he is impeccable and spotless; and there are no stains or blemishes anywhere on Him. In Him, there is “no darkness”. This is the God we seek...the God we want to fellowship with. When we come before the throne of grace, we approach the *light of His perfection*.

**1 Jn. 1:6-7** says the following:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and we walk in darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of His Son Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

We must be absolutely sure about the meanings of these two verses. In their meanings lie the underpinnings of the teachings we have advanced throughout all our studies. We must look at this passage carefully and prayerfully.

1. If we claim to have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, we lie. Why is this claim a lie? It is because of this: When we walk in darkness, we CANNOT have fellowship with Him. There is a complete absence of truth to the notion that we can be in a state of communion with God and still be operating in the dark. But why is it that we can’t fellowship with God if we are in the dark? We will see.

2. The opposite of darkness is light. If we walk in the light, we will be qualified for fellowship with each other, and—by extrapolation—with Him. But what changes to move us from the “dark” to the “light”; what makes us acceptable? Oddly enough, “walking in the light” is something we do all by ourselves. The light is not ours...just the walking. Here is the explanation:
  - a) Notice that “walking in the light” precedes the phrase, “Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin”. It is when we walk in the light that we are cleansed, because it is in the light of God’s perfection that our imperfection is exposed. This is where our sins can be seen and dealt with. **BUT NOTE: WE ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN BRING OUR SINS OUT INTO HIS LIGHT.** He already knows about them, of course, but He is looking for us to bring them to Him for treatment.
  - b) Darkness is the place where sins are hidden; light is where they are visible. By living in the light, or disclosing and unveiling our sins, we qualify for fellowship, *because our hearts are cleansed by Jesus Christ*. If we refuse to bring our sins to the light, we will continue to operate in darkness, and we will NOT have fellowship with the Father and the Son.
3. We must be clear that “living in the light” is not “keeping the law”. If we walked in the light because we actually kept all the rules (and no one can), we would not need to be cleansed. When we step into the light...at that moment, we are dirty. Light is simply this: the place where all things can be seen. It is the place where we display our sins so they can be washed.
4. If we are in the darkness, sins cannot be forgiven, and we cannot have fellowship with God. Light (exposure) is the key to cleansing, and cleansing is the key to fellowship. And the process is not a lengthy one. The **INSTANT** the light hits our darkness, we are cleansed. Bringing our sins to the light and being cleansed are almost simultaneous, just as light instantly removes darkness. Restoration of fellowship, then, is an instantaneous event.
5. “As He is in the light...” needs to be explained. We saw in verse 5 that God is light, meaning God is absolutely perfect. Jesus Christ walks at ease in the light of that perfection, because He Himself is God. Jesus Christ is completely open to His Father, and the Father sees no fault in His Son. Christ is always in the light, because He **IS** the light, and in Him is no wrong. Conversely, when we walk in the light, our ugliness and sinfulness are exposed, not so they can be judged, but so they can be forgiven and discarded. We walk in the light the same as Christ does. When we receive His cleansing, we are in the light the same as He is in the



light, because we are completely CLEANED. But—like our clothes—we’ll need to be washed again soon.

6. Light has various applications in Scripture. We will not try to explore all of these. At this point, we are looking at “light” only as holy perfection. We want to see several verses that show the effects of this light. We see this in the following:
  - a) Eph. 5:13—“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said, ‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”
  - b) Lk. 11:35-36—“See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”
  - c) Jn. 3:20—“Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”
  - d) Ps. 89:15—“Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord.”

Light makes our sins visible, so that Jesus Christ, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, can separate them from us with the laser beam of His righteousness.

**1 Jn. 1:8** says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

As we look at ourselves internally, we tend to obscure our own faults and mistakes, probably because we think we cannot face the reality of our failure(s). This is normal human psychology...but it works against us spiritually. This is because we are sinful and helpless, and our denial of this prevents its being corrected. By saying we are “okay”, we are keeping ourselves in a place of being “not okay”, because God cannot access our sins. When we admit that we are “not okay”, by the standards of a Holy God, then we become “okay”, because Holy God removes our badness, and replaces it with His goodness.

We have “sin”, or a sinful nature, which produces an array of specific sins, and for us to say that we do *not* have such a nature is to practice self-deception. We are kidding ourselves when we think for an instant that our nature is good and wholesome. As we look into our spiritual mirrors, we must see the truth about ourselves, and realize how much our goodness depends on the mercy and grace of God. When we truly *see* ourselves, we will be prepared to follow the path set for us in the next verse.

**1 Jn. 1:9**—“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous that He may forgive us the sins, and may cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The specific act of bringing our sins to light is seen in the verb “confess”. This key term comes from the Greek word *homologeō*, which means “to say the same thing”. This is naming our sins AS SINS, and saying the same thing about them that a perfect God says. This is agreeing with God about our sin(s), and acknowledging that we have done wrong. And this is recognizing that only He can correct our errors through forgiveness. When we confess, we bring our sins to the light. When we confess continually, we are “living in the light”, where faithful admission is greeted by faithful forgiveness. He is faithful to forgive confessed sin...100% of the time. Forgiveness restores our fellowship with God, and we can then walk in communion with Him. THIS IS NO SMALL MATTER.

**1 Jn. 1:10**—“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

God tells us that we are sinners, and that we have sinned. If we deny this, we are insulting God, denying His truth, and calling Him a liar. This is a serious charge. But when we try to hide or ignore our sins, this is exactly what we are doing. Instead of facing the truth of our sinfulness and His righteousness, we are claiming that God is wrong and that we have not really sinned.

**1 Jn. 1 is a Message for Believers.** The message John is giving in 1 Jn. 1 is for believers. This is confirmed in 1 Jn. 2:1, which immediately follows the passage we just examined, where John refers to his readers as “my little children”. This suggests their connection with Him in the family of God. John also says in verse 1 that he is writing “these things” so that these believers “will not sin”. But he knows they will, so he tells them immediately not to fret when they sin, but to refer their sins to Jesus, because Jesus will defend these *believers* before the Father with His own righteousness (1 Jn. 1:2). This “advocacy” is not offered to unbelievers.

**Conclusion.** The message for believers in 1 Jn. 1 is clear, as we see in the following:

1. The life of Christ is the starting point for our relationship...and fellowship...with Him.
2. Believers can have fellowship with each other, but—more importantly—with a Holy God and His Righteous Son.
3. The object of fellowship is to increase “joy”, which indicates the control of the Holy Spirit.
4. If we as believers say we have fellowship, yet hide our sins from God, we are liars and are living in darkness...away from fellowship.
5. If we bring our sins to light by exposing them to God, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins.
6. The light does two things: 1) it shows the sins, and 2) it allows Christ to clear the sins out.

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7. We assuredly have a sinful nature, and commit specific acts of sin.
8. But if we confess our sins...name them to God as sins...we will be bringing our sins to the light, and all our sins will be forgiven.
9. Darkness, or the presence of unforgiven sin, prevents fellowship.
10. Walking in the light results in forgiveness, restoring fellowship.
11. Repeat Point 8, as needed.

Honest, humble confession of our sins is the ultimate key to the kingdom...the means for regaining our fellowship-walk with God, and unlocking His power within us. Without it, we will have a power outage, and we will be operating in the dark.

## Sin and God's Grace

**Abusing Grace.** We know that we can confess our sins and they will be forgiven. Is there a danger, then, that we will take a lax view of sin, and take our sinful pattern lightly? Maybe. Paul addressed this problem with the Romans, and gave some very definite limits for such assumptions. Grace is great, and God delights when we access His grace offerings consistently and enthusiastically. But grace must not be seen as an opportunity to live our lives without responsibility.

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

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

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

**Regarding Sincerity.** Sincerity is not a feeling, but a core state of wanting God. To want God, we must believe that He exists, and that is the heart of Christianity. We believe God exists, and we believe He sent His Son as a substitute for our punishment, and we believe in the Word He has provided to help us live. “We believe”...that is the kernel. Faith is the center of our spirituality...we accept God's grace and love and provision because we TRUST Him. That faith is smaller for new and immature believers, which is why He has given us techniques to help us GROW in faith, so that we can TRUST HIM MORE.

This is sincerity: believing God. And believing is a matter of choice. We must choose for ourselves. No one else can choose for us, and everything we ever become spiritually depends on our constantly, repeatedly choosing God and His way and His Word as the core reality of our lives. The choice is mine...and yours. Choose God, choose faith, choose study, and choose prayer. When we fear God, acknowledge Him in our hearts, thank Him,

and wait for Him, it is because we CHOOSE Him. This is the heart of our faith and practice...choosing God. Start now. Make a choice as to Whom you will believe.

Josh. 24:15 says the following:

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

This is the backdrop for confession and forgiveness and all grace operations in our lives. It revolves around our choosing God...all the time.

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

Rom. 6:1-2 follows this with a caution not to abuse grace: “What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” The questions are rhetorical. *Of course* we should not go on sinning, and must *not* “live in it any longer”. We “died to sin” *positionally*, or in our eternal state; but we often “live in it” in our *condition*, or in our temporal state. But we do not *want* to LIVE in sin. This is why dealing with it is so important.

**To Be Alive, Choose to Believe.** Verse 5 in Rom. 6 tells us that we are no longer slaves to sin, and verse 11 says we can count ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God. We are well aware by now that sin is removed by confession, and that “being alive to God” is the same thing as walking in the Spirit, or being controlled by the Holy Spirit. We also know that sin will disrupt “being alive to God” and we will be alive to the flesh. We have understood that confession removes the *record* of sin, so that we can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to remove the *practice* of sin. When this happens, our walk will be characterized by faith...and preoccupation with Him. We are clear on these things, and we embrace these truths with all the spiritual enthusiasm we possess.

But we must return to our roots to find our original truth for living, and that is this: Unless we *choose* to *believe* that He is real, not just a topic for social gatherings, not just someone we look to for averting emergencies, not just a source for greater prosperity, and so on...we will not properly apply His techniques, and we will not reach our spiritual goals. We must believe that He is the real, infinite, timeless, loving, powerful, and engaged God Who made us, planned every tick of every clock throughout time, and knows our every fleeting thought and dream. He is there...He is here. And when we truly believe this, we can participate

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meaningfully in all the procedures which He provides to transform the quality of our lives from selfish, sinful pursuits, to meaningful, purposeful expressions of Himself.

**Rest.** So we can rest now. All we have to do is *choose to believe*. Don't try to make this hard. Keep it simple and start small. You have believed in Christ at a point in time, and you have eternal life. Now, once more, and again and again, you must believe in Him and His Word to get you through your life. Look up and know He is real. Just believe. He will do the rest.

Ps 37:3-7 says this:

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

When we trust Him, we will rest in Him and all that He is. And when we rest, we will see Him work, using our hands. So go to work.

## Conclusion

Sin is the biggest problem we face. This is a problem much bigger than we are, a problem so big that only an infinite God can solve it. And He has. He has given us the solution for sin in eternity through faith in His Son. And He has given us the solution for sin in life through the confession of sins...also an expression of faith. God's love forms God's grace, which generates His mercy, which produces forgiveness. We receive the benefits of all these qualities of God, and the result is that—through His character and effort—we are richly blessed and cared for.

God has provided techniques for us to get closer to Him and draw on His power. He has not left us alone to fend for ourselves in a hostile world, ruled by a despotic and evil prince. He has provided His Word to guide us, feed us, and correct us. And He has placed His Spirit within us, so that we can rely on Him to produce righteousness in our lives, and to teach us. But we must remember this: All the techniques God has given us involve our believing that He is real, and that His Word is true.

We see our “believing” in confession...and we confess because we believe. We accept His promise to forgive our sins, and we believe He has the power to do it. We believe Him when we pray, and know that He will hear and honor the prayer of faith. And we believe Him when we study, by believing what we see in His Word. Core truths invade our consciousness, and we know that His divine nature is being imparted to us through His words. We also know that our faith will build—as we mature—through spiritual nourishment and God's divine training program. And we have been assured that faith is the center of the Christian life.

We see several manifestations of this faith, as follows:

- **Respect.** This is the acknowledgement and humility we express to God in our walk before Him. In His presence, we acknowledge that He alone is God, and that we are totally dependent on Him.
- **Repentance.** This is the confession of our sins to bring our walk into His light, where He will forgive our sins.
- **Restoration.** When our sins are forgiven, we are restored to fellowship with His Spirit.
- **Rest.** This is the walk of faith, where we know at all times that He is a real Being, and that He is with us and in us. This is the place where we relate to Him in prayer and study, as we grow closer to Him, and the place where His Spirit communes with us to comfort and empower us.

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On God's side, we see mercy and forgiveness that deal with our sin. On our side, we see the operation of faith to access mercy and forgiveness, which leads to greater grace, as we grow. And faith *must* grow, or it will shrink. This is why we confess, pray, study, and endure the trials...because we want to grow spiritually.

2 Pet. 1:3-9 gives us the whole picture and pattern of growth:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in [partake of] the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

God has given it all to us. But for us to be "effective and productive" we must "possess these qualities in increasing measure". This means we must keep growing.

Because we sin, we must seek God's mercy through confession. Through sincere confession, we get forgiveness. With forgiveness, we get fellowship and insight and answered prayers and divine empowerment and training, all leading to greater growth as we see Him more and more clearly, and believe more and more that He alone is God...that He is our God...and that He is a great God.



## **Your New Address**

**Where Do You Live?** Wherever you live, you may want to consider moving. When we are living where God wants us to live, we will be protected and fortified and armed against all enemies, and we will be completely at home. Oddly enough, God wants us to move into a shelter...He wants our address to be the Shelter of the Most High. He sometimes shortens the name of this dwelling place to the “Most High”. Our real home is God, even while our feet are on the ground of earth. If we live in Him, we will think of Him all the time, seek Him, thirst for Him, and rest in Him. Stay at home; it’s where you belong.

**From Psalm 91.** Here is our invitation to move into God’s shelter rent-free:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.”

Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

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

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

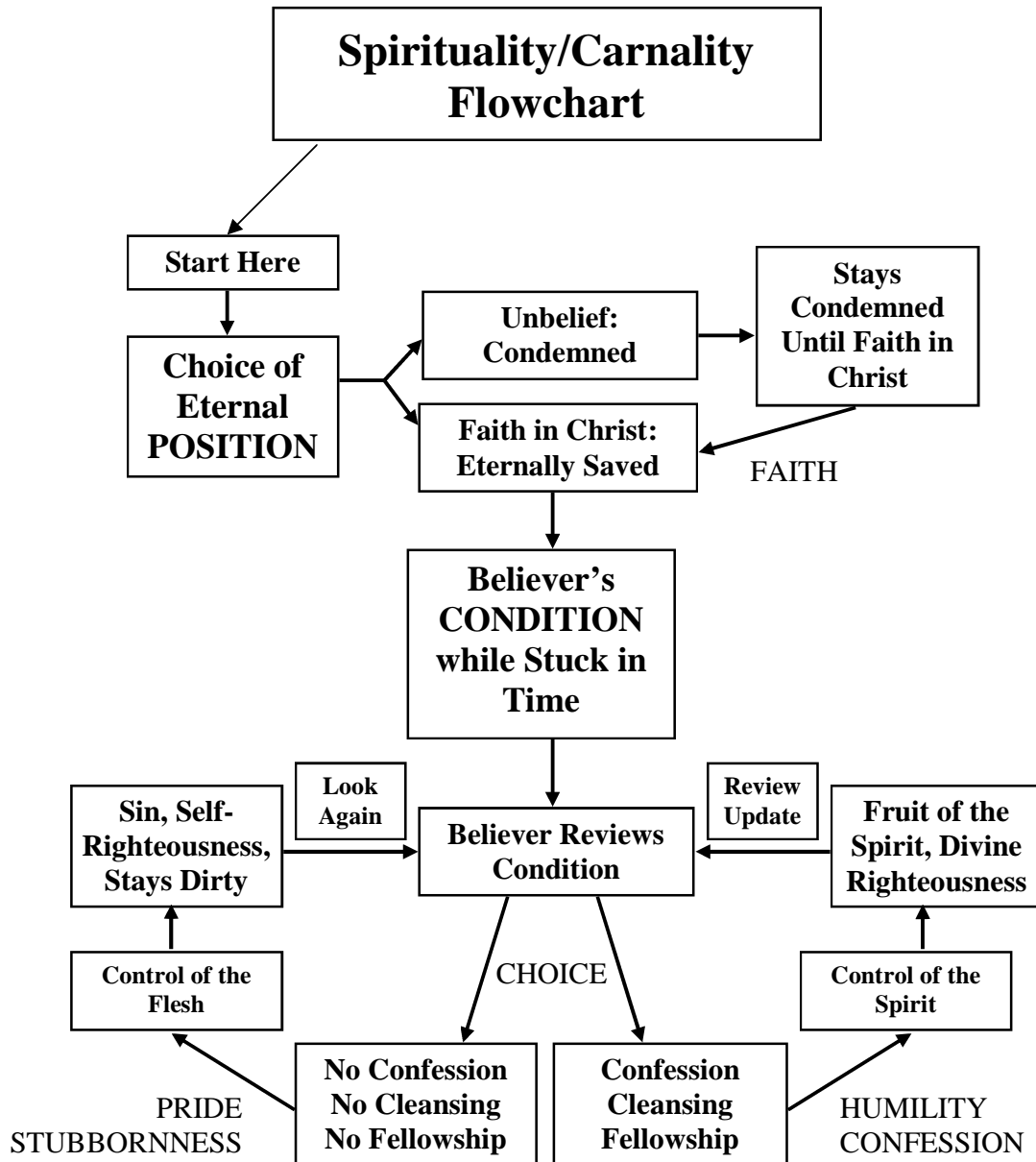
“With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

Welcome home. You have the key: faith. You control the light switch: confession. You have power behind the switch: the Holy Spirit. You have an open line to the supply room: prayer. You have instructions, a contract, and a guarantee: the Word. And you have secure walls: God’s promises. Take your shoes off, settle back, and stay awhile. It’s safe here at the Most High.

When we make the Most High our dwelling, every waking moment will take place within an awareness of God. All else will be secondary. When we seek Him first, everything else that we want will either be provided...or will become unimportant. When we can grow to a level that every event in our lives is viewed as a part of God’s plan, when we can come to know that He is in absolute control of everything, and when we realize that He is real...and that He truly loves us...we can rest in His provision and thankfully acknowledge Him as our refuge...our Savior...our God.

## Spirituality/Carnality Flowchart

This chart illustrates the flow from “unbelief” to faith in Christ at salvation, after which a toggle between two circuits will occur. One circuit is “Spirituality”; the other is “Carnality”. Can you find your current position on this chart?



## Endnotes

1. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, pp. 57-77. Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2002. This book is available at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).
2. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, p. 60.
3. *Behind the Glittering Mask*, by Mark Rutland, p. 158. Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI, 1996.
4. *Behind the Glittering Mask*, p. 159.
5. "Anxious People and A Sovereign God", an article by Dr. Greg Herrick, p. 1. Published in 2004. This article is available at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org), under the author's name.
6. *The Interlinear Bible*, ed. and trans. By Jay P. Green, Sr., p. 513. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Lafayette, Indiana, 1985.
7. The phrase cited here is from a taped sermon titled, "Ps. 103: Forget not His Benefits", presented initially in 2009 by Dr. John Brummett, pastor of Free Grace Bible Church, Garland, TX. This and other sermons by Dr. Brummett are available at [www.freegracebible.org](http://www.freegracebible.org).
8. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 498.
9. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 497.
10. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 479.
11. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 491.
12. *Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 208. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1999.
13. *Vine's*, p. 207.
14. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Joseph Henry Thayer, "kingdom", as used in Rom. 14:17, et al. This reference was found online at [www.tgm.org/bible.htm](http://www.tgm.org/bible.htm), under the website listing, *Free Bible Tools—Strong's Concordance*.
15. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, "inherit", as used in 1 Cor. 6:9, et al.
16. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 507.
17. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 945.
18. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 704.

## 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.