



A Scriptural Analysis of a Believer's Heart

Pride or *Humility*?

Judgmental Judging or *Right Judgment*?

Bitterness or *Forgiveness*?

Hypocrisy or *Reconciliation*?

Repentance?

Prov. 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.

Matt. 15:18

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart,
and this defiles a person.

The contents of this study are a compilation of notes from the resources noted at the end of this booklet. Proper footnotes and citations of material used from the sources identified are not noted throughout this booklet. The purpose of this compilation of notes is for personal study only or for study within a church. This compilation of notes is not for public distribution. This study is meant for use within a church and no fees or monies are being charged for it.

Provided in this study is a commentary on the scriptures referenced in this study. Scriptures referenced in definitions and illustrations within the study may not be found in the provided commentary. This commentary will allow you to examine the scriptures referenced in this study so you will be able to critically analyze all the statements made in this study. The commentary provided is based on a literal interpretation of the Word of God, but it is not infallible, so feel free to critically analyze and study other resources.

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Introduction

There is no more important study for each of us to undertake than the study of the heart of the genuine believer. The heart of the genuine believer is to love the LORD and their neighbor (cf. Matt. 22:37-40, 5:44; John 13:34; I John 3:23). However, it is all too common to see pride, judgmental attitudes, bitterness and hypocrisy between: individuals who claim Christ as Savior; Pastors, church staffs and members; husband, wife, children and family; and those who profess to be believers and those that are not believers. One of the greatest challenges in Christianity today is for believers to live out genuine faith in Christ to others by living a life that publicly portrays genuine humility, right judgment, forgiveness and reconciliation, which is demonstrated by genuine love and unity amongst those they live with.

This purpose of this study is to help you examine your own heart and life to see who is in control. Is it self and Satan as evidenced by pride, a judgmental attitude, bitterness and hypocrisy? Or is it Christ and a yielded heart as evidenced by humility, right judgment, forgiveness and reconciliation that produces unity? Your life is controlled by one or the other, there is no middle ground. It is that simple because there can only be one master in your life; and the master of your life is the one of your own choosing. This study will guide you into an understanding of who is in control of your life.

The foundation of this study is the Word of God, the gospel and repentance. Scripture will be used to provide a biblical analysis of pride and humility; judging and right judgment; bitterness and forgiveness and hypocrisy and reconciliation, which results in unity. This study will be using the "Law of Contrast" (presenting two vastly different alternatives in succession to clarify perception and understanding), as used in Proverbs, to highlight the stark and distinctive differences between pride and humility; judging and right judgment; bitterness and forgiveness and hypocrisy and reconciliation in such a manner to allow you the opportunity to personally examine your heart in light of Scripture. The greatest challenge you will face in this study is this; are you willing to be honest with yourself before the LORD? Do you see pride in your life? Do you blame God or look to place fault on others or your circumstances? If so, have you repented of the sin of pride in your life? Or will you continue to allow your heart to deceive you by allowing pride to do its work in your heart to rationalize your behavior and attitude? Please carefully examine your life through the lens of scripture? May each of us become more like Christ as we live our life in Him (cf. Phil. 2:5-11)!

Pride or Humility?

A priority in the life of the genuine believer should be to know and understand the characteristics of pride and humility. Pride is the original sin that caused the fall of Lucifer and the fallen angels (cf. Isa. 14:12-17) when pride created their desire to be a god like God. And it was pride that brought about the sin of Adam and Eve, who wanted to be like God by deciding for themselves what is right and what is wrong (Gen. 3:5-7). From the fall-in-the-garden to today, pride persistently troubles all of us – we all battle pride in our life. Pride is very deceptive and it is imperative that we know how to identify and see it in our own lives.

The exact opposite of pride is humility. Humility is the primary characteristic of a true believer's life that all should see. True humility is what Christ's life clearly demonstrated to us (Phil. 2:1-11); and humility in one's life is the primary evidence of true belief in Christ.

The Law of Contrast can effectively be used to examine the difference between Pride and Humility. We will define and examine pride and humility on the basis of Scripture. By examining both we will be able to clearly define what rules our heart – pride or humility.

Pride - A Scriptural Analysis

“There is nothing into which the heart of man so easily falls as pride, and yet there is no vice which is more frequently, more emphatically, and more eloquently condemned in Scripture.” C.H. Spurgeon

Definitions of “Pride”

To study PRIDE, it is a requirement that we look at the definition of PRIDE. Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of PRIDE:

- **Hebrew** (*'gaavah'*) arrogant haughtiness, lifting up proudly, raging swelling (Prov. 29:23). A clear illustration of pride in the Old Testament is Hezekiah as found in II Chron. 32:24-26. Also, we see evidence of pride in the fall of Lucifer in Isa. 14:12-17.
- **Greek** (*'tuphoo'*) boastful self-confidence, inflated with self-conceit, high minded (Mark 7:14-23) (cf. Pharisee – Luke 18:9-14)
(*'alazoneia'*) boasting self-confidence (I John 2:16)
- **English:** a high opinion of one's own importance, merit, or superiority exhibited by an unreasonable overestimation of one's own superiority in talents, beauty, wealth, rank, knowledge, etc.; which often manifests itself in arrogance and a moral elite attitude that projects, internally and/or externally, disdain and contempt of others.

With the definition of pride firmly established, we need examine ourselves to determine if pride is ruling our life. Pride will kill you; and it will kill you for eternity. Pride is the sin that will keep you from honestly looking at your spiritual need for a Savior. For the believer, pride is the sin that will always produce strife in your life; it will keep God from answering your prayers; and it will keep you from genuine peace and contentment in life. It is interesting that the English spelling of “pride” has “I” as the center focus of the word. Pride is self-centeredness that places “self” on the throne of your life and excludes God as the rightful ruler of your life.

From the world's perspective, pride is looked upon as virtuous. The world teaches us that you must put yourself first before anyone else. It worships self-exaltation, self-esteem, self-satisfaction, and self-

centeredness. The world today practices the religion of self-worship – and many are swept into that worship of man and themselves.

It is a truth that those who think they are well will not look for a doctor. Why go to a doctor to examine you when you are feeling well? But many times, when we finally go to the doctor because we are feeling bad, we find it is too late to effectively treat the medical condition to return to full health.

This is the case for pride in one's life. As seriously dangerous as pride is, it's equally hard to spot. What makes pride so dangerous is that it blinds us to the reality of how sinful we really are. When it comes to diagnosing your hearts, those who have pride and have nurtured that pride have a challenging time identifying it. Pride distorts our ability to accurately view and diagnose our life. Pride is so effective in distorting our view of ourselves that we often convince ourselves that what we are doing is not sin but is something that is right to engage in. The deception that pride creates in our life is so distorting that we believe we are not being harmed by participating in sinful activities and thoughts.

Pride leads us to rebel against the one true and holy God. Pride seeks to dethrone God as the absolute sovereign Lord of this world. When men are left to their pride and self-love, they will never seek after God and follow Him. The reality is that we do not see pride in our life because it is so deceiving. Are we willing to examine our own life just as God examines our life? God knows your heart; nothing is hidden from Him (Luke 16:13-15). Do you often rationalize your thoughts and actions? Do you seek to justify your decisions and your direction in life? Or do you look at your life as God looks at it? Pride yields fruit in one's life which is easily observed by others but it blinds the one who is prideful. In his essay on undetected pride, Jonathan Edwards points out seven symptoms of pride in your life.

1. Fault-Finding

Pride takes great notice of opposition and wrongs or injuries that are received. Pride is on full display when conflict, disagreement, or offense occurs. We become so focused on what the other person has said or done that we become blind to our own sinful heart and attitudes. Pride creates spiritual blindness that causes us to filter out the evil we see in ourselves. Your response to an offense reveals the extent of how pride rules your heart. Pride responds to offense with anger, gossip and even slander. Many times, we are so offended that we will not forgive the person who offended you. Pride blinds so thoroughly that we often do not see our own sin.

Pride causes us to point out sin in the life of others while ignoring sin in our own life. Christ highlighted this in Matthew 7:5 where He instructs us to remove the plank from our own eyes before focusing on the splinter in the eye of someone else. Jonathan Edwards wrote: "The spiritually proud person shows it in his finding fault with other saints...the eminently humble Christian has so much to do at home and sees so much evil in his own heart that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts."

2. A Harsh Spirit

Pride is the foundation for talking about others' sins with contempt, irritation, frustration, or judgment. Pride is the source of belittling (making light of) the struggles of others, which exhibits itself as having a harsh spirit. A harsh spirit is a sign of arrogance, which is very damaging to others and to the testimony of Christ before others. Jonathan Edwards wrote: "Christians who are but fellow-worms ought at least to treat one another with as much humility and gentleness as Christ treats them."

3. Superficiality

Pride has a firm grip on your heart when you are far more concerned with others' perceptions of us than the reality of the condition of our hearts. We fight the sins that have an impact on how others view us,

and make peace with the ones that no one sees. We have great success in the areas of holiness that have highly visible accountability, but little concern for the disciplines that happen in secret.

4. Defensiveness

Pride creates defensiveness. Pride in one's life creates words and actions that tell others about the perceived opposition and wrongs or injuries that have occurred to you. Pride causes one to seek ways and words to justify their own thoughts and actions because of the perceived injustice they have experienced. Christ addressed this type of behavior when He instructed the disciples about the superficial action of the Pharisees in Mark 7, specifically calling out the source of this sinful behavior, the unrepentant heart (Mark 7: 1-23 (20-23)). Words that defend the one's actions often degrade others in the defense of their actions (James 3:5-10, 14-16; cf. Prov. 10:19).

5. Presumption before God

Pride creates arrogant and disrespectful behavior. Such behavior is exhibited before God when we do not approach God with humility. Approaching God with a cavalier attitude, with an attitude of "demand" is evidence of pride. Also, approaching God with no faith or confidence is equally prideful when one appears to be a humbly approaching God but there is no reality in their relationship with God. When we focus on our outward behavior that others see rather than getting our heart into a right relationship with God, we are effectively telling the LORD that we are more important than He is. If humbleness is missing in our relationship with God, our hearts are infected with pride. Jonathon Edwards wrote: "Some, in their great rejoicing before God, have not paid sufficient regard to that rule in Psalm 2:11 - 'Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling.'"

6. Desperation for Attention

Pride is hungry for attention, respect, and worship in all its forms. Do we boast about ourselves? Do we not say "no" to anyone because we need to be needed? Do we obsess to be admired and adored? Do we spend time thinking about having the right clothes or the right car or the right house or the right title at work? Do you seek the glory that comes from men, not God? Pride creates a life that is focused on what the world provides for recognition and satisfaction. Pride is also often manifested by how quick one seeks to assume the role of leader. The proud see themselves as uniquely qualified to teach and to guide, to direct and manage and expect others to regard them as leaders and to yield to their authority.

7. Neglecting Others

Pride prefers some people over others. It honors those who the world deems worthy of honor, giving more weight to their words, their wants, and their needs. Do you get "excited and pleased" when people with "power" acknowledge you? Pride causes us to put people into categories or ranks. Do we look at others and try to work our way into their favor? Do we consciously or unconsciously pass over the weak, the inconvenient, and the unattractive, because they don't seem to offer us much? Such thoughts and actions cause us to neglect and separate from people because we are ranking them – and we often perceive ourselves as better than others. Pride causes one's heart to turn away from serving others to serving ourselves. Pride leads us to seek glory for our self and not the glory of God.

There are many dangers to pride because it is powerful and deceiving. Scripture calls us to examine ourselves (II Cor. 13:5) because we are often blind to our own sin. Following are some questions for you to ask yourself. And as you examine yourself and answer the following questions honestly, you will find out if you have a heart condition that is allowing pride to rule your life.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to see if you have pride in your heart. As you review each question, answer it by writing down the number that best fits your response to the question. 1 = Never / No. 2 = Rarely. 3 = Sometimes / Don't know. 4 = Regularly. 5 = Always / Yes. Try your best to be honest with your answers. There are 27 questions listed below; at some points there is more than one question. Please take care to answer all of the questions.

1. Do you seek great things for yourself? (Jer. 45:5)
 - a. Do you have to be the center of attention? (Jer. 45:5)
2. What is your motive? (Phil. 2:3-4; cf. Prov. 10:19, 21:2)
 - a. Do you interrupt because you must be heard?
 - b. Do you always have to say something?
3. Do you often experience disagreements and strife with others? (Prov. 13:10)
 - a. Are you easily offended?
4. Do you see yourself as being better than others? (Luke 7:36-50)
 - a. Do you arrive at meetings and/or appointments late?
5. Do you believe you are more important and have better knowledge than others? (I Cor. 4:6-7; Gal. 6:3)
6. Do you believe you should be in control? (Eph. 5:21; cf. I Cor. 1:10-13; I Pet. 5:5)
 - a. Do you find it difficult to work under someone's authority?
7. Do you ignore or dismiss critical words, rebuke or correction? (Prov. 10:17, 21:1, 13:1)
 - a. Do you have a hard time acknowledging that you are wrong?
8. Do you believe that your spiritual knowledge and experience is much better than anyone else's? (John 9:1-3)
9. Do you take the initiative to forgive others or seek forgiveness? (Matt. 18:15-35)
 - a. Do you forgive others?
10. Do you minimize your sin while bringing attention to someone else's shortcomings (maximizing their sin)? (Matt. 7:3-5)
11. Are you often critical of others? (Eph. 4:31-32)
 - a. Are you often critical of those who are in authority?
12. Are you envious or jealous of others? (I Cor. 13:4-7; cf. Gal. 5:26)
13. Do you find 'reasons' and excuses not to fellowship with believers? (Prov. 18:1-2; cf. Heb. 10:24-25)
14. Do you try to influence others by shading the truth? (Prov. 28:13)
 - a. Do you have a pattern of lying?
15. Do you get upset when people do not recognize or honor you or your family's achievements? (Prov. 25:6-7, 27:2; cf. Psa. 75:6-7)
16. Do you have an attitude of entitlement? (I Pet. 2:13-17)
 - a. Do you use your Christian liberty as the reason for your actions?

Did you answer each of the above 27 questions honestly? Did you carefully examine your heart as you were answering the questions? Did you study the scripture along with the question? The purpose of these questions is to provide you with tools to examine your heart to determine if you have pride in your heart. The single greatest reason that pride is so dangerous is that it is not something that is easily recognized or admitted. Who wants to admit that they are prideful? More of us struggle with pride than we want to admit. If your score was 85 or greater, you need to be on guard against being prideful.

Spiritual pride creates "Pharisee" believers that do not live a Christlike life that is characterized by humility, forgiveness, hope and service; esteeming others better than themselves. Spiritual pride

creates a life that is focused on yourself and what the world can provide for recognition and satisfaction. “Pharisee” believers say ‘many spiritual words’ but their actions demonstrate that their words are lies.

God opposes the proud (Prov. 3:34, James 4:6, I Pet. 5:5), therefore, we must confess and put away pride. Confession of the sin of pride to the Lord signals the beginning of the end for pride. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of the sin of pride, it is usually in a crisis of our own making where we are being faced directly with the results of pride ruling our life. It is only in those circumstances where we can we remove the lenses of pride from our eyes and see ourselves clearly and our need for Christ in our life. We either do that or pride will breed bitterness in our life toward others and God. By God’s grace, we can turn to Christ for our answer to pride. Just as pride once moved us toward eternal death, so the acknowledgement of pride in our life moves us toward life by causing us to cling to the righteousness of Christ. If we humble ourselves, God has promised to give us grace to save us (Eph. 2:8-9).

Humility – A Scriptural Analysis

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.” C.S. Lewis

“Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil’s reach as humility. Humility leads the Christian to treat others that are in fault with meekness and gentleness, as Christ did His disciples, and particularly Peter, when he had shamefully denied Him.” Jonathon Edwards

Definitions of “Humility”

To study HUMILITY, it is a requirement that we look at the definition of Humility. Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of HUMILITY:

Hebrew: to bring low, vanquish, subdue into subjection; to depress, submit self, to humble; abase, to bring down, and to put down. An illustration of this word is found in II Chron. 7:14, where the people of Israel are called to humble themselves. An illustration of this is Ahab in I Kings 21:17-29.

Greek: to depress, abase; cast down, bring low; of low degree, of humble mind, of humble heart; self-modesty. An illustration of this is found in I Peter 5:5-6.

English: having a modest estimate of one’s own importance, being lower in dignity and importance to someone else, not proud because of awareness of weakness in one’s person.

With the definition of humility firmly established, we need examine ourselves to determine if humility is ruling our life. Humility will allow you to set aside pride in order to look to Christ for salvation, which will give you eternal life. Humility will allow you to honestly look at your spiritual need for a Savior (Luke 18:9-17).

The Word of God tells us of five truths about humility.

1. Humility begins with your submission to God in Christ (Matt. 10:24). We are to humble ourselves before God (I Pet. 5:6). Humility approaches God with humble assurance in Christ Jesus.
2. Humility does not demand better treatment in one’s life than what Jesus got in His life. Therefore, humility does not return evil for evil. The humble do not live life based on their perceived rights (I Pet. 2:21-23).
3. Humility asserts truth, not to bolster one’s ego with control over others, but as service to Christ (I Cor. 13:6, II Cor. 4:5).
4. Humility is dependent on grace for all knowing and believing (I Cor. 4:7, James 1:21).

5. Humility recognizes weakness and failure, and so considers criticism and learns from it. Humility also knows that God has made provision for human conviction and that He calls us to persuade others (I Cor. 13:12, Prov. 12:15, II Cor. 5:11).

It is interesting that the English spelling of “humility” has “IL” as the center focus of the word. Humility has at its focus “ILove,” which means its focus is on others. It places God on the throne of your life and excludes self from being the ruler of your life. It is important that we search Scripture to know and understand humility. Scripture calls us to examine ourselves (II Cor. 13:5) because we are often blind to our own sin. Following are some questions for you to ask yourself. And as you examine yourself and answer the following questions honestly, you will find out if you have a heart condition that is allowing humility to rule your life. Understand that as you answer the following question, God knows your heart as nothing is hidden from Him (Luke 16:13-15).

Questions to be Asked and Answered

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to see if you have humility in your heart. As you review each question, answer it by writing down the number that best fits your response to the question. 1 = Never / No. 2 = Rarely. 3 = Sometimes / Don't know. 4 = Regularly. 5 = Always / Yes. Try your best to be honest with your answers. There are 40 questions listed below; at some points there is more than one question. Please take care to answer all of the questions.

- 1) Do you seek Christ and His will in your life before all other things? (Phil. 1:21; I Pet. 2:1-3)
 - a) Is Christ the center of your life?
 - b) Do you desire to be in the Word of God?
- 2) Is your motive to be Christlike? (Phil. 2:1-11; cf. Rom. 12:9-21)
 - a) Do you listen to others with an open heart before speaking?
 - b) Do you encourage oneness and unity, putting others before yourself?
- 3) Do you often experience heartfelt fellowship with other believers? (Acts 20:32-38; Rom. 14:19; Heb. 12:14-15; Eph. 4:1-3)
 - a) Do you seek peace with others?
 - b) Are you easily offended?
- 4) Do you prefer others before yourself? (Rom. 12:3,10)
 - a) Do you think soberly (serious, sensible, moderation, self-restraint) of yourself?
 - b) Do you arrive at meetings and/or appointments on time?
- 5) Are you open and honest about the areas where you need to grow in Christ? (Phil. 3:12-14, Psa. 119:65-72)
 - a) Are you teachable?
- 6) Are you willingly submissive and obedient to the ones in authority over you? (Heb. 13:17; James 4:6-10; cf. Rom. 13:1-2)
 - a) Do you submit yourself to God?
- 7) Do you listen to rebuke with an open heart and an attitude to change? (Prov. 15:31-33; 9:8, 27:5-6)
 - a) Do you critically examine your life in light of the rebuke, criticism or correction you have received?
- 8) Do you believe and trust in God in all circumstances you experience? (Rom. 9:19-23; I Thess. 5:16-18; cf. Psa. 116:12-19; James 1:2-7)
 - a) Are you thankful to God for all things?
- 9) Do you forgive others as Christ forgave you? (Col. 3:12-13; cf. Matt. 18:22-35)
 - a) Do you forgive quickly?
 - b) Do you seek others out to forgive them?
 - c) Do you choose not to remember hurts or offenses?

- 10) Do you critically identify and examine sin in your life before others? (Matt. 7:3-5; I John 1:8-10)
 - a) Do you repent of your sins and seek God's forgiveness?
 - b) Do you encourage believers that are struggling with sin?
- 11) Do you speak truthfully yet kindly in love? (Eph. 4:25-32; Matt. 5:43-45; I Tim. 2:1-4 (cf. Rom. 12:9-21))
 - a) Do you love your enemies?
 - b) Do you pray for your enemies and those in authority?
- 12) Are you content? (Heb. 13:5-6)
- 13) Do you seek fellowship with fellow believers? (Heb. 10:24-25)
- 14) Are you quick to listen and slow to speak? (James 1:19; Prov. 11:12-13)
 - a) Do you hold confidences of others and not share private things someone has shared with you?
- 15) Do you submit to others? (I Pet. 5:5-7; Gal. 6:1-5; cf. Luke 14:7-11; John 13:2-17)
 - a) Do you humble yourself before God and others?
 - b) Do you seek to help others?
- 16) Do you seek to obey Christ's commands? (Gal. 5:13-15; Micah 6:8; cf. II Cor. 12:7-10)
 - a) Do you set aside your personal preferences for the sake of other's spiritual health?
 - b) Do you lead by example in word and deed?

The purpose of these 40 questions is to provide you with tools to examine your heart to determine if you have humility in your heart. Were you honest with yourself in answering the questions? Did you study the scripture along with the question? Did you carefully examine your heart as you were answering the questions? More of us struggle with pride than we want to admit. One of the greatest needs in our life is a humble heart. If your score was 115 or less, you need to be on guard against being prideful. It is a challenge to be humble as Christ was humble as He set the example of the humility we are to have in our life (Phil. 2:5-11). Do you have a heart that is humble? In Isaiah 57:15 we read that the LORD will "dwell...with the contrite and lowly of spirit..." What does God see when He looks into your heart?

Humility is a prerequisite for one to become a Christian. When we come to Christ as sinners, we must come in humility (Matt. 5:3). We must acknowledge that we are paupers and beggars who come with nothing to offer Him but our sin and our need for salvation. We must recognize our lack of merit and our complete inability to save ourselves. Humility is the absence of self (Matt. 10:39, Luke 9:23-25); it is a bankruptcy of spirit (Matt. 5:3) that accrues no merit of its own but depends solely on God's righteousness for salvation (Luke 18:9-17). Humility is the sign of true faith (Micah 6:8) and it is necessary to enter God's kingdom (Matt. 5:3, 18:1-4). When God offers grace and mercy to us, we are to accept it in humble gratitude and commit our lives to Him and to others (Eph. 2:8-9).

After salvation, Jesus is our model. He did not come to be served, but to serve, so must we commit ourselves to serving others, considering their interests above our own (Phil. 2:3). This attitude precludes selfish ambition, conceit, and the strife that comes with self-justification and self-defense. Jesus was not ashamed to humble Himself as a servant (John 13:1-16), even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). In His humility, He was always obedient to the Father and so should we, as believers, be willing to put aside all selfishness and submit in obedience to God and His Word. True humility produces godliness, contentment, and security.

True humility comes through:

1. Humbling yourself (James 4:10), and
2. Repentance of sin (Luke 13:3,5), and
3. Drawing near to God (James 4:8), and

4. Submitting to God (James 4:7), and
5. Resisting the Devil (James 4:7), and
6. Living like Christ (II Cor. 5:17-21, Gal. 2:20; cf. Phil. 2:5-8, II Cor. 13:5).

The truly humble are not inclined to talk about humility or to display it in their manner of living. True humility is not noisy, especially about itself. If you are inclined to say, "No one is as sinful and depraved as I am," be careful that you don't think yourself better than others. Be careful if you develop a high opinion of your humility. If you find yourself thinking often of your humility, it is likely that you have little of it (Luke 14:11).

The truly humble think of their achievements to be comparatively low as compared to others. They truly esteem others as better than themselves; true lowliness of mind naturally thinks that others are better than themselves (Phil. 2:3). They seek to hear and to learn rather than to speak.

The truly humble, humble themselves to be as little children (Matt. 18:4). They actually are more sensitive to their sin, lack of love and their ingratitude than they are of their own spiritual attainment and knowledge of God. The truly humble are devastated by sin in their life, more than their spiritual growth and obedience to God's Word.

The truly humble does not look at what they have attained but rather at the standard of life that Christ established by His example. The truly humble judges what one does and what one has accomplished by the standard of Christ's life. In light of this, the truly humble always view their holiness and maturity in the comparison to Christ's.

Humility yields fruit in one's life which is easily observed by others. Following are the fruits of humility that are seen in one's life that has genuine faith in Christ. True humility creates "Christlike" believers that:

1. Desire to live a life that is characterized by humility, forgiveness, hope and service; esteeming others better than themselves.
2. Take little notice of opposition and wrongs or injuries that are received; and speak to others to forgive and encourage.
3. Say the words and do deeds and actions that demonstrate that their words are truth.
4. Are focused on doing the will of God to bring others to salvation.

Those who stand in the strength of Christ's righteousness alone find a confident hiding place from the attacks of men and Satan alike. True humility is *not* knocked off balance and thrown into a defensive posture by challenge or rebuke, but instead continues in doing good, entrusting their soul to Christ.

"For the humble Christian, the more the world is against him, the more silent and still he will be, unless it is in his prayer closet, and there he will not be still." Jonathon Edwards

As a believer in Christ, we are to live humbly with the mind of Christ just as Christ lived and set an example, a standard, for us (Phil. 2:1-11). Also, we are to love humbly with love toward others just as Christ loved, which set a standard for us (Eph. 5:1-21).

Our desire and prayer should be the same as King David when he declared in Psalm 139:23-24; "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." We are to examine our self in the light of God's Word (I Cor. 11:27-32). What is God seeing as He looks into our hearts?

Judgmental Judging or Right Judgment?

Pride and Humility produce fruit. The fruit of pride is willful judgment of others; being judgmental. The fruit of humility is right judgment, judging with wise discernment after careful examination of oneself. The Law of Contrast can effectively be used to examine the difference between being Judgmental and judging with Discerning Examination. We will define and examine judgment and discernment on the basis of Scripture. By examining both we will be able to clearly define what rules our heart – critical judgment (being judgmental) or judging with discernment by careful examination.

Definitions of “Judge” and “Judgment”

To study the issue of “judging”, it is a requirement that we look at the definition of JUDGE and JUDGMENTAL. Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of JUDGE and JUDGMENT. The term JUDGMENTAL is an English term only, but the definition of JUDGMENTAL applies directly to our study of Judging.

Judge –

- **Hebrew** (*‘shaphat’*) – pronounce sentence (vindicate, punish), litigate (condemn, defend); (*‘deen/door’*) – umpire, contend, execute judgment, strive
- **Greek** (*‘krino’*) – to separate, select, choose, to determine, to distinguish, decide, condemn, punish, go to law (sue), call into question (*‘krisis’*) - a separating then decision, a forensic separating then judgment, accusation, condemnation, damnation (*‘anakrino’*) – scrutinize, question, discern, examine, search (*anakrasis’*) - judicial investigation, examination
- **English** - one who makes judgments: to form an opinion about through careful weighing of evidence and testing of premises

Judgment –

- **Hebrew** (*‘mishpat/shephat’*) - verdict, decree, manner of law, measure / sentence, litigate (vindicate / punish), rule
- **Greek** (*‘krima’*) – decision (for/against), go to law, condemnation
- **English** - the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions, form an opinion or conclusion about, decide, give a verdict, decide results

Judgmental –

- **English** - the use of judgment that is expressed as having or displaying an excessively critical point of view.

New Testament – Greek Definitions of Judge and Judgment

1. *“anakrino”* – to separate out to investigate, to scrutinize, question, discern, search, examine, investigate, to examine. (Luke 23:14, Acts 17:11, I Cor. 2:14-15, 4:3-4, 10:27, 14:24)
2. *“dikastes”* – a judge. (Acts 7:25, 27)
3. *“diakrino”* – to separate, discriminate, to learn by discriminating, to determine, to decide. (Matt. 16:3, I Cor. 6:5, 11:29, 11:31, 14:29)
4. *“diakristis”* – a distinguishing, a clear discrimination, discerning, judging, to discern. (I Cor. 12:10, Heb. 5:14) (alternate: Rom. 14:1 – “judgments of reasonings”)
5. *“dokimazo”* – to test, to prove, to scrutinize, to decide. (Luke 12:56)
6. *“gnome”* – a means of knowing, understanding, a mind
 - a. A purpose (Acts 20:3)
 - b. A decree (Rev. 17:17)

- c. An opinion, judgment (I Cor. 1:10, Rev. 17:13)
 - d. Counsel, advice (I Cor. 7:25, 7:40, Philemon 14)
7. *"hemera"* – day of judgment (I Cor. 4:3, Rev. 1:10)
 8. *"hupodikos"* – brought to trial, answerable to (Rom. 3:19)
 9. *"krima"* – to judge.
 - a. Decision based on the faults of others (Matt. 7:2)
 - b. Man's judgment (Luke 24:20)
 - c. God's judgment (Rom 2:2-3, 3:8, 5:16, 11:33, 13:2, I Cor. 11:29, Gal. 5:10, Heb. 6:2, James 3:1)
 - d. The right of judgment (Rev. 20:4)
 - e. Lawsuit (I Cor. 6:7)
 10. *"krino"* to separate, select, choose, to determine, to distinguish, decide, condemn, punish, go to law (sue), call into question; to judge, to pronounce judgment.
 - a. Assuming office/position of judge (Matt. 7:1, John 3:17, Rom. 2:1,3)
 - b. Undergo process of a trial (John 3:18, 16:11, 18:31, James 2:12)
 - c. Give sentence (Acts 15:19, 16:4, 21:25)
 - d. To condemn (John 12:48, Acts 13:27, Rom. 2:27)
 - e. To execute judgment upon (Acts 7:7, II Thess. 2:12)
 - f. To be involved in a lawsuit (Matt.5:40, Acts 23:7, I Cor. 6:1)
 - g. To govern (Matt. 19:28)
 - h. To form an opinion (Luke 7:43, John 7:24, Acts 4:19, Rom. 14:4)
 - i. To make a resolve (Acts 3:13, 20:16, I Cor. 2:2)
 11. *"krisis"* – a separating then decision, a forensic separating then judgment, accusation, condemnation, damnation - most time referring to divine judgment. (II Thess. 1:5, Heb. 9:27, 10:27, James 2:13, II Pet. 2:4, 2:9, 3:7, I John 4:17, Jude 6, 15, Rev. 14:7, 18:10)
 12. *"krites"* – a judge. (Matt. 5:25, 12:27, Luke 12:58, 18:2, Acts 10:42, 13:20, 18:15, 24:10, Heb. 12:23, James 2:4, 4:12)
 13. *"kritikos"* – that which relates to judging, fit for or skilled in judging, to be critical of, discriminating and passing judgment. (Heb. 4:12)

Judging

What is scriptural "judging?" What is unscriptural "judging?" The Bible states that there are two ways to judge others. One way is to judge their motives, which is sinful. The other way is to judge their actions, which is right to do. Sadly, people often mistake what the Bible actually says about judging others by misapplying one of these truths. Sinful pride is the source of being judgmental in judging. Scriptural humility is the source of discerning examination. The first focus of the study of "judging" is to look at the negative side – being "judgmental." The most quoted passage of scripture by believers and unbelievers about 'judging' is Matthew 7:1-5; especially 7:1 and the phrase "Judge not!" Clearly there are two forms of judgment, one focusing on the motives and the other focusing on the actions. We will begin with the negative 'judging,' the judging of another person's motives. This is "judging" with a "judgmental" attitude.

It should be noted that Matthew 7:1-5 has erroneously been used to suggest that believers should never evaluate or criticize anyone for anything. Today there is an aversion to absolute truth and moral absolutes as many people, including believers, tend to resist strong convictions about right and wrong. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1 – 7:27), uses the Law of Contrast to show the clear distinction between true religion and false religion, between spiritual truth and spiritual hypocrisy. Jesus

places God's perfect and holy standards beside the unholy and self-righteous standards of the scribes and Pharisees and declares that those who follow those unholy and self-righteous standards have no part in God's kingdom (Matt. 5:20). No more judgmental sermon has ever been preached than what Christ taught in His Sermon on the Mount. .

Jesus taught, in His Sermon on the Mount, that believers are to be discerning and perceptive in what they believe and in what they do; and that they must make every effort to judge between truth and falsehood, which is the fundamental difference between God's way and man's way.

Judgmental Judging – A Scriptural Analysis

What Judging is Not to Be

Christ addresses 'judging' in His Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7 Christ addresses the issue of 'judging' straight forward by declaring "Do not judge (*'krino'*), so that you will not be judged (*'krino'*); for in the way you judge (*'krima'*) you will be judged (*'krino'*), and by your standard of measure, it will be measured unto you" (NASB). Christ is very specific here in His teaching that we are not to judge other people's motives. Throughout Christ's Sermon on the Mount, He spent time focused on the heart and one's motives. We should not and we must not judge the motives of those who say they are believers based on their decisions, actions, perspectives, words, or personality if their actions are not explicitly sinful (cf. I Cor. 4:5). We cannot assume sin if we suspect sin, given how biased and imperfect our judgment is.

In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus is referring to the judgment of motives, which no human being can know of another human being. Paul says, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way" (Rom. 14:13). Therefore, we cannot and must not judge a believer's motives because when we do, we are engaging in support of a works-based view of salvation. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was explaining that it was impossible for people to save themselves because even if they obeyed the law perfectly, their inner hearts and motivations were still sinful. The Bible says we should not judge others' motives because if God was to judge our motives and only save us based upon the inner righteousness we have on our own, we would be doomed.

What We Must Not Judge

When Paul wrote, "do not pronounce judgment before the time" (I Cor. 4:5), he was referring to a debate among Corinthian Christians over whether Paul, Apollos, or Peter (Cephas) was the most authoritative apostle (cf. I Cor. 1:11-12; 3:3-4). Why were they quarrelling over such a thing? We don't know. What we know is that the Corinthians had personal knowledge of and experience with these apostles and there were in debate. It appears that some may have misunderstood something Paul said or did and took offense. Whatever happened, some of the Corinthian Christians had 'judged' Paul and were calling his ministry and character into question (cf. I Cor. 4:3). And we find that is true today because we often judge pastors and leaders in our churches based on an opinionated view based on our observations and experiences.

Unfortunately, most of us are guilty of this when we judge church leaders, church members or others within the church community. Often, we rush to a judgment based on opinions and emotions. Pride is at work when this happens. Pride leads us into a judgmental opinion, then to disagreement, then to

suspicion and lack of trust, and then to judgment. In such cases, we must remember Jesus's words, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment" (John 7:24). We cannot judge other Christians' 'hidden purposes of the heart' as sinful if they disagree with us on issues not directly addressed by Scripture. Or, as often is the case, where we have misinterpreted scripture or have placed our opinion on what a scripture passage means without careful study. We may discuss and examine, but we may not judge. Jesus will judge. It is for him alone to bring to light what is now hidden and to commend or rebuke (cf. I Cor. 4:5).

In Matt. 7:1-2, Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." This teaching of Jesus is widely misunderstood. The common phrase we often hear is, "Don't judge me." What's interesting is that the application of this 'phrase' by almost all people, believers and unbelievers, is the inverse application of Jesus's lesson. Jesus is not telling others not to judge us; he's telling us not to judge others. What others do is not our primary concern; what we do is our primary concern. Our biggest problem is not how others judge us, but how we judge others.

Jesus is the example to look at to correctly understand His teaching. One of the best examples of His not judging is His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-26). The Jews (and especially the Pharisees) considered the Samaritans as unclean apostates; they had no dealings with them. In Jesus' day public conversations between men and women were prohibited; and Jesus initiated the conversation by asking the women for a drink. The Samaritan woman was coming to the well at noon, an unusual time because the women came to the well in the morning. She probably came to the well at this time because it was at a time when other women were not there. She had been divorced 5 times (at a time when only men could initiate a divorce) probably due to her immoral behavior and she was being shunned and abused by other women – and for good reason. If there was any person who could be judged for their behavior, it was the Samaritan women. Yet Jesus was not judgmental as His dealings with her. First – He initiated the discussion (John 4:7); second – He initiated a discussion with a Samaritan (John 4:9); third – He initiated the discussion with a woman (John 4:9); and fourth – He initiated a discussion with an immoral woman; a woman of reputation (John 4:17-18). Yet Jesus did not condemn her, rather He shared with her that the time was at hand for her to worship the Father in spirit and truth. A similar incident occurred in John 8:1-11, where a woman was brought to Him by the Pharisees who they had entrapped in an immoral act (John 8:3-4). As before with the Samaritan women, she was a woman who had been engaged in immorality (possibly a woman of reputation). Did Jesus judge her for her actions and agree with the Pharisees to condemn her and sentence her to death? No. As before – He initiated the discussion with her, a woman (John 8:10) and He did not condemn her (John 8:11). As before, He shared with her the admonishment to "sin no more" because He was the "light of the world" (John 8:12). These real events demonstrate the grace that the LORD has provided to us – and that is the grace we are to extend to others.

Christ is the example we are to follow. We are not to be judgmental with others. In contrast there is a group of people in the New Testament that did not extend grace to others, but rather were judgmental with all they came in contact with – the religious fundamentalist of the day – the Pharisees. They judged everyone, especially Jesus and those who followed Him. They lived their life by always comparing themselves to others. They were exacting students of the Word of God and had turned the Word of God into a man-made legalistic religion system that they forced upon people. This was the primary issue that Christ was addressing when He gave His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1 – 7:27). It is interesting to note that the times Christ addresses or warns of hell is when He was talking to the Pharisees. Why, because the Pharisees had placed themselves in the position of God as they judged the people around

them. This is most evident when they brought Jesus before them to ‘try’ Him and ‘convict’ Him before His crucifixion. The contrast between the Pharisees (‘judgmental’) and Jesus (‘non-judgmental’) is most evident when Jesus was meeting with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, when He tells Nicodemus that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 – NKJ). The only people Jesus continually ‘judged’ were the religious people of the day – the ones who went around telling people that they spoke for God and being judgmental on everyone’s behavior but their own.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

As you review each question, answer it by writing down the number that best fits your response to the question. 1 = Never / Happy / No / Positively. 2 = Rarely / Pleased. 3 = Sometimes / Neutral / Don’t know. 4 = Regularly / Questioning. 5 = Always / Unhappy / Yes / Negatively. Try your best to be honest with your answers.

1. How do you respond to someone who has just announced that they are going to do something you have always wanted to do?
2. How do you respond to someone who has just gotten something or achieved something that you have always wanted to get or to achieve?
3. How do you respond to someone who has the same problem over and over, and they are now telling you about it again?
4. How do you respond to someone who will not engage you when you are talking to them?
5. How do you respond to someone who seems to be arrogant or pushy?
6. How do you respond to someone who you believe is not being honest with you?
7. How do you respond to someone when you tell them of something you enjoyed but they did not share in your enjoyment?
8. How do you respond to someone that you have been told has a reputation for being opinionated, arrogant and self-centered?
9. How do you respond to someone who does not normally associate with you who now comes to you and asks you to do something for them?
10. Do you look for the negative or positive before going somewhere and/or doing something?
11. Do you believe that ‘you know’ what God thinks about certain situations that other people are found to be in?
12. Do you believe that ‘you know’ what someone has done to get in the situation that other people are found to be in?
13. Do you believe that ‘you know’ what someone is thinking and have predetermined what your response will be to them?
14. Do you believe that ‘you know’ when someone should have been in church to hear a message that addressed the problem or issue ‘you think’ they have?
15. Do you often view others who see things differently than you, as people you should confront or correct?
16. Do you often view others who see things differently than you, as people who need to learn what ‘you know’?
17. Do you talk about other’s activities and life?
18. Do you use ‘prayer requests’ or ‘prayer time’ to inform others about another person’s situation?
19. Do you talk about other people behind their backs?
20. Do you believe that ‘you know’ what someone is saying is a lie because ‘you know’ that what they are saying is not what they are thinking?
21. When you see someone wearing something you dislike, do you judge them for it?

22. When someone gives you a cheap gift or no gift, do you judge them for it?
23. Do you judge someone when they do not respond positively or not at all for something that you went out of the way to do for them or give to them?
24. Do you measure a people's worth based on what they do for a living?
25. Do you measure people's success based on how much money they have?
26. Do you have strong opinions on preferences that you 'share with' or 'confront' others with?
27. Do you look down on people who are not 'at or on your level' or not doing what you think they should be doing?
28. Do you disrespect others?
29. Are you impolite to some people?
30. Do you laugh at or make fun of others at their expense?
31. Do you feel you are the most complete and mature person 'you know' when you compare yourself to others?
32. Do you feel you are 'normal' and certain other people are 'not normal'?
33. Do you judge someone who likes music that you don't like?
34. Do you judge someone by the type of clothes they wear?
35. Do you judge someone by what they spend their time doing?
36. Do you judge someone by the behavior of their child or children?
37. Do you judge someone by the number of children they have?
38. Do you judge someone by the house they live in or the car they drive?
39. Do you judge someone when they choose to work in a career that they are not well suited to do?
40. Do you judge someone if they have lost their job and they have not found a job because they are not looking for a job?
41. How do you respond to one who is in authority who asks you to do something that you do not want to do?
42. How do you respond to someone who challenges you about something they have observed in your life?
43. How do you respond to someone who is doing something in a way that 'you know' how to do it better?

Did you answer the above 43 questions honestly? Did you carefully examine your heart as you were answering the questions? The purpose of these questions is to provide you with tools to examine your heart to determine if you have a habit of judging other people's motives. If your score was 125 or greater, you need to be on guard against being judgmental.

The truth is that how we look at and 'judge' others is a direct declaration to others of what is in your heart (cf. Prov. 4:23). Even secular studies validate this truth. How you judge other people is how they perceive and judge you. If you are not judgmental with others then others are not judgmental about you. It has been accurately stated – "what you send out is what you receive back." We see that principle in Proverbs 15:1 and Galatians 6:7. If you are judgmental with others then that is usually how others see you; and they are judgmental back to you. A recent secular study made this statement regarding people who were judgmental: "The simple tendency to see people negatively indicates a greater likelihood of depression and various personality disorders for the people who see others negatively." We are not to be judgmental but rather we are to judge with discernment – and that should be done slowly. We should be slow to judge.

There Is a Difference Between Judging Others' Motives and Others' Actions

There is a biblical difference between judging people's motives and judging people's actions. The judgment of people's actions should be based on careful, discerning examination. The difference is demonstrated by the action you take. If you perceive sin in the life of another, pray for them, counsel them and befriend them to help them, this is a healthy use of biblical discernment. However, if you believe there is sin in the heart of another and you accuse them through your conversation with others proclaiming that 'you know' for certain that their motives are sinful because of what you have observed them doing, then you are not using discernment but are merely being prideful and judgmental.

This is especially important because many situations we face are not clear-cut. Often the difference between 'judging hidden heart purposes' and 'calling out sin' is slight and hard to determine. So it is best to be slow to judge. When blatant sin is confirmed, we must lovingly confront other believers. But we must be very slow to judge, exercising great care and restraint. Our sinful flesh has a hair-trigger to judge others with a judgmental attitude. We must have a healthy suspicion of our own pride, and keep Jesus's words in mind: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1).

Right Judgment – A Scriptural Analysis What Judging Is to Be: Discerning Examination

Definitions of "Discern" and "Examine"

To study "Judging" it is a requirement that we look at the definitions of DISCERN and EXAMINE.

Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of DISCERN:

- **Hebrew:** (*'nakar'*) to scrutinize, look intently (Gen 31:32)
(*'shama'*) to hear intelligently, obey diligently, discern (I King 3:11)
(*'yada'*) to know, advise, answer (II Sam 19:35)
- **Greek:** (*'diakrino'*) separate thoroughly, discriminate, decide, judge (Matt. 16:3)
(*'diakrsis'*) judicial estimation, disputation (Heb. 5:14)
(*'dokimazo'*) test to approve, discern, examine, prove (Luke 12:56)
(*'kritikos'*) decisive, discriminative (Heb. 4:12)
- **English:** the ability to judge well, perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual direction and understanding.

Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of EXAMINE:

- **Hebrew:** (*'bachan'*) to test, investigate, prove (Psa. 26:2)
- **Greek:** (*'dokimazo'*) to test, examine, prove (I Cor.11:28)
(*'peirazo'*) to test, experience, assay, try (Acts 28:18)
(*'anakrino'*) to scrutinize, question, discern, search, examine, investigate (Luke 23:14)
- **English:** a detailed inspection or investigation, a detailed, through inspection to determine nature or condition

In its simplest definition, discernment is nothing more than the ability to decide between truth and error, right and wrong. Discernment coupled with careful examination is the process of making careful judgements in our thinking about truth. In other words, the ability to think with discernment is synonymous with an ability to think and judge biblically.

Right Judgment: Discerning Examination

Believers are not to judge other believers. And believers are to judge other believers. What appears to be a contradiction is exactly what the Word of God teaches. Paul says both things in his first letter to the Corinthians. In I Corinthians 4:5, Paul states that believers are not to 'judge' one another because the LORD will judge the 'the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart.' Then Paul writes in I Corinthians 5:12, after he has presented his judgement on overt sin in the church in 5:9-11, that believers are to judge believers when explicitly sinful behavior is observed in the life of a believer; "Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge." Paul clearly is instructing us that there are things we must not judge (the motives of people) and there are things we must judge (explicit public sin). Jesus taught this in Matthew 12:33 when He stated to the Pharisees that a "tree is known by its fruit."

The key to victorious Christian living lies in one's ability to exercise discernment in every area of life. Unfortunately, discernment is an area where most Christians stumble. They exhibit little ability to measure the things they are taught against the infallible standard of God's Word, and they unwittingly engage in all kinds of unbiblical decision-making and behavior. Many believers are not grounded enough in God's Word to take a biblical stand against the biblical thinking and attitudes that face them throughout their day.

Discernment intersects the Christian life at every point. And God's Word provides us with the needed discernment about every issue of life. Peter wrote: God "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (II Peter 1:3). It is through the "true knowledge of Him," that we have been given everything we need to live a Christian life in this world.

Discernment -- the ability to think biblically about all areas of life -- is indispensable to an uncompromising life. It is incumbent upon each believer to seek and learn the discernment that God has provided for us in His Word. Without being grounded in the Word, believers are at risk of being "tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). In I Thessalonians 5:21-22 we read that it is the responsibility of every Christian to be discerning: "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil." John issues a similar warning when he says, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). According to the New Testament, discernment is not optional for the believer; it is required.

"Discernment is not only knowing the difference between Right and Wrong; it is knowing the difference between Right and Almost Right."— Charles Spurgeon

The Bible Does Say Christians Are to Judge Other Christian's Sinful Actions

As a genuine believer, when we sin, our fellow believers have a Scriptural basis and obligation to judge us. They must not condemn us, but they must, out of love, call us to repentance. Such judgment is a grace because the call to repentance is an expression of God's kindness (cf. Rom. 2:4).

In Matthew 7:3-4, we see that Jesus introduces a new responsibility for the believer; they are to judge another's sinful actions. Jesus is telling His followers that they are to be extremely careful when they judge the actions of others. So, we should spend most of our time judging our own actions before judging the sinful actions of other people. We should be examining the 'log in our own eye' (the sin in our life) before we begin to exam and judge the sin in the life of other people.

Understanding that, we can correctly understand Matthew 7:5. Jesus didn't say it is wrong to judge believers when they have 'specks of sin' in their lives. He didn't say it was hypocritical to judge other believers when there is sin in their lives. BUT, He did say such judgment would be hypocritical if we didn't first judge ourselves. Once we identify, confess and repent of sin that we know exists within our heart, we are then to help people with their sin. It is only after we have addressed sin in our life that we can help remove 'specks of sin' from our fellow believers' lives.

As we have noted before in I Corinthians 4:4-5: "It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart." The Word of God states that the LORD alone has the right and power to judge other people's heart (cf. I Sam. 16:7); therefore, we are not to judge people's hearts because we are not qualified to do so.

But we find in I Corinthians 5:12-13 that Paul is instructing the church at Corinth on how to deal with a brother's sexual sin that is occurring in the church. In I Corinthians 5:12-13, Paul writes: "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'" Here the Word of God is instructing believers to judge other believers when there is external public sin that is impacting the testimony of Christ to the unbelievers and causing a stumbling block for believers. This passage is referring to a person who claims to be a believer. Believers are only to judge other believer's external sins, not the sins of unbelievers. This passage is referring to a believer who is in an unrepentant, ongoing, habitual, public sin. We are only to execute judgment on those who claim to be a believer and continue to publicly sin refusing to repent of sin. When a genuine believer repents of their sin, even if they must repent often, we are not to judge them.

It is interesting to note Jesus' words in Matthew 7:6: "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces (NKJV)." He is stating that we, as believers, are not to judge those who are unwilling to listen. The principle being taught by Jesus is how one is to handle the truth in the face of those who hate the truth (cf. Prov. 9:8). If a person who is publicly sinning claims to be a believer, they will listen to correction. If a person who claims to be a believer but will not listen to those who confront them about their sin, they are probably not a genuine believer. We must exercise care to discern the other person's spiritual heart and desire, then do what would be accepted and beneficial for all involved. Prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer to prepare hearts is needed to know the LORD's will and the Holy Spirit's leading when confronting someone who has explicit, habitual sin in their life.

Caution: Judge at Your Own Risk

When Jesus stated, "Judge not," He was not a prohibition on judging others, but rather He was issuing a serious warning that we are to take great care how we judge others, as we noted before (cf. Matt. 7:3-5). How we judge others says far more about us than how we are judged by others for two reasons. One – what we say, how we say it and when we say it shows everyone how you think and what is in your heart (cf. Matt. 15:18). Two – the standard that we use to judge others will be the same standard by which others will judge you (cf. Matt. 7:2).

Jesus' warning is needed. It is meant to give us serious pause and examine ourselves before saying anything. Our old nature is profoundly selfish and proud; and we are often very hypocritical, because we will judge ourselves lightly (i.e. – we rationalize everything we do) but we will judge others severely. What Jesus forbids is self-righteous, officious, hasty, unmerciful, prejudiced, and unwarranted

condemnation based on human standards and human understanding; in other words, He forbids us to be judgmental. He gives three reasons why such judgment is sinful, because: 1) it reveals an erroneous view of God, 2) an erroneous view of others, and 3) an erroneous view of ourselves.

It is better to “judge not” than to judge like this, since we will be judged in the same way we judge others. Jesus takes judgment very seriously. He is the righteous judge (II Tim. 4:8), who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). He does not judge by appearances, but judges with right judgment (John 7:24). And every judgment He pronounces issues from His core loving nature (I John 4:8). Therefore, when we judge, we must take great care that our judgment, like Christ’s, is always with gentleness and love.

The LORD has given to us many examples of the care we ourselves should take before making judgments, especially those that involve serious consequences. Before He judged those who were building the tower of Babel; “the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” (Gen. 11:5). Before He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah He said, “I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know” (Gen. 18:21).

Unrighteous and unmerciful judgment is forbidden first of all because it manifests a wrong view of God. With the phrase ‘lest you be judged’ (Matt. 7:1), Jesus reminded the scribes and Pharisees that they are not the final court; they are not the judge just as we are not the judge. To judge another person’s motives is to place yourself in the position of the Jesus Christ the LORD. “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). Paul wrote: “To his own master he stands or falls” (Rom. 14:4). Paul was not concerned about how other people judged him, and was not even concerned about how he judged himself. “I am conscious of nothing against myself,” he says, “yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:3–4).

There must be a biblical balance that we must keep before we judge someone. When someone who claims to be a believer is continually teaching false doctrine or following habits and lifestyles that are clearly unscriptural, we have foundation to judge righteously. But we warned by James; “Do not speak against one another. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?” (James 4:11–12). Such judgment is blasphemous to the LORD, because it sets a man up as God; and He is the only one true Judge. Whenever we judge people to condemnation without mercy because they do not do something the way we think it ought to be done or because we believe their motives are wrong, we pass judgment that only God is qualified to make.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

As you consider confronting someone that has publicly exhibited willful sin in their life that is directly against the commands of Jesus and the Word of God, consider the following questions that will help with the preparation of your heart preparation before confronting someone.

1. Is my motive pure?
2. Is my greatest concern spiritual deliverance or restoration?
3. Have I dealt with my own sin issues before I approach someone else about sin in their life?
4. Am I approaching this issue as a self-righteous hypocrite, or am I offering truth as one who is equally in need of God’s transforming grace?
5. Am I doing this to show someone how much I know?

6. Am I doing this to show someone how much better I am than they are?
7. Am I more concerned about winning the battle than I am concerned about the other person's need for salvation or spiritual growth?
8. Am I prepared to give a biblical and gracious defense of my position?
9. Am I addressing a truth issue, or is this a preference issue?
10. Is this the best time to have this conversation?
11. Have I thoroughly prayed over this conversation?
12. Am I reacting in pride or humility?
13. Are my emotions sinfully involved with this issue?
14. Can I convey love to the other person as I deliver this message of truth?
15. Is the other person's behavior actually my business?
16. Is the issue at hand a matter of my opinion or biblical standards, truth and the testimony of Christ?
17. Does the issue at hand really matter?
18. Are my words, thoughts and actions purposeful or beneficial?
19. Do I have mercy and compassion for the person?
20. What is my ultimate purpose?

We need to be sure of our heart condition before the LORD before we confront others about sin in their life. Following are suggestions for you to consider:

1. Be Quick to Believe Innocence

Be slow to confront and pronounce guilt when what you know is hearsay or ambiguous. This runs counter to our fallen, old human nature. What we see in our culture today encourages self-centeredness and self-gratification that pushes us into judgmental attitudes. We should presume innocence until sufficient evidence demonstrates explicit habitual sin that God condemns beyond a reasonable doubt.

2. Be Thorough Before Final Judgment

Be careful to examine all aspects of a situation or circumstance before you make a judgment. Our own life experience and the experience of others throughout human history have taught us that appearances can be deceiving. Also, we know that "reasonable" people have conscious and unconscious biases that shape how they interpret public actions and events. We must be rigorous and diligent in evaluating what we have been told and what we have observed. We must work to ensure that deceptive appearances and biases do not distort the truth. This process requires diligence, patience, and restraint. When Paul wrote, "love believes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7), he was talking about this kind of charitable judgment. When we confront someone, we must remember how faulty our perceptions are and how biases distort our judgment. We often think we understand what's going on; when in reality we do not. From a distance, love covering a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8; cf. Prov. 10:12) includes not repeating a matter (Prov. 17:9). As a believer, we are called to believe the best about each other until sufficient evidence confirms beyond a reasonable doubt that habitual, public sin is being practiced by an individual who calls Christ as their Savior.

Also, it is very important to make the determination if the issue at hand is blatant sin against a clear command of the LORD – or if it is an offense created by someone whose preference was not shared by the person being examined. The Word of God forbids hasty judgments that do not have full knowledge of the heart or of the facts. "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13). Sometimes what appears to be wrong is not wrong. There is a great gulf between sin (a moral

act that is a transgression against divine law) and preference (a preferred liking of one thing over another thing; a liking not related to a standard or a law but opinion). Most judgments made by believers today are in the area of preferences and not over explicit, overt sin.

3. Aim for Restoration

When a careful examination is done and it is known, for a fact, that explicit, overt, habitual sin is being practiced; then we confront with gentleness and love with the purpose of restoring fellowship with the person. If we're personally involved in such a situation, our goal in confronting someone caught in sin is to gain back our brother or sister (cf. Matt. 18:15). Our goal in confronting a believer caught in sin is not punitive, but redemptive. We must vigilantly remain "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave us" (Eph. 4:32). Even if the individual confronted is unrepentant and fellowship must be severed, the purpose remains redemptive and restorative for that person – individually and for the church.

The challenge with confrontation and righteous judgment is the wounding it causes. Most of us tend to allow the judgments of others to sink into our hearts, by which we are often 'hurt' and react negatively to. Be sensitive and loving when you confront someone. Do so with love and mercy with the goal of restoration. Yes, tone of voice and attitude presented to those you confront will often send a stronger message than your words.

4. Judge with Right Judgment

How we judge others says far more about us than how we are judged by others. This is why God will judge us in the manner we judge others, not in the manner they judge us. Therefore, we must judge with right judgment (John 7:24). And right judgment is reasonably quick to believe innocence, reasonably slow to pronounce guilt, reasonably redemptive when it must be, and reasonably silent if at all possible. (*Reasonably: the act of being fair, sensible, sound judgment based on good sense and understanding, appropriate*) And when in doubt, "judge not."

Jesus provides us with an example of judging with right judgment when He addressed the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery. He also provided us with an example of judging with right judgment when He addressed hypocritical scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:1-36. There Christ judged the scribes and Pharisees for being hypocrites because of their selfish leadership and actions as they led the people of Israel. All of Christ's confronting statements were based on scripture and dealt with habitual sin that was leading those who followed them to hell. Christ's confrontation was based on biblical truth, no opinion; and it was based on what the scribes and Pharisees were publicly doing that was demonstrating their heart's condition. This is an example of judging with right judgment.

God has provided us with His judgment through His Word. When Christians address moral issues and make a judgment based on Scripture, we are not "judging" that individual on the basis of our own authority. Our judgment is delivered from the authority of God's Word—not our own fallible word or opinion. We must take care not to mishandle His Word or misinterpret it. We need to know His Word so when we confront another believer about their habitual, public sin; we deliver clear Scriptural truth so it is God's Word bringing judgment, not our personal opinion.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he provides us with guidance on how we approach someone when we need to confront them and "deliver a message of judgment" (a word of truth from Scripture): "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). This is the guiding principle for us to follow as we approach someone who is "caught" or entangled in a sinful lifestyle. Paul warns us

that we are in danger of falling into the same sin as the brother we are confronting; and we must be careful and watchful of our own hearts. Our motive in judging and confronting another believer about offenses made or explicit overt sin must be reconciliation and restoration.

Bitterness or Forgiveness?

Pride produces judgmental judging. Humility produces discerning examination; which means judging with right judgment. From these two different foundations that we see two different fruits: bitterness or forgiveness.

The Law of Contrast can effectively be used to examine the difference between bitterness and forgiveness. We will define and examine bitterness and forgiveness on the basis of Scripture. By examining both we will be able to clearly define what resides within our heart – bitterness or forgiveness.

Definition of “Bitterness”

To study “Bitterness” it is a requirement that we look at the definitions of BITTERNESS. Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of BITTERNESS:

- **Hebrew:** (*‘mar / marah’*) anger, angry, heavy discontent (I Sam. 1:10; Isa. 38:15)
(*‘marar’*) to cause to be bitter, to make bitter, to be moved to grieve (Isa. 38:17)
(*‘mamror’*) a bitter calamity (Job 9:18)
(*‘rosh / rowsh’*) poisonous, venom (Deut. 29:18)
- **Greek:** (*‘pikria’*) sharp, piercing; poison (Rom. 3:14; Eph. 4:31; Heb. 12:15)
(*‘chole’*) bile, poison (Acts 8:23)
- **English:** anger and disappointment at being treated unfairly, resentment; sharpness, lack of sweetness; angry, hurt, resentful, sense of unjust treatment, emotional painful hurt, unpleasant to contemplate

Bitterness

When pride and a judgmental attitude is at work and present in someone’s life, often there are personal relationship challenges because pride and a judgmental attitude create anger, strife and offense. Such is the state on sinful man that when humility and careful examination work together, there are personal relationship challenges because sinful man will react to such confrontation with anger and offense. When anger and offense work together, the fruit is bitterness.

What does the Bible say about bitterness? One of the most well-known stories of bitterness in the Bible is the story of Cain and Abel. Cain becomes consumed by bitterness for his brother and God when he feels unjustly treated. Cain became bitter because he disobeyed God’s command, which caused God to reject his gift of worship. Abel obeyed God’s command, which caused God to recognize and blessed it. The reaction of Cain against his brother Abel was based on Cain’s pride and judgmental attitude. Cain damns God and kills his brother out of hatred - and pity for himself. This story shows us what bitterness is as well as warning us of the sinful consequence of bitterness.

Bitterness is best examined by seeking the biblical use and definition of bitterness. In Deuteronomy 29 Moses is speaking to the nation of Israel about the Covenant between the LORD and Israel; and the need of Israel to remain faithful to the LORD when they are surrounded by peoples who worship idols. In Deuteronomy 29:18 we read: “...so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe,

whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go *and* serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness /a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.” And what causes this ‘poisonous and bitter fruit’ mentioned in 29:18? The answer is found in Deuteronomy 29:19 (NIV): “When such a person hears the words of this oath and they invoke a blessing on themselves, thinking, “I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way,” they will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry.” The answer to what creates a ‘poisonous and bitter fruit’ in one’s life – selfish pride. Moses was instructing the nation of Israel to be extremely vigilant against the sin of idolatry; because once that sin took root it would yield a poisonous fruit. In the case of Israel, their pride and persistence in going their own way and doing their own thing resulted in a turning away from and a rejection of the LORD. And that is exactly what bitterness in one’s life will do today; it will turn you away from following the LORD.

Bitterness in one’s life is always based on pride and self-will; and it comes deceptively easy to the human heart where it can flourish because it is attended to very well by the host. There is a lot of scripture that speaks directly to bitterness. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians spoke to them directly about this because of issues within the church at Ephesus (cf. Eph. 4:31-32). Today bitterness is a major issue within personal relationships and the church; and it is destroying the testimony of Christ to unsaved family members, neighbors and the community.

What Causes Bitterness?

The seed of bitterness is a hurt that is planted in someone. It may be intentional or unintentional. Someone does not mean to hurt you, but you were hurt. Sometimes the hurt is only imagined. No one has hurt you, but somehow you feel that someone has done something wrong to you. The soil of bitterness is a heart that harbors hostility and does not deal with hurt by the grace of God. When someone becomes bitter, the bitterness takes root in the heart and grows deeper. The world is full of people who have not dealt with an old hurt. When hurts have not been properly and biblically dealt with, resentment and bitterness set in. They look for things to criticize, people to find fault with, and ways to justify the way they feel. Have you ever seen people who are hypercritical? Generally, they are bitter people. They seek to push and know how to push ‘hot buttons’ until they get people to react in a way to justify their bitterness.

Bitterness has its beginning with an angry feeling over a specific offense. Bitterness involves angry feelings that we hang on to. Anger turns into resentment as we continue to think about the offense. Resentment and bitterness are two sides of the same coin. Resentment and bitterness are both passive-aggressive reactions to anger. Resentment is the attitude people have toward someone or something. Bitterness is the internal emotion that drives resentment. Left unchecked, resentment and bitterness will consume one’s life because it changes the heart; it will become the state of your life. Resentment and bitterness often resurfaces when you are around the person who has offended you; so often we avoid them. If you have bitterness within, you become jaded about everything that person does; to the point that you do not seek to engage with them in anything. Also, when resentment and bitterness are present, you usually will assume the worst and attach the worst motive to everything they do. Even when efforts are made to reconcile, you will refuse to talk or impose conditions on any interaction that may occur. In the end, bitterness works like a long-acting poison, killing you from the inside.

Most bitter people are absolutely convinced that what has been done to hurt them justifies their attitude and anger; “You do not know how bad I have been treated!” Anger and hurt can make one who is bitter to lose their perspective. A bitter person will inflate things in their mind because it helps them

justify their thoughts and actions. One of the reasons people fail to work out their problems and wind up becoming bitter is because no one is willing to take the initiative to fix them. Here are some examples:

1. A husband and wife have a fight; the husband feels like the wife is wrong. They are now not speaking to one another – and he has made up his mind that he is not going to talk to her until she comes and apologizes.
2. A husband and wife have a fight; the wife feels like the husband is wrong. They are now not speaking to one another – and she has made up her mind that she is not going to talk to him until he comes and apologizes.
3. Fellow believers have experienced an offense where angry words were spoken. Both feel the other is wrong and they refuse to resolve the problem until the other guy takes the first step.
4. Two friends have a falling out because one of them heard a rumor that the other had gossiped about them and the things said were untrue. They are now not speaking to one another – and they each have made up their mind that they are not going to talk to the other person until the other person comes and apologizes.

As believers, each party is responsible to go to the other party, no matter “whose fault it is” (cf. Matt. 5:23-24, 18:15). But bitterness and resentment together create the primary obstacle to forgiveness and reconciliation. It is pride that causes people not to humble themselves to seek out forgiveness and reconciliation.

What are the Signs of Bitterness?

It is a challenge for someone to recognize that bitterness exists within their heart and life. Bitterness is easy to hide and camouflage. Rarely if ever do you find anyone who will admit that they are a bitter person. They will deny it or disguise it. The heart is deceptively wicked and pride is the great deceiver (cf. Jer. 17:9). Most bitter people believe that they are ok and that they have dealt with the offense or hurt that has caused them to be angry or hurt. It is important to be able to identify a bitter person when you come across one because we are often influenced negatively by bitterness. Here are some observations one can use to see if bitterness does exist in one’s life:

1. **Generalization:** Someone who is bitter will generally categorize their experiences because they experience the same thing over and over again. Many times they are often not just angry with the individual who’s wronged them, but whole groups of people. They often think that everyone in the world is out to get them and they are always the one getting the short end of the deal. This can also be seen if they make sweeping statements that show they’ve judged a person or situation without bothering to try to understand the circumstances – because ‘they know.’
2. **Holding Grudges:** Someone who is bitter holds on and talks repetitively about past wrongs and hurts. We all get angry sometimes, but misunderstandings and arguments are normally cleared up and forgotten. Even if two people don’t see eye to eye, they understand that there’s no point in wasting their energy by holding a grudge. Those who are bitter, however, will find it very difficult to let something go, even when everyone else has forgotten about it.
3. **Talking About Their Own Experiences:** A bitter person’s favorite topic of conversation is the things that have happened to them. They generally won’t ask questions about your life and things that are going on with you. They just want to complain to you about what someone said to them, something that happened to them or the state of the situation they are in and how everything works against them.
4. **Jealousy:** A bitter person focuses on the successes other people have that they don’t experience because nothing works for them. Rather than be happy for a friend or colleague when they get a promotion or when something’s going well in their life, they’re just jealous that things aren’t going as well for them.

5. **Stubborn - Making No Changes:** They think they should be the one having success, but they take no steps to change things to help them get there. They stay exactly where they are. They have a tendency to isolate themselves.
6. **Seek Attention:** A bitter person does not keep quiet about the way they feel. When they feel like life is treating them particularly unfairly, they want sympathy and reassurance that what they're feeling is justified.
7. **Hypersensitive:** A bitter person consistently looks at situations and other people examining what they say, how they act and what they do. They are easily distracted by the actions of others that they believe are wrong. They often view themselves as the one being taken advantage of. They have many mood swings.
8. **Struggle To Accept Advice:** A bitter person habitually complains. But if someone who befriends them and genuinely cares about them tries to offer some helpful advice, they go on the defensive. They are blind to those people in their lives who do care about them, focusing on those that they feel are out to get them.
9. **Do Not Seek Relationships with 'Successful' People:** A bitter person tends to isolate themselves. Being around optimistic and/or successful people throws their behavior into a sharp contrast, meaning they are confronted by their own negative attitude and that is something they don't want to face up to. So, they tend to just avoid optimistic and/or successful people. Often, they become anti-social, preferring to spend their evenings thinking about and mulling over why the world is against them rather than being out socializing and involved in the lives of others.
10. **Rarely Congratulate Others:** Bitter people are jealous. Their jealousy means that they find it difficult to genuinely congratulate anyone else on their skills or achievements. You never hear them say the words "well done!" They do not go out of their way to congratulate people on their successes.
11. **Consistently Talk About Others:** Bitter people often spread stories they've heard about things that other people have done wrong. They are the person who will always have a negative thing to say about a person, most often in comparison to what they have done or are doing. They are quick to talk about someone's shortcomings. They often live in the comparative; comparing their lives to others.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to see if you are bitter. As you review each question, answer it by writing down the number that best fits your response to the question. 1 = Never / No. 2 = Rarely. 3 = Sometimes / Don't know. 4 = Regularly. 5 = Always / Yes. Try your best to be honest with your answers.

1. Do you frequently review conversations that you have had with people?
2. Do you analyze and reanalyze (review and review) what people say along with their actions and the body language they present?
3. Do you 'have to' talk about people and/or offenses to others?
4. Do you seek to have people side with you to validate what you have done?
5. Do you get frustrated easily?
6. Do you find it hard to control your tongue and the language you say when you encounter someone who has hurt you?
7. Do you often feel ill?
8. Do you experience family relationships that are characterized by strife, anger and/or bitterness?
9. Do you place blame on others for the situation you are in?
10. Is your life filled with harsh and angry relationships?

11. Do you demand what you want?
12. Do you feel that you are the one who is always getting the blame, or getting used, or not getting what you desire or deserve?
13. Do you recruit other people to your relationship challenges to agree with you to justify your feelings and actions?
14. Have you ever had feelings or a desire to harm someone?
15. When you talk about people it is usually about negative things you have observed them do or say?
16. Do you usually compare yourself and what you do to other people you know?
17. Do you avoid people in social settings?
18. Do you 'hear things' other people say and think they are talking about you even when they are not talking about you?
19. Do you generalize your experiences by putting everything you experience into the same category of feelings of hurt, and that you are always the one being taken advantage of?
20. Do you think that you are owed something better than what you have experienced?

Did you answer the above 20 questions honestly? Did you carefully examine your heart as you were answering the questions? The purpose of these questions is to provide you with tools to examine your heart to determine if you have a bitter heart. Who wants to admit that they are bitter? No one wants to admit to being bitter, so it is pride at work in your heart if you are unwilling to examine your heart for bitterness. If your score was 65 or greater, you need to be on guard against being bitter.

The Fruit Of Bitterness

Someone who is bitter generally focuses on the negative side of life. Bitterness will affect you physically, emotionally, and spiritually because the fruit of bitterness is a poison that slowly works to destroy. When your heart is bitter, God will not be real to you be. Why, because bitterness and holiness cannot dwell together in the same heart (cf. I John 4:19-21 – summary). And without holiness you will not see the Lord (cf. Heb. 12:14-15). Bitterness will control the life of a believer; and it will create a critical, caustic believer. Here are some fruits of bitterness:

1. **Defilement.** Bitter hearts and lives are contaminated before God (Heb. 12:15). We become unclean before God. Sin abides in the bitter heart (cf. Rom. 3:10-13). James 3:6 describes the same truth concerning the tongue which 'defiles the whole body.'
2. **Division.** Bitterness divides the bitter person from fellowship with God, family and friends and drives away the ones who love us the most. Sin breaks relationships (cf. Gen. 3:6-11).
3. **Deadness.** Bitterness deadens sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and the things of God. Bitterness controls and consumes the heart and keeps the bitter person from fellowship with God and peace from God. Bitter people often question if the Bible is true. Bitterness has companions that contribute to spiritual deadness: wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking and malice (cf. Eph. 4:30-31). Simon is an example of this in Acts. 8:18-23.
4. **Deception.** The bitter heart is a deceived heart. Bitter people are most times very deceived about their heart condition. Many times, bitter people cannot see where they are wrong and they feel justified in the position(s) they have taken and the feelings that they have. One can never win victory over something they will not admit is true. The primary evidence of bitter people is their continual statement: "I am not bitter!"
5. **Depression.** Bitter people have poison in their heart and the first victim of bitterness is the bitter person. They live in mental anguish and are consumed with the object of their bitterness. Not all depression comes from bitterness but all bitterness has a measure of depression that bitter people experience.

6. **Disease.** Bitterness unchecked interferes with the body's hormonal and immune systems. After 15 years of studying the effects of bitterness on the human body, psychology doctors have stated that 'long-term bitterness forecasts patterns of biological dysregulation that can affect metabolism, immune response and organ function leading to physical ailments that are difficult to diagnose.' (cf. I Cor. 11:30)
7. **Damage.** The longer a person stays bitter, the more damage is done in every personal relationship including fellowship with the Lord. The longer a person remains bitter, the more suffering they spread with their bitterness. It affects whole families, whole churches, friends and acquaintances. Bitterness actively chips away at the foundation of faith because they begin to believe that the Bible is not true.
8. **Distraction.** A bitter person usually cannot fellowship with the Lord without thinking about the source of the bitterness. They cannot pray without thinking about the source of the bitterness. They cannot listen quietly and contently to the Word of God without thinking of the source of bitterness. They cannot live a successful Christian life exhibiting the fruit of the Holy Spirit described in Gal. 5:22-23. Sadly, many times the bitterness spreads to others, so that the bitterness of one keeps others from coming to Christ. When a father or mother allows bitterness to take them out of church, they take their children with them and away from the environment best suited to reach their hearts (cf. Rom. 10:14-17).

The Eradication Of Bitterness - How to Get Rid of the Root

Carefully examine bitterness and hurt. There are times when the hurt you are experiencing may be the chastisement of God upon your life for disobedience to His command or will. There are other times when the hurt you are experiencing is based on what people have done or said to you. When bitterness and resentment exist in your life, there are three steps to eradicating bitterness:

- 1. Let God Reveal It.** Sometimes people say, "I know my heart, there's no bitterness in me." Truth of the matter is you don't know your heart. God's Word tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (cf. Jer. 17:9). A deceitful heart cannot diagnose a deceitful heart. You need to let God the Holy Spirit do radical surgery.
- 2. Let Grace Reveal It.** A response of bitterness is never right when someone has done something wrong to you. You need to ask God to forgive you, and He will by His grace. If someone has wronged you, cut it down and choose not to remember it. By the grace of God, bury that hurt in the grave of God's forgetfulness. Justice is God giving us what we deserve, mercy is God not giving us what we deserve, and grace is God giving us what we don't deserve.
- 3. Let Good Replace It.** Hebrews 12:14 states, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." You cannot be holy unless you follow peace with men. It is so worth it when you forgive. But, you say, "Look what they've done! I am not going to let them off the hook." Well, they are not on the hook - you are! When you forgive, you set two people free and one of them is yourself.

Sometimes even after forgiveness has been voiced tensions remain. That emotional tension can cause bitterness to breed once again after forgiveness has been voiced. But doing active good for the one who hurt you can heal the emotional hurt. If they get sick, be the first to go and take some food by or send a card. If they need some help, be the first to volunteer to go and help them. Have them over for a meal. It will not be easy, but it is the right thing to do (cf. Matt. 5:43-45; Rom. 12:19-21).

Most of the time it is difficult to see God when we have been mistreated, but there usually are things there for us to learn (James 1:2-5). At times the most objective and beneficial critics are those who have hurt us; because we need to pay attention to what they say. We can benefit from the hurt they have caused us because we should take time to carefully examine what caused them to 'hurt' us. Elbert

Hubbard, an early 20th century American writer, has observed: “*The final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure contemptuous treatment without resentment.*” The challenge is if you are bitter, you will not get better until you deal with the bitterness. As long as Satan can entice you to feel justified in what you are doing and how you are feeling he can keep you locked in the prison with the poison of bitterness. Don’t be ‘poisoned’ by bitterness! Rather, eradicate bitterness from your life by allowing the Holy Spirit to change your heart and your attitude!

Forgiveness – A Scriptural Analysis

The evidence of a humble heart that exercises right judgment is forgiveness. Forgiveness is putting others first. Forgiveness is an action that is initiated and sought out by those of a humble heart.

Definitions of “Forgive” and “Forgiveness”

To study “Forgiveness” it is a requirement that we look at the definitions of FORGIVE / FORGIVENESS. Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of FORGIVE / FORGIVENESS:

Forgive:

- **Hebrew:** (“*calcah*”) to pardon
- **Greek:** (“*aphesis*”) to pardon, to deliver from, to liberate (“*aphiēmi*”) to send away, dismiss, suffer to depart; to emit, send forth.
- **English:** (forgive) to stop feeling angry or resentful toward someone for an offense, flaw or mistake; to grant pardon for an offense; to cease to feel resentment against; to cancel an indebtedness or liability - (pardon) to excuse an offense without exacting a penalty, forgiveness for an offense

Forgiveness: The act of forgiving.

Forgiveness

One of the greatest challenges in Christianity is the challenge of forgiving someone who has hurt or injured you. It is all too common to see broken relationships between individuals who claim Christ as Savior; in the church between Pastors, church staffs, and members; in the homes of believers between husband, wife, children and family; in the community between people that are not believers. This study of forgiveness seeks to identify what it is, what scripture says about it and what we, as believers, are to be doing to exercise forgiveness. Forgiveness is one of the primary expressions of love that we have for Christ and for fellow believers. And forgiveness is also an example of Christ’s love to unbelievers; it provides the opportunity to show the gospel at work. Please carefully examine your life and the scripture in this study of forgiveness as the purpose of this study is to engage your heart and mind with the Word of God so you can best understand forgiveness and its role in your life.

Forgiveness is a biblical principle

Forgiveness is a biblical principle (‘principle’ meaning “foundation of belief or behavior, belief governing behavior”) that is not open to debate or opinion. The believer in Christ is required to offer forgiveness to all men in all situations and circumstances (Eph. 4:31-32). The forgiveness principle is based on:

1. The transformation of life that takes place in salvation (II Cor. 5:17-19). Are we who we say we are (Matt. 5:48)? Is our behavior consistent with who we say we are (Gal. 5:22-23)?

2. The submission of one's life to the principles outlined in God's Word and the obedience to those principles. The Bible is the authority, not our opinion, and we will be held accountable for our obedience to the commands of God's Word (cf. Heb. 4:11-13).

The transformation of life at salvation coupled with submission and obedience to biblical principles establishes a strong foundation for the life-action requirements of a believer. The believer does not have the luxury, privilege or right to a personal opinion when a biblical principle is clearly stated.

Forgiveness is a biblical standard

Forgiveness is a biblical standard (*'standard' meaning "measure, model for comparative evaluation"*). Believers are called upon to forgive – “even as God in Christ forgave you”; it is not a choice (Col. 3:12-13). We are to forgive someone no matter what that person may have done to you. We are to forgive in the same way that God, because of Jesus Christ, has forgiven you (c.f. Psa. 86:4-5; Rom. 5:8-10).

Forgiveness is required in the life of a believer. However, forgiveness is not an oppressive feature of following Christ. It is a blessing, a gift to be given and it is evidence of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in one's life when they are abiding in Christ. Forgiveness, because it is a gift to be given, is a willful work within the life of the offended that is completed before it is offered and given. Man, the created, offended God, the Creator, through willful disobedience. God, the offended, by His will and choice, forgave man, the offender, of that offense by providing a way of reconciliation through Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross. God, the offended, did not wait to forgive but forgave and provided a means for the offender to ask for forgiveness so that reconciliation could take place. God pursued that forgiveness, which is why Christ and Stephan could say – “Father, forgive them” without the offenders asking for forgiveness. Forgiveness is to be pursued because it is a gift to be given.

Forgiving others is the requirement of God that is the foundation upon which He can bless you (Matt. 6:14-15). Does the forgiveness Christ instructs us on in Matthew 6:14-15 require someone to ask for it before it is given? No, because forgiveness can be offered and provided by the person offended without request from the offender. The reason the offended can offer forgiveness and forgive the one who offended is because the one offended has already forgiven them. This initiation of forgiveness comes from the heart of one person to another whether it is asked for or not. Forgiveness offered does not mean forgiveness accepted.

God provides us with an example of offering forgiveness without being asked. God initiated and extended forgiveness to us through the sacrificial death of His Son on the cross (Heb. 10:15-18). This extension of forgiveness to us is real and it is from His heart (John 3:16). Forgiveness can be a one-way action when the one being forgiven rejects the forgiveness offered. Examples of this occurring are Christ Himself (Luke 23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:60). As we see by Christ and Stephen's examples, one can forgive without someone asking for forgiveness; and it is the responsibility of a believer to actively initiate forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift that is available to be taken but it does not mean that it will be taken (Rom. 12:14-21; cf. Prov. 25:21, Luke 6:35). It is available as a gift (Eph. 2:8-9); whether it is accepted or not is the responsibility of the one who has been offered forgiveness, not by the one who is forgiving.

God seeks us with forgiveness in hand for us to receive it; and we must ask for it. Asking for forgiveness is different than offering forgiveness. Offering of forgiveness does not require someone to ask. The offering of forgiveness is based on the fact that forgiveness has already occurred. Receiving forgiveness does require one to ask, yet the not asking for forgiveness does not negate the forgiveness that has already taken place. When we, as lost sinners, ask the Lord for forgiveness of sin, He is faithful to forgive us of our sin (I John 1:8-10) because He has already forgiven through His sacrifice on the cross. His

forgiveness is not effective until it is asked for and received, like a gift (Eph. 2:8-9). This is the example that we, as believers, are to follow. We are to be the ones to initiate and extend forgiveness to others; whether they ask for it or not and whether they accept it or not.

The biblical standard of forgiveness employs a 'law' (*'law' meaning "rule defining behavior"*) and a 'principle' (*'principle' meaning "foundation of belief or behavior, belief governing behavior"*). The law is the "law of personal relationships" (Gal. 6:10; c.f. Col. 3:18 – 4:1, I Cor. 10:31-33) and the principle is the "principle of personal relationships" (John 13:13-17; cf. Matt. 22:37-40; I Cor. 13:4-8a). The referenced 'law' and 'principle' sets the standard that we are to treat others in the same manner as Christ treats us, which is this – Christ treats you like His own son or daughter. How do you treat your son or daughter when they offend you? Do you hold that offense against them? Do you desire to seek reconciliation? The biblical standard of forgiveness (cf. Col. 3:12-13) works in conjunction with the "law of personal relationships" and the "principle of personal relationships." Together they establish the characteristics of the forgiveness that is offered by a believer to another person. Forgiveness is:

1. Generous – it is generous in forgiving insult, injury or offense; it is free from resentment (Luke 17:3-4; Col. 3:12-14).
2. Unlimited – it will always be given quickly and without reservation. (Luke 17:3-4; c.f. Matt. 5:23-26, 18:21-35).
3. Complete & Total – it is without bounds or conditions. (Matt. 5:38-48)

Forgiveness, as a biblical standard, is not conditional – forgiveness is to be without conditions. No matter what someone has done; no matter what it is; no matter how much it hurts; no matter how it has impacted you; we are to forgive (Luke 6:31-38). Forgiveness offered does not require someone to request it, this is based on the example of Christ (Col. 3:13; Matt. 5:38-48). There is nothing that anyone has ever done to you in any situation that is unforgiveable. It does not matter what the offense was, nothing falls outside the context of Scripture to support a position of unforgiveness. There is no such thing as something that you cannot forgive someone else of (cf. I Pet. 2:20-24). There is nothing that you have ever done in your life that is outside the forgiveness of God – and that is the standard we are required to live by. You are to forgive just as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you (I John 2:12-13).

Unwillingness to forgive is a willful act of pride

If an individual is unwilling to forgive for any reason, it is evidence of pride in one's life. Pride is the source of strife (Prov. 13:10, cf. 19:11). If strife with others is occurring frequently, it is evidence of pride in one's life. If strife is causing broken relationships with others, then one must carefully examine their heart to see if pride exists within their heart that is being exhibited by their words and actions, which may be the source of the strife with others in their life. Pride takes great notice of opposition and wrongs or injuries that are received. Pride often speaks to others about the perceived wrongs or injuries they have experienced to justify their thoughts and actions – and to degrade others (cf. Prov. 10:19; Mark 7:20-23; James 3:2-18).

Unwillingness to forgive has consequences

Scripture is clear about the consequences that will occur when one does not genuinely forgive another who has offended you. The first consequence is the real probability that you are not genuinely saved. Scripture indicates that if you are unwilling to forgive another person of an offense, then it is very probable that you are not genuinely saved (Matt. 6:14-15, 18:21-35).

The second consequence is unanswered prayer. All believers pray but often many do not experience answers to prayer. There are a number of reasons why the prayer of a believer is not heard, but a

common reason is the lack of forgiveness in their life (Mark 11:25-26; cf. Psa. 66:18; Prov. 28:9; Isa.59:2). A forgiving heart toward others (believer and unbeliever alike) is essential to effective prayer. God will not listen to the prayer of a person who nurses sin in their heart. An unforgiving heart is a sinful heart.

The third consequence is broken relationships. When pride and bitterness prevail in a believer's life, it results in broken relationships. Sin caused broken fellowship between mankind and God (Gen. 3:6-11) and it is the cause of broken relationships when the sin of unforgiveness is present in one's life.

Unwillingness to forgive an offense enslaves you to the offense

Refusing to deal with an offense and the resentment it causes or rationalizing that you have a right to be resentful because of the offense puts you into bondage to the offense. You have not forgiven someone if you:

1. Cannot shake the memory of the offense.
2. Cannot wish them success in their endeavors in life.
3. Want that person to hurt just like you do.

Resentment (unforgiveness) that is held internally will turn into bitterness. The evidence of resentment (unforgiveness) in your life can be and is seen by others. It is self-centered pride that will cause you to ignore the features of unforgiveness (Eph. 4:31-32). The evidence of unforgiveness in one's life is:

1. Bitterness will exist: it is a smoldering resentment that resides within you; you will be holding a grudge against someone, which is demonstrated by your attitude (irritability).
2. Wrath will be demonstrated: it is anger that is assertive; it occurs publicly in the passion of a moment when things do not go your way.
3. Anger will reside internally: it is an internal resentment that resides within you that you will not let go; it is tied to deep emotion that is fed by rationalization that you will repeat in your mind over and over and over again.
4. Clamor will be seen: it can be exhibited by shouting and vocal outburst of anger that results in arguments; it can be small verbal or non-verbal expressions that exhibit emotional resentment, it is an exhibit of a loss of control of your emotions.
5. Slander is exhibited: it is speaking derogatorily of a person to another person; it is the putting down or criticizing a person that comes from bitterness within the heart from real or perceived offenses.
6. Malice will reside within: it is the accumulation of the previous sins; it is the internal creation of evil thoughts, words and deeds; it is the darkening of the heart and it is the root of all vice and evil.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to see if you are willing to forgive someone. As you review each question, answer it by writing down the number that best fits your response to the question. 1 = Never / No. 2 = Rarely. 3 = Sometimes / Don't know. 4 = Regularly. 5 = Always / Yes. Try your best to be honest with your answers. There are 10 questions listed below to answer.

1. Am I willing to forgive someone who is not sorry that they have hurt me?
2. Am I willing to forgive someone who has betrayed my confidence?
3. Am I willing to forgive my spouse for hurts that they have caused me?
4. Am I willing to forgive someone who has not asked for forgiveness?
5. Am I willing to forgive someone who has purposely ignored me?
6. Am I willing to forgive someone that I have no feelings for?
7. Am I willing to forgive someone that I don't know but who has hurt me?

8. Am I willing to forgive someone that I really don't like?
9. Am I willing to forgive someone who is offended when I don't know what has caused the offense?
10. Am I willing to forgive myself?

The purpose of these questions is to provide you with tools to examine your heart to determine if you have a heart that is willing to forgive. Were you honest with yourself in answering the questions? Did you carefully examine your heart as you were answering the questions? Pride often overrides the desire to forgive. One of the greatest needs in our life is a humble heart that is willing to forgive. If your score was 30 or more you need to be on guard against being prideful and unforgiving. It is a challenge to be humble as Christ was humble as He set the example of the humility we are to have in our life (Phil. 2:5-11). Do you have a heart that is humble and willing to forgive? What does God see when He looks into your heart?

Forgiveness is a willful act

Forgiveness is a willful act based on humility. Forgiveness is the willful act of granting a complete, unconditional pardon to the person who offended you. It is not hypocrisy to forgive when your emotions are telling you not to. We are to be obedient to Christ and biblical principle and standard, regardless of how we feel. When you refuse to nurture, harbor, or dwell on the offense you “starve” angry thoughts and emotions. This requires a willful act. When you choose to refuse the urge to “feed” angry thoughts and emotions, the Lord will set your heart right. But this requires another act of your will in surrendering your heart and the offense to Him. It is a factual truth (*‘truth’ – state of being true, in accordance with fact, accurate, exact, honest: ‘fact’ – an undisputable thing, information as evidence, truth as opposed to interpretation*) that what you focus on will eventually become who you are (Matt. 15:19, cf. Prov. 23:7, Phil. 4:8, Col. 3:1-2, Rom. 8:5-8). If you dwell upon and constantly remember an offense, the very offense that you dwell on will become a part of you; and you will be guilty of perpetuating the very offense that hurt you upon others. Ultimately a conscious, deliberate, willful choice to forgive is the only thing that can free you from the bondage of bitterness created by an unforgiven offense.

Forgiveness is a transaction

Forgiveness is a transaction between two people. It is a basic law that when two people meet, a transaction takes place. All transactions have a beginning and that is something being offered. No transaction can occur without something being offered or presented to which a person reacts to. As we are examining forgiveness, something has first occurred to create an offense or hurt. From that initial action there are reactions – judgmental bitterness or discerning forgiveness. All people are in one of those two categories. If bitterness exists, there are no transactions for resolution and forgiveness, only transactions of criticism and hate. Bitterness should not be present in the life of a believer. However, forgiveness seems to be a significant challenge to believers, primarily because of pride. Forgiveness requires the believer to take the initiative. The initiation of forgiveness is a transaction that is to be initiated by the offended and the offender, as we have noted before.

Forgiveness, as a transaction between two people, has at its base a cause; meaning something has occurred that has created the need for forgiveness. A proper illustration of this is the parent-child relationship and discipline. If a child (the offender) does something wrong (cause) they are disciplined by the parent (the offended). The child rarely, if ever, asks the parent for discipline; and rarely do they ask for forgiveness without first being disciplined. The parent rarely, if ever, asks the child if they want to be disciplined; and rarely do they ask for forgiveness from the child for the discipline that they have enacted. The parent (offended) initiates the discipline on the child (offender); the parent (the offended)

does not wait for the child (the offender) to ask for discipline, nor does the parent ask the child for forgiveness for disciplining them. The parent disciplines the child so the child can learn from the discipline not to engage in the activity that caused the discipline. This is the situation that Christ addresses in Matthew 18:15 where the person offended is to go to the person who offended to seek forgiveness for the purpose of reconciling a relationship.

Following are the stages of the forgiveness transaction:

1. Sin has occurred and an offense has been made. Person A (offender) has offended Person B (offended) (Matt. 18:15a).
2. Person B (offended) initiates the forgiveness transaction by seeking forgiveness in the going to Person A (offender) to inform Person A of the actual offense made (Matt. 18:15b). Person B (offended) goes with humility and grace (with no pride or arrogance) and speaks the truth in love about the sin (sin – not preference) that created the offense (Eph. 4:15; Matt. 7:1-5). This is a face-to-face meeting; one-on-one (no letters, emails, texts). Person B (offended) is seeking forgiveness without Person A (offender) asking for forgiveness.
3. When Person B (offended) goes to Person A (offender) the forgiveness transaction burden moves from Person B to Person A. Person A (offender) now bears the burden of the cause that has broken the fellowship (created the offense) with Person B (offended). Person A now has a choice to make; to accept the forgiveness being offered by Person B or to reject it.
4. If Person A (offender) recognizes the cause, repents and accepts the forgiveness offered by Person B; Person B (offended) now has the burden of granting forgiveness (Matt. 18:5c). Person B (offended) now carries that burden until the verbal words “I forgive you” are spoken by Person B (offended) to Person A (offender). Person B also bears the burden of integrity when the words “I forgive you” are spoken. The words must be from the heart and genuine. That is the reason that Person B (offended) is instructed to initiate the forgiveness transaction because it prevents the sin of deceit; meaning Person B (offended) is unlikely to initiate the forgiveness transaction if they did not believe there was need forgiveness or if they did not think they had done any wrong.
5. Proof of a completed transaction of forgiveness is restored fellowship and reconciliation between Person A (offender) and Person B (offended) (Matt. 18:15c).

Forgiveness is not a two-way street

One problem that many have with forgiveness is that they envision it as a two-way street. They are willing to forgive only when the one who has wronged them repents and seeks forgiveness. But the Scripture puts no such limit on forgiveness. Quite the contrary as we noted before. The examples of Jesus (Luke 23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:60) both demonstrate forgiveness, even when the wrong is occurring. In the midst of their executions, both prayed for the forgiveness of those killing them.

Forgiveness is choosing not to remember

Forgiveness, as an act of the will, is often difficult to do because of the wide range of emotions that occur with an offense that needs to be forgiven. But we have an example to follow in forgiving. God does not forget our sin; He chooses not to remember it (Isa. 43:25; Heb. 10:15-18) (*‘Remember’ – have in or able to bring to one’s mind an awareness of something that one has seen, known or experienced in the past*). God is omniscient, so His choice ‘not to remember’ sets a high standard for us, His creation. Once a person places their faith in Christ and confesses their sin to God, God refuses to call the believer’s sin to mind or to bring it up again. This is what we are to do. We may not be able to forget the

offense but we are required ‘not to remember’ it. We are to refuse to recall an offense to our memory.... or to the memory of the one who offended us...or to the memory of anyone else. To “forget” does not require choice; it can happen without the engagement of will (i.e., “I forgot where my wallet and/or keys are.”). To “not remember” requires the engagement of the will because it is a transaction of the will. This is what God does when He forgives (cf. Psa. 25:7, 79:8-9, 103:12; Isa. 43:25); He engages His will in the determination to “not remember.”

To “not remember” is a transaction with 3 parts that reflects the engagement of the will to “not remember.” The transaction to “not remember” results in a 3-part commitment, which is based on what God does when He forgives (cf. Psa. 25:7, 79:8-9, 103:12; Isa. 43:25). When one forgives, they are making a “not to remember” commitment, which is a commitment not to bring up the past; specifically, not to review the offense with the three parties (i.e., you, the other person, and others) that are often involved or associated with an offense. The offended should:

1. Not review the offense with the person who has offended them. To tell someone “I forgive you” and then bring it back up to the person who offended them is not forgiveness. While one may not have forgotten the offense, the offended is not to repeatedly bring up the offense to the one who offended them.
2. Not review the offense with others. To tell someone “I forgive you” and then go tell others about the offense is not forgiveness. To review an offense that has been forgiven is an act of hypocrisy because the words spoken were a lie.
3. Not review the offense with themselves. To review the offense with yourself after you have told someone “I forgive you” is not forgiveness. Not only were the words spoken a lie but the continued reviewing of the offense internally will ultimately turn into bitterness; and that is an action that slanders the death of Christ on the cross when He took all sin upon Himself and paid for it with His life’s blood.

Genuine forgiveness prevents us from dwelling on the past; we are to ‘not remember.’ The purpose of these transactions, ‘forgiveness’ and ‘not to remember,’ is to restore fellowship, which ultimately results in the reconciliation of relationships between fellow believers. These actions work toward restoring unity within the church. Forgiveness and reconciliation are to be done with humility and gentleness (Gal. 6:1-5).

Conclusion and Application

Forgiveness is one of the greatest challenges we have in life. Is forgiveness something that you want but are unwilling to give? Pride is so prevalent in life and is such a deceiver that we often battle with forgiving someone who has offended or deeply hurt us. Scripture clearly teaches that we are to forgive because we have no foundation to not forgive. If we do not forgive, we place ourselves above God. By not forgiving we are telling God that He does not know or understand the situation we are dealing with or the people we are dealing with. When we do not forgive, we actively place ourselves into a position and place that God cannot hear our prayers or bless our life. We are to seek forgiveness if we are the offender or the offended; and forgiveness is a process, a transaction. As believers, we should be meeting each other on the way to the other’s place to seek forgiveness. The lack of seeking forgiveness is an indication that pride in your life has a strong hold on you. Actively seek forgiveness. Actively seek for God’s strength in forgiving someone you have offended or one who has offended you. You will find out that seeking and providing forgiveness results in two things – God will hear your prayers and you will have gained a brother through the restoration of fellowship in reconciliation.

Hypocrisy or Reconciliation?

Pride produces judgmental judging, which in turn fuels bitterness. Humility produces discerning examination, judging with right judgment, which fuels forgiveness. From these foundations that we see two additional different fruits: bitterness yields hypocrisy; forgiveness yields reconciliation and unity.

The Law of Contrast can effectively be used to examine the difference between hypocrisy and reconciliation. We will define and examine hypocrisy and reconciliation on the basis of Scripture. By examining both we will be able to clearly define what resides within our heart – hypocrisy or reconciliation, which is exhibited by unity.

Definitions of “Hypocrite” and “Hypocrisy”

To study “Hypocrisy” it is a requirement that we look at the definitions of HYPOCRITE/ HYPOCRISY. Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of HYPOCRITE / HYPOCRISY:

Hypocrite:

- **Hebrew:** (“*chaneph*”) soiled with sin, impious (not religious, lacking reverence for God) (Prov. 11:9)
- **Greek:** (“*hupokrites*”) an actor under an assumed character, a dissembler (one who conceals opinions or dispositions under a false appearance) (Matt. 7:5)
- **English:** (hypocrite) a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue, a person who acts in contradiction to his/her stated beliefs

Hypocrisy:

- **Hebrew:** (“*choneph*”) moral filth, wickedness (Isa.32:6)
- **Greek:** (“*hupokrisis*”) acting under deceit, acting under a feigned part (I Tim. 4:2)
- **English:** the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one’s own behavior does not conform

Hypocrisy – A Scriptural Analysis

Hypocrisy is one of the greatest charges leveled against the church and members of a church. And, for the most part, this charge has foundation because many people who claim to be a believer in Christ do not live a life that reflects Christ. Are there religious hypocrites out there who try to appear holy and smarter than everyone else, but are filled with hypocrisy and wickedness? Yes, hypocrites don’t ‘practice’ what they ‘preach.’ They say one thing, but do another. Being a hypocrite is a very dangerous thing. We are going to study hypocrites and hypocrisy very carefully, because people who claim to be believers but who habitually live-in hypocrisy will be denied eternal life (Matt. 7:21-23, 24:51). One cannot be a hypocrite and be a genuine believer. At times believers backslide, but if someone is truly a child of God they will not continue to live in sin and in hypocrisy. God will work in the lives of His children to conform them into the image of Christ. We must pray that God removes the spirit of hypocrisy from our lives.

What is a Hypocrite?

As defined before a hypocrite is a person who professes to be a believer in Christ, but does not live a life that demonstrates that Christ dwells within their life. Hypocrites say one thing but live a life that contradicts the beliefs they say they believe in.

Following are some characteristics of a hypocrite who is living a life of hypocrisy:

1. **Hypocrites claim to believe in Christ.** They pretend to be someone who they are not. They take time and effort to look like a believer. They talk about Christ. They pray. They serve. They want others to believe that they are righteous, but their hearts are far from Christ (Mark 7:6; Matt. 23:25-28).
2. **Hypocrites know the Bible.** They know the scripture verses. They are public ‘saints’ but private sinners; they seek to conceal from others what they do in private. They can actually show signs of being a believer but they do not live consistently. They have mastered ‘lip-service.’ They can talk with biblical language, but they do not live the life that they talk about to others (Matt. 13:20-21, 15:8-9).
3. **Hypocrites often have remorse and sadness for sin,** but they do not change their lifestyle. They are often sad, but it is sadness for being caught not for the sin they indulge in; so they do not change. They maintain the habits that are sinful because their heart has not been changed (Matt. 27:3-5).
4. **Hypocrites live in the comparative.** They are self-righteous. They are critical of other believers. They rationalize their behavior and justify it because of other believer’s behavior – and they believe that they are better than others (Matt. 23:29-30; Luke 18:11-12; Rom. 10:3).
5. **Hypocrites live to be recognized.** They love the praise of men; they highly value it. They want to be seen and recognized for what they do. They think they have a good heart when it is actually evil (Matt. 6:1-2,5; 23:5).
6. **Hypocrites judge everything.** They have a judgmental attitude. They are quick to find fault while they ignore their own sin. They search for things wrong with people but they don’t examine their own selves to see themselves honestly. They are more concerned about correcting others than themselves (Matt. 7:3-5; John 7:24; Rom. 14:1-3).
7. **Hypocrites claim to be neutral judges.** They pretend to be the one seeking after the truth. From this position they can rule out any arguments that come against them.
8. **Hypocrites are excellent liars.** They are the one who most confidently denies wrongdoing. They are very convincing and often ‘swear’ that they are not doing anything wrong. They may even have deceived themselves that they have not done anything wrong – and believe the lies they are telling. They often claim that they have been misunderstood; or that they are the victim of someone or something.
9. **Hypocrites are accusers.** They easily accuse others to place blame elsewhere so they appear to be the innocent party. They fake confidence.
10. **Hypocrites are talkers.** They speak many, many words. They have sharp tongues. Often, they are witty. They live a double-standard life so they often exempt themselves from being suspected of doing the kinds of things that other people do.
11. **Hypocrites focus on small things and pass over the big things** (Matt. 23:23-24).
12. **Hypocrites focus on the immediate.** They put importance on man-made traditions and successes. The temporal is very important to them. They think very little on eternity.
13. **Hypocrites are usually ‘Christian’ atheists** (Rom. 1:18-22).
14. **Hypocrites are false friends** (Psa. 12:2, 55:21).

Jesus heavily condemned hypocrisy. The problem with hypocrisy is it is difficult to detect for the person committing it. Usually, in most cases, it takes another person to point it out to the one who is being a hypocrite – and that is often rejected with anger. All of us have been hypocritical in our life, but we cannot afford to ignore hypocrisy and its deadly end. Sadly, we commit this sin without knowing it or even if we already know it, we simply ignore hypocrisy.

For this reason, it is crucial for us, as believers, to know the signs of a hypocrite. By being familiar with these signs, we will be aware of what to change in our lives and become better followers of God

In 1654, William Guthrie, in his book “**The Christian’s Great Interest**” wrote the following about hypocrites:

1. A hypocrite may be influenced by the gospel in every part of himself. He may come to great knowledge of God’s truth (Heb. 6:4). His emotions about Christ may be high (Matt 13:20). He may even experience drastic changes in the outward man, like the Pharisee who prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, etc.” (Luke 18:11–12).

2. A hypocrite may look to others like he’s a true believer. He might talk of the law and the gospel (Psa. 50:16), openly confess his sin to his own shame (1 Sam 26:21), and humble himself in sackcloth (1 Kings 21:27). He may even carefully consider what duties he needs to perform and seek after them (Isa. 58:2), persevere even in hard times, give his possessions away to God and the saints, or even give his body away to be burned (1 Cor. 13:3).

3. A hypocrite may advance far in God’s ordinary graces. He may come under great convictions of sin, just as Judas did (Matt 27:3–5). He may tremble at the word of God, just as Felix did (Acts 24:25), rejoice in receiving the truth (Matt. 13:20), and have many experiences of tasting the good graces of God (Heb. 6:4).

4. A hypocrite may have some characteristics very similar to the saving graces of the Holy Spirit. He may have a kind of faith, like Simon Magus who “believed also” (Acts 8:13) but then proved to be a false believer. He may have a kind of legal and outward repentance that looks very much like true repentance (Mal. 3:14). He may have a great and powerful fear of God, like Balaam did (Num. 22:18). He may experience a kind of hope (Job 8:13). The hypocrite may even have some love, as Herod had of John (Mark 6:26).

5. A hypocrite can even have great and powerful experiences of God. He may have “tasted of the heavenly gift” and become “partakers of the Holy Spirit” and experienced the “powers of the age to come” and yet not be genuinely converted.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to see if you are a hypocrite. As you review each question, answer it by writing down the number that best fits your response to the question. 1 = Never / No. 2 = Rarely. 3 = Sometimes / Don’t know. 4 = Regularly. 5 = Always / Yes. Try your best to be honest with your answers.

1. Do you frequently say one thing but do another?
2. Do you treat those in power differently than you do toward someone who is not in power?
3. Do you give advice but fail to follow your own guidance?
4. Do you tell others to be tolerant but judge others who don’t conform to your way of thinking?
5. Do you volunteer others but you *rarely* volunteer?
6. Do you live one way in public but another in private?
7. Do you pretend to be someone you’re not to win acceptance or praise?
8. Do you make rules but fail to follow the rules yourself?
9. Do you tell others you live morally while living a sinful life?
10. Do you demand things of others that you’re unwilling to do yourself?
11. Do you say one thing to someone’s face but another thing behind their back?
12. Do you pretend to have money even though the bank account is empty?
13. Do you alter your opinion to gain acceptance from others with differing viewpoints?
14. Do you condemn the actions of others even though you commit those same acts yourself?

15. Do you promote righteous living to draw attention away from your own reckless behavior?
16. Do you help people *only* when it's in your personal interest to do so?
17. Do you pretend to care when your motive is really self-serving?
18. Do you tell others to be content with what they have or what they make but you demand to be paid well and are consistently looking for new things?
19. Do you feign outrage even though you have no intention of doing anything about it?
20. Do you penalize some folks for wrongdoings but look the other way for others?
21. Do you lecture people about morality but cover up sin for your friends or family?
22. Do you judgmentally judge others but get angry with people when you're personally judgmentally judged?
23. Do you act one way when folks are looking and then the opposite when they're not looking?
24. Do you reject anyone who seeks to talk to you about bitterness?

Did you answer the above 24 questions honestly? Did you carefully examine your heart as you were answering the questions? The purpose of these questions is to provide you with tools to examine your heart to determine if you have a habit of judging other people's motives. If your score was 70 or greater, you need to be on guard against being hypocritical.

The Trait Of The Hypocrite

A hypocrite is one whose conduct is determined by self-interest, not by obedience to God's commands. A hypocrite is an actor; speaking and showing one thing while thinking and living another thing. The trait of the hypocrite is to make a show of commitment to God by words and actions, while at the same time putting self and self-interest over obedience to God's Word. Christ quotes Isaiah 29:13 to the Pharisees after He calls them "hypocrites" (Matt. 15:7). The context of the Isaiah quotation is a criticism of the Jews for displacing heartfelt worship with mere ritual (Matt. 15:1-9). Jesus' application of this quotation to the Pharisees condemned their entire worship of God, not just their carefully observed traditions. This is true today; hypocritical people talk a lot about their "belief" but their actions do not match their words (cf. I John 4:19-21 – summary). This is a dangerous place to be because there is accountability to God for each word and action (Matt. 12:36-37).

Pride – The Leaven of the Pharisees

Christ had a very large following (Greek: *myriadon*, meaning 10,000 and more). This following was having an impact on the disciples – one of pride. In Luke 12:1-3, Christ uses this occasion to warn them about hypocrisy, which comes from pride. Jesus warns them against becoming like the Pharisees – teaching truth without living truth. He likened the Pharisee's and their teaching to "leaven". Leaven, just as hypocrisy, starts small but expands and affects everything it touches. A hypocrite is one whose conduct is determined by self-interest, not by obedience to God's commands. A hypocrite is an actor; speaking and showing one thing while thinking and living another thing. A hypocrite is someone who wants others to see them as better than they really are, and to achieve this goal they hide what's really going on in their life. But there is a truth principle that applies to all men; what is now unknown will one day become known. God knows all secrets and one day accountability to God will occur.

Jesus' Condemnation and the Judgment of the Unrepentant Hypocrite

The condemnation of the hypocrite – Matt. 23:1-36

Jesus directs His attention toward the scribes and the Pharisees in the temple courtyard. He announces a scathing indictment of them in seven 'woes.' Jesus began His ministry in Galilee with the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-11); now He ends it in Judea with seven "woes." Jesus spoke *of* the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:1-7), but He spoke *to* the crowds and His disciples. Christ's pronouncements on the Pharisee's

were severe. Why, because they were hypocrites. They outwardly, by word and action, manifested a form of religious observance; but inwardly they were far from God – they were impure. As the theme of the Sermon on the Mount was righteousness, the theme of the seven woes is hypocrisy. There is a common strong emphasis in both addresses on religious leaders' failure to understand and submit to the Scriptures. Jesus gave both addresses to contrast the true meaning of Scripture with the Pharisees' interpretation and application of it. The Pharisees professed to teach the Scriptures accurately but did not do so; they were hypocrites. Every one of the seven 'woes' is an exclamation like the 'blessed' in the Beatitudes. They state a truth. Each "woe" is not a curse that calls down immediate judgment; but they are true verdicts rendered by the supreme Judge himself, Christ.

Christ's 7 Condemnations (Traits) of a Hypocrite

The "woes" Christ proclaimed against the Pharisees can be used today to identify hypocrisy of professing believers in the church.

The first woe – Matt. 23:13(14) – Say one thing, do another

Christ condemned the Pharisee's because they professed to teach God's will, but their teachings were actually keeping people from entering the kingdom; when it was God's will for His people to enter then. They kept people from entering the kingdom by not preparing to enter it themselves and by discouraging others from doing so. NOTE: Most of the best and earliest copies of Matthew's Gospel available today omit verse 14 but it occurs in the parallel passages of Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47).

The second woe – Matt. 23:15 – False teachers

Christ condemned the Pharisees actions to get Jews to subscribe to their doctrinal convictions, which were corrupt. Christ condemned what they taught their converts; that their teachings (Oral Torah) had the same authority as the Old Testament, if not more authority. These converts were the sons "of hell" in the sense that they belonged to hell and would go there eventually; so instead of leading them to heaven, the scribes and Pharisees and were leading them to hell.

The third woe – Matt. 23:16-22 – Habitual Liars

Christ condemned the Pharisees lying through their use of oaths. Jesus had dealt with the subject of taking oaths in the Sermon on the Mount (5:33-37). By differentiating between what was binding in their oaths and what was not, the Pharisees were encouraging evasive oaths that amounted to lying. Jesus' point was that people should tell the truth and avoid lying through the use of half-truths. Here the Pharisees were misusing the Scriptures that they claimed to defend and expound.

The fourth woe – Matt. 23:23-24 – Focus on the small things

Christ condemned the Pharisees failure to observe more important, "weightier" commands in the Law, while focusing on what specific plants, spices, and seeds to tithe. Hypocrites are usually focused on small issues; and are blind to great principles (Matt.7:3-4). The "weightier" issues that Christ is referring to are the ones He led Micah to write in Micah 6:8; the three primary duties that God requires: "justice and mercy and faithfulness."

The fifth woe – Matt. 23:25-26 – Know the scriptures but do not live them

Christ condemned Pharisaic superficiality, the primary indication of hypocrisy. The Pharisees taught the importance of being ritually clean by observing the dietary and cleansing ordinances of the Law; but they neglected internal purity.

The sixth woe – Matt. 23:27-28 – Know the scriptures but do not live them

Christ again condemned Pharisaic superficiality. The Jews whitewashed grave markers so a Jew would not unknowingly touch one; because to touch a grave one made one unclean and ineligible to participate in religious worship. Jesus compared these "whitewashed" graves to the Pharisees. While appearing attractive on the outside, they were contaminated on the inside, full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Christ's mention of "lawlessness" is significant because the Pharisees prided themselves on

their observance of the Law. Yet their failure to understand and apply the Law correctly made them lawless; their approach to the Law was in fact *wicked*.

The seventh woe – Matt. 23:29-36 – Self-righteous, living in the comparative

Christ condemned Pharisaic morality. Christ directly condemned religious hypocrisy that is demonstrated by an attitude of spiritual superiority. The Pharisees were saying they would not have killed the prophets like their fathers did, but they were plotting to kill Christ. Because their sin was the same as their fathers, rejecting God's prophets, God would punish them for their sin of rejecting Christ by sending them to hell.

The "woes" Christ proclaimed against the Pharisees can be used today to identify hypocrisy of professing believers in the church. This is addressed by Peter in I Peter 1:22 – 2:3. Peter explains the believer's duty to fellow believers is an obedience to the truth that produces a sincere love for the brethren (1:22-25), repentance from sin (2:1), and a desire for spiritual growth (2:2-3). Peter urges believers to do everything out of "sincere (unhypocritical) love" for "the brethren" – "from the heart". This action comes as a result of spending time in the Word of God; it is the only basis for unity of believers. Because of time spent in the Word and obedience to God's Word, each believer is to put aside all "malice" (wickedness) and guile ("deceit," craftiness, lit. to catch with bait), which are *attitudes*; and all "hypocrisy," "envy," and "slander", which are *actions*. Believers are to have an appetite for the Word of God because they have "tasted" God's goodness ("kindness") in their new birth. The more time the believer spends in God's Word, the greater satisfaction they will have in life as well as increased spiritual growth (cf. Ps. 34:8).

Judgment of the unrepentant hypocrite

Warning! Fear God, not man. All unknown will become known. Judgment will occur to those who are hypocrites (Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 12:1-5). Because all things will be made known, there is accountability for all things done (Luke 12:4-5). Christ identifies why it is important to guard against hypocrisy by the use of a comparison – death and life. Christ tells the disciples to stay true to His teachings even when it may mean their death. Rather than fearing their persecutors, the disciples should "fear" God more. Christ was warning the disciples not to become hypocrites like the Pharisees. Why? Because judgment will occur to those who are hypocrites – ones who have not truly repented of their sin (Matt. 7:21-23) – and God has the power (and right) to send a person to hell; which will happen to all men who do not repent of their sin and believe in Christ.

Hypocrisy is the I of being righteous on the outside when you're unrighteous on the inside. Hypocrisy is rearranging your ashes for the effect that it has on others. A hypocrite has no real life, only ashes because death is their eternal reality (cf. Matt. 6:1 – 7:23). There are consequences to being a hypocrite. Truth was being taught by the scribes and Pharisees ('you have heard it was said;' cf. Matt. 5:21-48); but it was not being lived by the scribes and Pharisees (Christ pointed out the truth – 'but I say unto you;' cf. Matt. 5:21-48). Truth must be lived out within your life. If truth is not being lived out in your life, you are practicing a religion that will yield only eternal death in hell (cf. Matt. 5:20). Hypocrites are focused on material things and money. They are anxious for their life and seek ways to gain temporal peace. Hypocrites end up practicing a man-made religion even when their words are scriptural and religious.

Concluding Thoughts

Hypocrisy is among the greatest sins of Christians all throughout the ages. Christians are often accused of being hypocritical and people often say there are hypocrites in the church. Most people get confused of the actual meaning of the word hypocrite. As soon as a Christian does something wrong, he or she is branded a hypocrite when really the person is a sinner. Everybody is a sinner, but when a Christian sins

the world puts it out there more because they expect us to be non-human when really a Christian that gives his life to Jesus Christ says Lord I am not perfect I am a sinner. Why does it matter that there are hypocrites in the church? What does that have to do with you and worshiping the Lord with the body of Christ?

However, habitual hypocrisy has led many astray. Due to hypocrisy, many unbelievers are turned off to Christianity, thinking that we are no different to others. Sadly, hypocrisy isn't just found among members of the church, but also among its leaders. We have all been hypocrites at some time of our lives. In fact, this sin is a struggle for many of us. Now, here's the hope that we all have: hypocrisy, like any sin, can be overcome. You may not successfully eliminate it from your life overnight, but the important thing is that you recognize it in your life and are seeking the LORD in struggling against it.

Are you hypocritical in the way you are living your life? How do you measure up to the standards set by Christ? Does your life demonstrate the evidence of spending time in God's Word and obedience to His commands and will? What are the marks of a true believer? How is genuine conversion to be distinguished from false conversion? William Guthrie, in his book **'The Christian's Great Interest,'** provides five marks of a true believer that are not possessed by the hypocrite.

1. A true believer's heart is changed forever. In Jeremiah 32:39 the Lord says, "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever." Hypocrites never have a changed nature. Hypocrites want Christ for the good that He might do them in the world. But a true believer's heart loves Christ as the all-satisfying treasure of this life and the next.

2. A true believer's changed life comes from a heart of love to Christ. Hypocrites can clean up their outward behavior to be seen by men, to ease their troubled consciences, or to keep themselves from the consequences of their sins. But true believers love Christ and keep His commandments for His sake, to serve Him, to know Him, and to bring glory to His name (Psa. 119:6).

3. A true believer seeks Christ and His kingdom above all else. This is the one thing necessary: Christ's friendship and fellowship. But that is never the "one thing" and heart-satisfying choice of the hypocrites. True believers, on the other hand, desire that this "better part would never be taken from them" (Luke 10:42).

4. A true believer submits to the righteousness of God. He abandons all hope in himself and his own righteousness, and rests wholly in the righteousness of Christ for his acceptance before God. A true believer rests in Christ and Him only as his Savior. Hypocrites don't do this (Rom. 10:3). They depend, in some degree, upon their own righteousness.

5. A true believer has the three great essentials of genuine Christianity. First, he is broken in heart and emptied of his own righteousness so as to loath himself (Luke 19:10). Second, he takes up Christ Jesus as the only treasure and jewel that can enrich and satisfy (Matt 13:44). Third, he sincerely closes with Christ's whole yoke without exception, judging all His "will just and good, holy and spiritual" (Rom 7:12). A hypocrite does none of these things.

As long as you are putting an effort of eliminating hypocrisy in your life even little by little, God can see your heart and will commend you for that. He is more than willing to help you overcome hypocrisy and live a genuine and blessed life. Just pray and ask for His help.

No one's perfect but we must aim for perfection (Matthew 5:48). That's how high God has set the standard that we all should live by. Please examine your life closely to be sure that you are not a hypocrite.

Reconciliation – A Scriptural Analysis

The fruit of a humble heart that forgives is reconciliation. Genuine forgiveness results in reconciliation, a restored relationship. The greatest evidence of this truth is salvation. Christ died for our sin so that we may be reconciled to God, which we are when we trust in Christ and ask Him for forgiveness of our sin and place our faith in Him.

Definitions of “Reconcile” and “Unity”

To study “Reconciliation” it is a requirement that we look at the definitions of RECONCILE / RECONCILIATION / UNITY. Following are the Hebrew, Greek and English definitions of RECONCILE / RECONCILIATION / UNITY:

Reconcile:

- **Hebrew:** (“*kaphar*”) to make atonement, appease, be merciful, pardon, forgive, to placate, to cancel (Lev. 6:30)
 (“*ratsah*”) to satisfy a debt, accept, accomplish, approve, consent with, delight, enjoy, pardon (Isa. 29:4)
- **Greek:** (“*apokatallasso*”) to reconcile fully (Col. 1:20)
- **English:** (reconcile) restore friendly relations; cause to coexist in harmony, make or show to be compatible

Reconciliation:

- **Hebrew:** (“*kaphar*”) to make atonement, appease, be merciful, pardon, forgive, to placate, to cancel (Lev. 8:15, Ezek. 45:15, Dan. 9:24)
- **Greek:** (“*katallage* / *katallasso*”) to change mutually, to restore, restoration to favor, atonement (II Cor. 5:18, Rom. 5:10)
- **English:** (reconciliation) the restoration of friendly relations; the action of making one compatible with another, harmonization

Reconciled:

- **Greek:** (“*diallasso*”) to change thoroughly, to conciliate (Matt. 5:24)
- **English:** (reconciled) to reestablish a close relationship, to settle or resolve, to make compatible and harmonious

Unity:

- **Hebrew:** (“*yachad*”) to become one, a unit, alike, together (Psa. 133:1)
- **Greek:** (“*henotes*”) oneness, unanimity (Eph. 4:13)
- **English:** (unity) the state of being united, joined as a whole, state of forming a complete and pleasing whole

Reconciliation

Reconciliation comes from the Greek family of words that has its roots in “*allasso*.” The meaning common to this word group is “change” or “exchange.” Reconciliation involves a change in the relationship. First it is a change of relationship between God and Man. Second it is a change of relationship between man and man; individual and individual. Reconciliation is an action that is needed when there is a breakdown in a relationship. Reconciliation is fundamentally a change from a state of hostility and separation to one of harmony and fellowship.

The reconciliation between God and man is clearly stated by Paul. In Romans 5:6-11, Paul says that before reconciliation we were powerless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies; we were under God's wrath (v. 9). Because of change or reconciliation, we become new creatures. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Cor. 5:17). The reconciliation of God to man takes place through the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross (II Cor. 5:18). God reconciles us to himself through the death of his Son (Rom. 5:1). Therefore, by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9) we can be reconciled to God. We are no longer enemies to God, ungodly, sinners, or powerless. Instead, the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom he has given to us (Rom. 5:5). It is a change in the total state of our lives.

Reconciliation is the objective work of God through Christ (II Cor. 5:19-20). It is Christ through the cross who has made reconciliation possible, for "God made him to be sin for us" (II Cor. 5:21). Reconciliation is also related to justification. We have been justified through faith by His blood (Rom. 5:1-11). Reconciliation is also subjective because a believer in Christ is spoken of and referred to as "being reconciled." The reconciliation of a believer with God through Christ is the basis for reconciliation between believers; between husband and wife, pastor and member, believer and believer. If a believer is about to worship the LORD, ('offer a gift at the altar' cf. Matt: 5:23-24) and remembers that he has something against his brother he should "go" and be reconciled first to his brother and then come and worship. Reconciliation is initiated by the one who seeks forgiveness and offers it.

Is Reconciliation Different than Forgiveness?

Reconciliation and forgiveness are similar in some respects. So much so that sometimes we confuse the two of them. But they are not the same thing. So then, what is reconciliation?

Reconciliation presupposes forgiveness. If we forgive someone, we need to be open to reconciliation, if possible. Reconciliation is forgiveness completed—the actual restoration of the interpersonal bond between two people in mutual acceptance of each other for whom each one is. Forgiveness and reconciliation can lead to a stronger bond than previously existed. Each time an offense occurs, we can learn more about both the other and ourselves. This can lead to a deeper knowledge and understanding of each by the other, and thus can also lead to a more authentic bond of intimacy. Reconciliation should always be the goal.

Sometimes we feel unable to reconcile—to put forgiveness into our actions and restore a relationship. We need to look at what is in ourselves that prevents us from reconciling—some fear or expectation of the other. But it is crucial to remember that forgiveness is only fulfilled in reconciliation.

An example of God's forgiveness— and a model for our own—is the parable of the Prodigal Son (cf. Luke 15:11-32). Think of the hurt of the father as his son selfishly rebelled against him. But the father never ceased to love the son, and was watching and waiting for his return. When the son came to himself, and became aware of his own sin—but not of how much he had hurt his father—he returned. Still thinking only of himself and his own needs, he rehearses how he will ask his father to receive him and make him an employee. But his father doesn't even let him finish his little rehearsed speech. He embraces the son and holds him to himself. He has a robe and ring brought, restoring him as son and heir. He kills the fatted calf as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. He neither demands nor wants an apology, nor does he permit any justification or even self-denigration on the part of his son. Rather, he forgives his son from the abundance of his love, casting away any resentment or bitterness, and accepts him for who he is—his beloved son. This is how God forgives us! So, we must forgive each other and be reconciled. We are instructed by Scripture to forgive others. It was an explicit part of Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6:7-

15. As noted before, ‘forgive’ in the Greek means “to send away, dismiss, suffer to depart; to emit, send forth.” In relation to an offense against us, it means that we dismiss it, or send it away. We do not hold onto that offense, harboring it in our hearts. Instead, we treat it as if it had not occurred.

Reconciliation Definition

The word “reconciliation” is less commonly used. And most times in Scripture it deals with the relationship between God and mankind. Reconciliation assumes a broken relationship caused by an offense or hurt. Broken relationships have a cause that has separated two parties. The two might have been friends; it might have been family members; it might have been husband and wife; it might have been a pastor and a member of a church; it might have been two church members; the offense has occurred and the relationship is strained, broken or it does not exist.

Reconciliation involves forgiveness. But it goes beyond forgiveness. When we forgive someone, there is no guarantee that we will have a restored relationship. Forgiveness may be one-sided. It may well be that even after you have forgiven someone that both parties remain estranged because forgiveness does not require two parties to be in agreement. Forgiveness can be offered and rejected. .

Reconciliation, however takes two parties to restore the relationship. Reconciliation requires both parties to be willing to participate in restoring the relationship. It is always possible, and expected, for you to forgive. But reconciliation will not be possible if the other party is not willing to participate.

Seek reconciliation where it’s possible

In Romans 12:18, Paul gives us explicit instructions about the need for reconciliation. Paul tells us that “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” We should strive for reconciliation. But it may not always be possible.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus also gives instructions concerning the need for reconciliation. He says to us that “if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” Broken relationships with people can impact my relationship with God, hindering my prayer.

What is your responsibility when there is a damaged relationship with another person? First, you need to forgive them for whatever offense is between you and them. Then you should seek reconciliation. But reconciliation may not be possible. We have no control over how the other person might respond, but you should (may I say ‘must’) initiate the attempt to reconcile. If that does not work out, you should continue to do my best to live at peace with them.

Foundation for reconciliation

As believers in Christ; as believers who will spend eternity together, we have a solid foundation whereby we should seek reconciliation and experience reconciliation. The foundation for us to make every effort to reconcile with another believer is the shed blood of Christ. In Scripture receiving forgiveness is more than the offending party saying “I’m sorry, please forgive me” to the one offended; or the offended party saying to the offending party “I forgive you.” In the O.T. restitution for an offense was often required (cf. Ex. 22:1-15; Num. 5:5-7). If the offense was against God, the shedding of blood was required (cf. Heb. 9:22). Because of the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, the offended party, God, has forgiven the offending party, humanity.

However, forgiveness given by God does not mean that we are reconciled to God. Restoring a relationship requires something from both sides of the broken relationship. It requires a desire for restoration; and then acting on that desire. What is required on the human side of the equation? What is it that God expects of me in the reconciliation process? The Bible teaches us that all we have to bring to Him is faith. God has done everything needed for reconciliation. All that he requires from me is that I accept it. In reconciling human relationships, this is the principle we are to follow. We have to initiate reconciliation. The other person has the burden of accepting it or rejecting it.

Questions to be Asked and Answered

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to see if you desire to reconcile with a party that has offended or hurt you. As you review each question, answer it by writing down the number that best fits your response to the question. 1 = Never / No. 2 = Rarely. 3 = Sometimes / Don't know. 4 = Regularly. 5 = Always / Yes. Try your best to be honest with your answers.

1. Do you want to reconcile with the other person?
2. Can you 'choose not to remember' the past hurts or offenses?
3. Can you move forward with a relationship with the other person?
4. Are you willing to be the initiator to reconcile?
5. Have you grown spiritually in humility and forgiveness?
6. Can you see a long-term relationship with the person who has hurt or offended you?
7. Are you willing to work on restoration of the fellowship or relationship with the person you are seeking to be reconciled to?
8. Are you willing to build a relationship with the other person?
9. Are you willing to make some changes in your behavior to the other person?
10. Are you willing to commit to reconciling and restoring your relationship with the other person?
11. Is your heart humble enough to seek reconciliation?
12. Do you feel vulnerable in seeking reconciliation?

Did you answer the above 12 questions honestly? Did you carefully examine your heart as you were answering the questions? The purpose of these questions is to provide you with tools to examine your heart to determine if you have the desire to reconcile with the other person. If your score was 35 or less, your heart is not in the right place to seek reconciliation with the person who offended or hurt you.

Believers and reconciliation

As believers, we are to seek forgiveness and reconciliation as soon as possible (Matt. 5:21-25). Frankly, if forgiveness and reconciliation is needed between two believers, we are to go immediately and reconcile even if we are at church getting ready for a communion service. After reconciliation takes place, we are to return to worship. This is reinforced in Matthew 18:15-20, which is a process to be followed for forgiveness as well as reconciliation. It tells us in verse 15 that when we go to make reconciliation, we should go alone and keep it private. Unfortunately, in most cases when there is a dispute between two parties in the church, everyone in the church knows about it before the parties involved. Note: If you are someone who is not part of the problem or part of the solution then you are a 'gossip' if you speak to others about the situation.

For the believer, the restoration of friendly relations demonstrates the peace and unity that we have in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation also fulfills what Jesus said would be a key element in demonstrating to the world that we are Christians - love one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12). Likewise, reconciliation shows us that relationships are more important than religion.

Jesus spoke about this when he was having dinner at Matthew's house and others questioned why he was there with tax collectors and sinners. In Matthew 9:12-13 (NIV), "On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' for I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners (to repentance)." By these words, Jesus emphasized that repenting and restoring relationships were what was most important to God (cf. Hosea 6:4-10; Matt. 12:7).

Another thing that makes reconciliation different for believers is the Old Testament Hebrew word for 'reconciliation.' The Hebrew word for reconciliation is '*kaphar*,' which is most often translated into the English word, "atonement." This is what Christ did on the cross when He died for our sins; He provided an 'atonement' for our sins with the Father (Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:17-21) so we could be reconciled to God. The English word for 'atonement' means "to reestablish a close relationship; to settle or resolve; to make compatible and harmonious which is a condition without tension. Therefore, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross removed the tension between us and God. No other word could serve as a better example of what reconciliation should mean between believers. Our reconciliation with one another has its Biblical foundation in the atonement of Christ.

Reconciliation is the restored fellowship of two people that had been estranged from one another. It is an action taken by two people to forgive one another and move forward in peace and unity of a restored relationship.

How do we reconcile with someone else?

The Bible teaches that when we approach someone else to confront or forgive them, we should do it in a spirit of meekness. Our motivation should be to communicate in such a way that the person being approached is not offended. This communicates grace and love to the other person and a willingness to restore the relationship. (cf. Prov. 10:12; Gal. 6:1-5; Eph. 4:1-3, 25, 29-31).

In addition to this, we must be willing to ask for forgiveness and forgive if asked (Matt. 18:21-35). It is important to remember that to forgive it means that we give up our right to enforce justice when we have been wronged. Asking for forgiveness is different than apologizing. An apology only applies when no wrong has been done because the root of the word apology means "without the Word." This makes an apology only appropriate when no Biblical offense has taken place. When we grant forgiveness, we release our right to enforce justice and bring up the topic again. Our motivation to forgive is based on the fact that God forgave us of our sins and removed them from our account when we confessed our sins to Him.

Because of His great act of love, we are able to love and forgive others (cf. Psa.103:8-12; Prov. 10:12). This should motivate us to do everything in our power to restore our relationships with others even if we're not the person who has done wrong. In the same way, Christ did the same for us (cf. Rom. 5:8-9; Eph. 5:21; 1 John 4:19). It should be, in practice, that believers have an advantage over non-believers to seek forgiveness and reconciliation quickly because they share the Holy Spirit who empowers them to humble themselves and to seek the will of God. Forgiveness and reconciliation should be a priority for believers because of: 1) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, 2) the time we spend in God's Word and 3) the time we spend in prayer. We, through the work of the Holy Spirit, should have our mind changed to think like Christ. This makes reconciliation easier for believers, but only if we seek the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Reconciled

Reconciliation is the process of restoring friendly relationships with one another so that we can get along. The Bible teaches that reconciliation should take place as soon as possible. The Bible also provides a process for believers to resolve their differences. When this process is followed, it will lead to reconciliation if both parties are seeking the will of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ is the motivator for believers to reconcile with one another. Just as God has forgiven you, you are to forgive those who have hurt you. Just as God has reconciled with you through the person and work of Christ, you are to reconcile with others. May we be found walking in unity with all of our fellow believers; and as much as possible with all men (cf. Rom. 12:18).

Fruit of Reconciliation – Unity

The fruit of reconciliation is unity; and this unity is on public display. Unity is clearly and easily observed. When forgiveness and reconciliation are genuine, unity is on display for all to see. The greatest display of unity that can be seen by the world is the unity of the church. The greatest danger for a church seeking to be a testimony of Christ to a community is disunity. Because the church is made up of people that have a sin nature that have different interests, different talents, different personalities, different attitudes, different levels of enthusiasm, different levels of knowledge, different experiences, different opinions, different backgrounds, different philosophies of life, different priorities, different levels of commitment, different levels of expectations and different ages; there is a great danger and opportunity for disunity to occur.

But unity is possible. Why, because we are united with Christ (Phil. 2:1-4). And it is on that foundation that, as believers, we are to be forgiving and reconciling with one another. We share in something common. With relatives we share family relationships; a comingled ancestry but with a common bond. With friends we share common interests, experiences and viewpoints. Common things bind us. Which is the case in a church, we have Christ in common. A church can be and should be unified because we have Christ and the Holy Spirit indwelling within us – we have things in common.

However, conflict does arise in the church between believers. And when this occurs, we are to be swift to forgive and seek reconciliation. Believers have too much in common to be ‘dis-unified’ because we have the Holy Spirit within (Eph. 4:3-4). If there is disunity, it is because pride is at work or one of the people involved is not a genuine believer (Gal. 5:22-23) because the fruit of the Spirit is not evident in their life. Believers are to have the same mind; we are to have the same love; we are to be hospitable; we are to be united – meaning ‘one-souled’ (Phil. 2:1-11; Rom. 12:10-20). Believers within a church have the same purpose – to share the gospel with the community where the church is located (Phil. 1:27). With all of these things in common, all differences and offenses that occur between people within a church should fall by the wayside. The purpose of the church is to share the gospel and to be a testimony of Christ to a community – and in accomplishing that purpose forgiveness and reconciliation should be constantly practiced.

The purpose of a believer being a member of the church cannot be your personal comfort or preference. When that is the case conflict abounds because of pride. We are to have the mind of Christ as we seek to share the gospel with others (Phil. 2:1-11). We are to be humble. We are to judge rightly. We are to forgive. We are to seek reconciliation. We are to look out for the interests of others in order to have unity (Phil. 2:3-4). We are to encourage one another toward love and good works (Heb. 10:24). When we humbly seek to encourage and meet the needs of others, there is unity. And unity is the fruit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

How do believers preserve unity in a Church?

How can we preserve unity in the Church? How can we be an instrument of unity as an individual *rather* than an instrument of division? Here are some principles of conduct for us to follow as we seek to establish, support and preserve unity within the church.

1. Be Humble. Always be humble (Eph. 4:2). Unity requires humility. A humble person is willing to sacrifice their ego and desires for the sake of the group.

2. Be Gentle. Always be gentle (Eph. 4:2). A gentle person calms those around them. A gentle person has the ability to deal with hard situations in a graceful way. Inevitably there will be conflict within the Church. A gentle person will know the right way to deal with it.

3. Be Patient. Always be patient with each other (Eph. 4:2). A patient person keeps calm even when those around them are being irritating. Don't be hasty. Don't base any decisions on your emotions of the moment (Prov. 16:32). Don't make decisions on unproven facts (Prov. 18:13, 17).

4. Be understanding. Always make an allowance for each other's faults because of your love for Christ and for your fellow believer (Eph. 4:2). People are sinful and will let you down. Knowing that fact will help you be understanding when they do. Don't expect perfection from your church family because you will be disappointed; and because you are not perfect.

5. Work hard for peace. Always make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace (Eph. 4:3). Unity and peace take hard work. You must be willing to put in the effort to make unity really happen. Work hard to keep the unity within a church (John 17:20-21). Every Christian has the duty to keep the unity of the Church. Being united is not optional, but rather it is mandatory.

6. Celebrate and embrace your common faith. Always remember that you and your fellow believer are God's (Eph. 4:4-6).

7. Celebrate Christ's gifts to believers. Always seek out and celebrate each other's unique gifts that have been given by Christ to each believer (Eph. 4:7). Each person should faithfully use the gifts they have been given, while at the same time celebrating the gifts of others.

8. Follow those with leadership gifts. Christ has given gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12). God has given people with leadership gifts to the Church in order to equip the members to do the work of the ministry. Someone who is promoting unity in the church will follow spiritual leadership within the limits of scripture. Love the Word of God and follow those whom God has called to lead you (Psa. 119:165). We must stand as one and be united under the Head of the Church, Christ; and under the leadership of those called to be the leaders of the local church.

9. Speak the truth in love. Always speak the truth in love. When we speak the truth in love, we grow more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church (Eph. 4:15). There will be times that you will need to say hard things to someone. It is important to do this in a loving way. As you do this with one another God will help you grow and will unite you as a group. Don't be a gossip; be careful of every word you speak (Matt. 12:36-37).

10. Be quick to forgive and reconcile. Always be ready to forgive one another of any offense (Matt. 5:23-24). Always be ready to forgive one another and to reconcile with one who seeks forgiveness (Matt. 18:15-17).

Closing Thoughts

There is no more important study for each of us to undertake than the study of the heart of the genuine believer. The heart of the genuine believer is to love the LORD and their neighbor (cf. Matt. 22:37-40, 5:44; John 13:34; I John 3:23). However, it is all too common to see pride, judgmental attitudes,

bitterness and hypocrisy between individuals who claim Christ as Savior; in the church between Pastors, church staffs, and members; in the homes of believers between husband, wife, children and family; in the community between those who profess to be believers and those that are not believers. One of the greatest challenges in Christianity today is for believers to live out genuine faith in Christ to others by living a life that publicly portrays genuine humility, biblical discernment, forgiveness and reconciliation that results in unity.

As we have studied together, my hope is that you have examined your own life to see who is in control. Is it self and Satan as evidenced by pride, a judgmental attitude, bitterness and hypocrisy? Or is it Christ as evidenced by humility, right judgment, forgiveness and reconciliation? Your life is controlled by Satan and self; or it is controlled by Christ and a humble heart; there is no middle ground. There can only be one master in your life; and the master of your life is the one of your own choosing – Satan or Christ.

The key issue in your life is your heart. Is it a repentant heart or is it a rebellious heart? We will close our study with a study on repentance. Repentance is the key to life – to eternal life. Repentance leads to salvation and an eternal life in heaven. Unrepentance leads to condemnation and an eternal life in hell. God has given to you two great gifts – time and choice. What choices are you making when it comes to the gospel of Christ? Do you allow pride to control your heart? Or are you willing to humble yourself and place your faith in Christ? The choice is yours. And what does your life publicly show to others: Pride, Judgmental Attitude, Bitterness and Hypocrisy; or, Humility, Right Judgment, Forgiveness and Reconciliation? Others see your life clearly. What do you see in your life according to Scripture?

Genuine repentance is the key!!

Genuine Repentance – The Fruit of Genuine Faith

Why is Repentance Needed!

In II Peter 3:9 scripture states that God does not want any to perish but that all come to repentance. This directly implies that man must make an intentional decision about repentance. God is sovereign and He will draw men to Himself (John 15:16; 17:20-23), yet He has provided men with the gift of choice (Matt. 18:11, John 3:16). Because of the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:12), all men are born lost; enemies of God and destined for an eternal hell.

But God has provided men with a way of salvation from an eternity in hell through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the message of the gospel, place your faith in Jesus Christ and you will be saved from an eternity in hell. Now men have a choice to make within the sovereign will of God; do they place their faith in Christ or do they reject Christ?

Salvation is by faith and faith alone in the person and work of Christ on the cross (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation does not occur when men reject Christ or when they believe that works are needed in addition to faith. Faith within a person is either genuine or it is false. Genuine, authentic faith in Christ is evidenced by; 1) a love for God, 2) genuine repentance from sin, 3) humility, 4) devotion to God's glory, 5) prayer, 6) selflessness, 7) good works, 8) separation from the world, 9) spiritual growth and desire to learn God's Word, 10) obedience to God's Word, 11) a publicly transformed life, and 12) an eagerly awaiting for Christ's return. A false faith wants only to escape hell and there is no desire for Christ or for any of the fruits of genuine faith and

repentance; in fact they would rather that Christ not return right away so they can have as much of this world as possible.

A person who is truly justified by faith will genuinely repent of their sin (as repentance is the fruit of faith) and will publicly exhibit a life change. If a person claims to be saved but continues to habitually sin and there is no visible, public evidence of a changed life, they most likely do not have a genuine faith (James 2:14, 17, 20, 26). Also, if a person claims to be saved and does not eagerly await the return of Christ, they most likely do not have a genuine faith (Heb. 9:28).

Genuine faith seeks repentance so one can be reconciled to God; repentance is a fruit of faith as genuine repentance does not occur prior to faith (Rom. 14:23, John 14:6). Until the person and sacrifice of Christ are the objects of trust in one's life, genuine repentance will not take place. Repentance is needed because we sin. All men, believers and unbelievers' sin – and this is a great challenge. All of us have sin in our hearts and lives. If we say we have no sin we are simply deceiving ourselves. To say that we have no sin is not the truth (I John 1:7-9). So how we deal with sin in our lives is important; for both the unbeliever and the believer.

When salvation by genuine faith occurs, it is important to understand that becoming a believer does not nullify the old nature, but rather introduces a new nature which wars against the old. What we have to understand is that these two natures war with each other and the sinful nature sometimes wins out over the new nature and thus we can fall into the trap of sinful behavior as believers (Eph. 4:22-24, Rom. 7:15-20). We have the new nature that does not sin and cannot sin and we have the old nature that wars against this new nature (I John 3:6-9)and the reason we sin is that we allow the old nature to win battles from time to time.

Does the fact that all believers' sin give us a license to continue in known sin? Or does God expect us to turn and repent from known sin and walk in victory (Rom. 6:1-2)? God expects us to repent of our sin....and if we do not there are consequences to continuing in known sin. Known sins stated in the Bible that we are to repent of when we come to Christ are: immorality, drunkenness, filthy language, covetousness, evil desires, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, lying, theft, hatred, jealousies, dissensions, murders, etc. (Col. 3:5-10, Gal. 5:19-21). There are also sins in which God has convicted you personally of which must be repented of such as one's attitudes, sins of omission, lack of forgiving, bitterness, critical spirit, pride, etc.

God warns us that we are to repent of sin in our lives. If we persist in the sin we will begin to sow to the flesh and the flesh will reap corruption from the sin. As a result, our sins will eventually be found out by the fruit of our lives (Gal. 6:7-8). There are some serious consequences to continuing in known sin such as 1) loss of Christian joy (Rom. 14:17), 2) the Holy Spirit being quenched and grieved (Eph. 4:30), 3) reproach upon God and Christ (II Sam. 12:13-14), 4) God will turn a deaf ear to our prayers (Isa. 59:1-3), 5) brings chastisement from God (Heb. 12:5-7, 1 Cor. 11:29-32), and 6) being easily deceived (Rom. 7:11, c.f. Prov. 28:13).

For the professing believer, walking in known and unrepented sin can have some pretty severe consequences (i.e., Matt. 7:21-23). But for the true believer, by the fear of God and the goodness and mercy of God, they are led into genuine repentance that leads to victory over sin. Genuine repentance of sin occurs when the acts of sin cease to exist because of the infusion of grace. Repentance is a gift of God's mercy and is a grace of God's Spirit whereby the sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.

Repentance is Desired by God!

In II Peter 3:9 scripture states that God is patient with us because He does not want any to perish but that all come to repentance (“metanoia”: meaning a change of mind for the better). This verse describes God’s desire but it is not His decree. God’s desire that all come to the Lord is also stated in I Timothy 2:4 (‘come to the Lord’; based on the Greek word “*epistrophe*”: meaning to turn to, to turn one’s self about, to convert – Acts 9:35). Based on the whole counsel of Scripture, we know that God has chosen His own and He is patient so those who would be saved will come to repentance.

II Peter 3:9 states that it is God’s desire that all come to repentance, so there must be results directly tied to the action of repentance. Genuine repentance has two specific results; repentance in salvation and repentance to a restored fellowship with God.

1. Repentance in Redemption (salvation)

Sinners must repent to be saved (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30, II Pet. 3:9). Repentance is the evidence (the fruit) of genuine faith, which assures redemption (salvation).

Illustration: Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

- a. Jesus sought Zacchaeus and Zacchaeus sought Jesus – vs. 5,9
- b. Zacchaeus repented, which resulted in a change of Master, from Satan to Christ – vs.6,8
- c. Repentance results in a change of heart – vs. 6
- d. Love of God (Ps. 42:1, 73:25; Luke 10:27; Rom. 8:7)
- e. Repentance from sin (Ps. 32:5; Prov. 28:17; Rom. 7:14; II Cor. 7:10; I John 1:8-9)
- f. Genuine humility (Ps. 51:17; Matt.5:1-12; James 4:6,9)
- g. Repentance results in a change of life, an authentic change of direction in one’s life from taking to giving – vs. 8

2. Repentance to Restored Relationship (fellowship) with God

The old nature within a believer will lead the believer into sin, but the new nature within a believer never lets the believer to be happy in sin. Believers in Christ must repent when they sin (Acts 8:22; Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19).

Illustration: Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24)

- a. The Father / Son relationship is well established; it is a family relationship. After genuine salvation one is a part of the family of God through Christ – vs. 11-12
- b. The son rebelled. He allowed a change of Master to occur, from father to self; which ultimately led to someone else – vs. 13, 15
- c. There was a change of heart in the son, from family to self. A change from serving to taking through self-centeredness – vs. 12-13
- d. There was a change of life in the son. He left the family to focus on self and selfish desires; he lived life based on his rules and desires – vs. 13
- e. The result of that decision was a destroyed life – vs. 16 Then came repentance for sin, “he came to himself” – vs. 17.
- f. Repentance creates a foundation for action to restore fellowship with father and family – vs. 18-19.
- g. Genuine repentance is evidenced by the son’s change of heart and change of life – vs. 21
- h. The Father was looking for the return of his prodigal son; just as Christ is looking for the return of His wayward children – vs. 20

- i. Genuine repentance results in restored relationship with father and family – vs. 22-24

Both repentance in salvation (sinner being reconciled to God) and repentance to restored fellowship with God (believer's fellowship being restored, after sin breaks fellowship and communion with God) exhibit the same characteristics. There are six characteristics of genuine, authentic repentance, they are:

- a. Seeing sin as sin – seeing one's self as a sinner
- b. Sorrow for sin
- c. Confession of sin
- d. Shame for sin
- e. Hatred of sin
- f. Turning from sin

Why Repentance is Necessary!

Genuine repentance, as the fruit of genuine faith, is necessary for man to be reconciled to God. There are 5 scripturally clear reasons why repentance is necessary for man to be reconciled to God.

1. **Repentance is God's sovereign command to man.** Repentance is not arbitrary; it is a command of God (Acts 17:30). God has enacted a command to repent – and no sinner will be saved and enter into heaven unless that sinner repents. Why? Because God will not break, change, or modify His own command. God made this very clear to Moses, though He is a God of mercy He will not forgive a sinner who goes on in his sin (Exod. 34:5-7).
2. **Repentance is required for God to fellowship with man.** A righteous, holy and pure God cannot fellowship with sinful man (II Cor. 6:14). God will not justify a man who is an unrepentant sinner (Exod. 23:7). Until the sinner repents, God cannot fellowship or commune with man. If God would fellowship with a sinner before repentance then that represents God's approval of the sinner and the sin he is engaged in. It would be inconsistent of God to go against His righteousness, holiness and purity to pardon and fellowship with a sinner while he continues in sin.
3. **Repentance is required by Christ for the salvation of man.** Christ is the Savior, but He does not save men who do not repent. A king will pardon a rebel if the rebel repents of his defiance and yields himself to the mercy of the king; but a king will not pardon a rebel if the rebel persists in being openly defiant against the king. This truth applies to Christ – He is the "Prince and Savior to give repentance" (Acts 5:30-32), and He will not pardon the man who continues and persists in sin (Rom. 1:18-32).
4. **Repentance is required because sin wrongs God because it is disobedience to His Law.** A sinner breaks the Law of God (Exod. 20:1-20; Matt. 22:34-40). Today a person who breaks a law is held accountable to pay for breaking that law (prison, fine, repayment, etc.). This is genuine in regard to the Law of God. A sinner breaks the Law of God and is accountable to pay for breaking that law (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). Through genuine, genuine repentance a sinner humbles and judges himself before God because he understands that God has every right to destroy him because of his sin.
5. **Repentance is required because if God would save men without repentance, then He must save all men.** Repentance is necessary because man sinned against God (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:6-7, 17; i.e., Rom. 5:12-18). Because of the sinful act of man, God established a plan where He gave man the opportunity to be reconciled to Him through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:10-11; II Cor. 5:17-19) and the fruit of repentance. If God would save man without man repenting, then the entirety of scripture would be foolishness and of no use – and God

would not be God. Yet many men do not seek repentance. There are two types of men who do not seek repentance – 1) those who hear the Word of God but their lives do not change, and 2) those that actively rebel against and reject the Word of God and its truth.

The first type of man is the most fearful type of man. They hear the truth of God's Word being proclaimed, but they do not attend church regularly (Heb. 10:25) and their life does not change. When God puts individuals and pastors in their life to exhort them, encourage them, teach them and persuade them to leave their practice of sin in their life and they do not change, it becomes harder and harder for them to repent. That is a fearful position to be in because they will be the ones that experience the truth of Matt. 7:21-23 (eternal punishment and death in hell).

The second type of man is the man who chooses to follow Satan. They ignore and actively reject the truth of God's Word. They will find it hard to repent because they actively move away from repentance. They are ones who "rebel against the light" (Job. 24:13-17). The sinner's heart becomes so hard through their active wickedness (Jer. 8:4-6) that their hearts become like stone (Zech. 7:11-12). A hard heart is where Satan dwells (I Tim. 4:1-2 – "seared conscience"). The hard heart has a seared conscience – and that is when God gives the sinner over to their sin and ceases to pursue them (Rom. 1:28-32). Here is where the unpardonable sin (the sin of unbelief in Christ and the rejection of Christ) comes into existence because the sinner's heart has become so hard and reprobate that it will not repent. The one sin that is unforgivable is unbelief in and the rejection of Christ (John 16:8-11)

What Repentance is Not!

To understand what genuine repentance is, we must understand what genuine repentance is not. This is an important contrast to know and understand. It has been stated that many people are going to hell because they have been deceived by their belief in a counterfeit (false) repentance.

1. **The first deceit of counterfeit repentance is sorrow for being caught.** This means an individual has no feelings of compunction (uneasiness, anxiety, remorse) while engaged in sin but feelings of great sorrow when caught in sin. When someone is "caught" in sin there is fear, shame, anguish and crisis of conscience; they may believe that they were repentant of sin because of the shame, fear, guilt and humiliation they experienced when caught in sin. Repentance is not a natural fear produced within human nature caused by the breaking of a law or a moral code. Being sorrowful for sin without a change in one's heart is not repentance; and this is evidenced over time, when things calm down, the sin they were once caught in once again becomes a part and pattern of their life (II. Cor. 7:8-12).
2. **The second deceit of counterfeit repentance is resolving not to sin again when caught in sin.** This means a person may purpose and make a vow not to sin a specific sin again, yet they do not repent (usually the individual is primarily concerned about "outward" sins). Many people cry out to God to help them if they are in a difficult situation or circumstance; then later on they forget their cry out to God and revert back to their sinful ways. Resolution against sin in one's life often occurs due to a present painful circumstance brought about by an act of sin. This resolution comes not because the sin is evil but because the sin has created painful or embarrassing circumstances. It has been said that resolutions against sin that arise during a storm will die in the calm. With counterfeit repentance man attempts to turn from sin in his own power but he does not turn to God. Counterfeit repentance is ultimately man's attempt to "manage" an accusing conscience; which often results in man taking pride in a temporary "victory" over one sin.

3. **The third deceit of counterfeit repentance is the keeping of many sinful ways in one's life.**

This means a person may remove the one sin that they were caught in, but leave other known sinful ways in their life alone. A specific sin can be left by an individual (without having a repentant heart) because they keep other sin alive and well in their life. This action is known as the exchange of sin – they remove one sin but keep other sins; which indicates there is no change of heart. Also, a person may remove a sin from their life not because of a repentant heart but because of prudence; meaning it would not be in a person's best public or personal interest to continue in a specific sin because it could damage their personal health, or ruin their financial position, etc. When sin is removed from one's life because of prudent reasons, it is not genuine repentance. In counterfeit repentance man remains alive to the world and dead to Christ (Gal. 6:14; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). The counterfeit repenter keeps his heart's affections for self as self-interest will always be primary in their life.

Counterfeit repentance exists when an individual exhibits a deep sense of sin but without a sense of the mercy and forgiveness in Christ. A counterfeit repentance is blind to the holiness of God. Counterfeit repentance is evidenced where there is a sense of mercy within an individual but they suppress their conviction of sin – and their life does not change. The feeling of being convinced of or knowing of sin in one's life falls short of genuine repentance (illustrations - King Saul (I Sam. 24:16-22); King Ahab (I Kings 21:25-29); Judas (Matt. 27:3-5)).

What Repentance Is!

Genuine repentance of sin occurs when the willful acts of sin cease to exist because of the infusion of God's grace. It is a gift of God and it is a grace of God's Spirit whereby the sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed. Genuine repentance makes a believer (one who has placed their faith in Christ) open to exhortation with the willingness to humbly receive correction (Psa. 141:4-5).

Repentance has been defined by the Westminster Shorter Catechism as the following; "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a genuine sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience."

Repentance as defined by John Calvin is as follows; "Repentance . . . is the genuine turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of Him; and it consists in the mortification (overcoming the desire for sin) of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification (giving life to) of the Spirit." A person must turn to God in His mercy, publicly turn his life around and intentionally turn from sin for repentance to be genuine. It is God's goodness that leads us to genuine repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Genuine, Godly repentance is evidenced by 6 characteristics.

1. Sight of Sin
2. Sorrow for Sin
3. Confession of Sin
4. Shame for Sin
5. Hatred for Sin
6. Turning from Sin

These characteristics are interrelated and intertwined.

1. **Sight of Sin.** The first characteristic of genuine repentance is the correct sight of sin and the correct view of sin can only come from “opened” eyes (Acts 26: 18 – Paul’s mission given to him by Christ – “to open their eyes in order to turn from darkness to light”). A man must correctly and accurately see sin within himself for what it is before he can truly repent. This was evidenced by the prodigal son in Luke 15:17 when scripture records “when he came to himself” (Luke 15:11-24). When the prodigal son saw himself as a sinner and nothing but a sinner, he was now ready to return home. This is the same course of events today for a sinner before he comes to Christ, he must see himself as a sinner and nothing but a sinner. He must also see the evil in sin. Because this is genuine, the opposite is true, if one cannot see sin and the evil in sin there can be no repentance. Today there are many people who easily see and proclaim the faults and shortcomings of others, but see no fault or shortcoming in themselves. This is the case for the unrepentant sinner. The unrepentant sinner is deceived by self-love, self-centeredness and spiritual ignorance; they do not see themselves as a sinner. If a sinner does not see evil in their sin, they are not seeing correctly or accurately. Repentance requires that a person sees his sin for what it really is; evil, defiling, wicked, unrighteous, and that his sin is against God (Rom. 1:28-32, 3:20). This is the knowledge of sin; seeing sin as evil, which is the correct sight of sin. The correct sight of sin is needed in order for genuine repentance to occur.
2. **Sorrow for Sin.** The second characteristic of genuine repentance is Godly sorrow for sin (Psa. 38:18). The Hebrew word “to be sorrowful” means “to have the soul crucified”; this must occur in genuine repentance. Repentance without sorrow is a false repentance; a truly repentant heart is sorrowful (II Cor. 7:9-10). This sorrow is not superficial but it is truly the breaking of the heart (Psa. 51:17).

This heart-breaking sorrow makes Christ precious; until the heart is full of sorrow it is not fit for Christ. Genuine heart-breaking sorrow drives out the desire to sin; heart breaking sorrow makes a way for joy (Psa. 126:5). Godly, heart-breaking sorrow is first inward: it is sorrow of the heart that “bleeds” for its sin (Acts 2:37-38). It is a heart that laments for heart-sins such as pride, bitterness, ingratitude, covetousness, lust, etc. (Rom. 7:23-25).

Godly sorrow is sorrow for the offense (act) rather than the punishment (consequence). Hypocrites grieve over the consequence of sin, not the sinful act itself; they sorrow over their sin only when they see punishment coming. The genuine repentant grieves over sin because it was sin against God; he grieves because he has sinned against the free grace of God that rescued him from eternal damnation in hell (Psa. 51:3-4). Godly sorrow for sin must surpass worldly sorrow because it is against God. Godly sorrow for sin must be such that it makes us willing to let go of sin(s) that personally delight us. When the sorrow for sin within the life of a repentant is strong enough to eradicate the love of sin – that is when genuine repentance occurs.

Godly sorrow is trustworthy in its action because it is the fruit of faith (Mark 9:24). Godly sorrow demonstrates the authenticity of faith. This sorrow for sin can also result in restitution (Luke 19:8) as it demonstrates trustworthiness in its fruit of repentance.

Godly sorrow is continuous; it abides with the genuine repentant. Genuine sorrow for sin abides in the heart of the genuine repentant; because the genuine repentant knows that his heart is wicked and deceitful (Jer. 17:9). Godly sorrow is sensitive; it causes one to weep over sin in one’s life. A

time for each believer to consider his heart and truly repent of sin is at the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:27-32).

3. **Confession of Sin.** The third characteristic of genuine repentance is confession of sin. Confession is self-accusing; when we come before God to confess sin, we must accuse ourselves. In genuine confession the repentant sits in judgment and passes sentence on himself (I Cor. 11:31). This confession must: 1) be voluntary, 2) be heart-felt, 3) be sincere, 4) be specific, 5) rightfully identify source of sin, 6) be complete, 7) vindicate God, and, 8) be with resolution.
 - a. **Genuine confession is voluntary** like that of the prodigal son in Luke 15:18; he voluntarily confessed without anyone accusing him.
 - b. **Genuine confession must be heart-felt.** It is one thing to confess sin it is another to feel sin to the point of confession. The heart must deeply resent the sin; the heart must be impacted (Psa. 38:3-5).
 - c. **Genuine confession must be sincere.** Our heart must go along with our confession. The hypocrite confesses sin – yet loves it because he continues in it. The genuine repentant is convinced of his sin he confesses and hates the sin he has committed.
 - d. **Genuine confession identifies specific sin in one's life.** Natural man can acknowledge that they are a sinner in a general sense – and he confesses sin in wholesale terms. A genuine repentant identifies and names the specific sin they are confessing.
 - e. **Genuine confession understands the make-up of man by rightfully identifying the source of sin** (Psa. 51:5). The genuine repentant does not blame Satan or the world's temptations; they acknowledge that their sin is wholly from themselves. Man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9) – it is the source of sin.
 - f. **Genuine confession is a complete confession.** This means there is an acknowledgement of all sin as being against God; it recognizes the consequences of sinful actions taken in spite of knowledge of God's wrath and judgments against sin (Psa. 78:31-32).
 - g. **Genuine confession vindicates God;** we must charge ourselves for the sin and the consequences of sin so God is not blamed. Nehemiah provides the example in Neh. 9:33; as the Levites are confessing sin, they are vindicating God.
 - h. **Genuine confession must include a resolution not to sin again.** Many times, individuals repent of sin only to go back to that sin again. It is vain to confess sin then continue on doing it (illustration - Pharaoh – Ex.9:27; 9:34). What king would pardon a man who, after he confessed of treason against king and country, would go out to act a new treason?

Confession is a necessary component of genuine repentance. Unfortunately, many people would rather have their sins covered than cured as illustrated by the example of King David dealing with his sin with Bathsheba (Psa. 51) and Achan dealing with his sin of stealing (Josh.7; Prov. 28:13). Many people blame others rather than themselves for sin in their lives, as illustrated by the example of Adam (Gen. 3:12) and King Saul (I Sam. 15:24). Confession of sin makes the way for pardon, as illustrated by the example of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20) and King David (II Sam. 12:13). God's promise is to pardon and forgive those who confess sin (I John 1:9).

4. **Shame for Sin.** The fourth characteristic of genuine repentance is shame for sin.
 - a. **Every sin makes us guilty.** Individuals are not ashamed when doing things right but are ashamed when caught doing wrong. Adam is an example of this as we find in Genesis 3: 7-10. Sin makes us ashamed.
 - b. **Every sin demonstrates our unthankfulness.** Unthankfulness is a matter of shame. We have sinned against God when He has given us no cause to sin (Jer. 2:5). Sin is

rebellion against the goodness God bestows on man; such as life, food, clothing, shelter and means are examples of God's goodness. Unthankfulness is a great sin against God (Isa. 1:2) that should cause us shame.

- c. **Our sin put Christ on the cross.** Our sins put Christ to shame by the ridicule He suffered and His death on a cross. He became sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). Should not our sin put us to shame before Christ our Savior?
- d. **Every sin demonstrates our cooperation with Satan.** Sin is conceived by our own will (James 1:13-15); but this sin is empowered by Satan (source of temptation – John 13:2, Acts 5:3). Shame should occur when we realize that we are cooperating with Satan, not living in victory in Christ.
 - i. **The sin of a believer is worse than the sin of an unbeliever.** As a believer we know the price Christ paid for our sin; to willfully sin against God after salvation is an act of treason and rebellion; which is a cause for shame (illustration – Acts 5:1-11; Ananias and Sapphira – love of material things).
 - ii. **The sin of a believer is worse than the sin of a demon.** Christ did not die for the fallen angels (demons); He died that man may have eternal life through His death and resurrection (Rom. 5:8; I Cor. 15:51). We have affronted (disrespected, insulted) and disparaged (belittled, discredited) Christ's blood by our sin – and this should cause us to be ashamed of our sin.
- e. **Every sin demonstrates folly (foolishness).** Individuals who sin are fools; they demonstrate foolishness (Jer. 4:22). Is not a person who believes in and acts on a temptation before a promise a fool? Is not a person who acts upon their selfish desires instead of their gratefulness for salvation a fool? Mankind should be ashamed of their actions in light of what Christ has done for them to provide a means of salvation.

Shame for sin is a characteristic of genuine repentance. Genuine repentance cannot occur without shame for sin. If one has no shame for sin, then they are not a genuine repentant. Scripture tells us that many have sinned away shame in their life (Zeph. 3:5, Jer. 6:15). It is interesting to note that man is the only being that can feel shame; so to not feel shame for sin puts man on the level of animals. Let us have holy shame for our sin before God; the more we are ashamed for our sin today the less we will be ashamed at the Lord's coming (I John 2:28).

5. **Hatred of Sin.** The fifth characteristic of genuine repentance is hatred of sin. Hatred of sin is two-fold. First, it is a hatred of the attitude and condition of the will that leads to sin; as sin is bitterness, malice, hostility, animosity and hate. Second, it is a hatred of the action of sin (a loathing of sin); as sin is repugnant, evil, and detestable. What is hatred of sin? First, a genuine repentant is a sin-loather; meaning they are actively reluctant, unwilling, and averse to sin and to sinning. It has been said that Christ can never be loved until sin is loathed (hated) by the repentant; and heaven cannot truly be longed for until sin is loathed (hated) by the repentant. Second, a genuine repentant is a hater of the attitudes and will that lead to sin. Hatred has been defined as anger that is a fully established negative or destructive feeling, thought or practice that is established by long continuity and obsession.

How do we know if we hate sin? First, our spirit (our will) is set against sin; we abhor sin, meaning we have an extreme distaste, repugnance and aversion to sin and seek ways to separate our life from the practice of sin. Second, we understand that to hate one sin means that we must hate all sin (Psa. 119:104); therefore, genuine hatred against sin is against sin in all forms (i.e., if you hate one snake, you usually hate all snakes). Third, genuine hatred of sin cannot be appeased or pacified;

a genuine repentant cannot be reconciled to sin (purpose to sin) so they can sin again. Fourth and finally, where there is genuine hatred of sin, we not only oppose sin in ourselves but in others as well. Christ is our example of this as He threw out the money changers from the Temple (John 2:13-17). There are other scriptures that support this understanding of hatred of sin (Neh. 5:7, 13:17; Psa. 101:7). In conclusion, individuals who have no hatred (natural, basic, habitual dislike; aversion and repugnance) of sin are strangers to repentance (they are not truly repentant). In contrast to hatred of sin is loving (accepting) sin. Loving sin, in many ways, is worse than committing sin. A believer will commit sin, but it is not (or should not) be willful. Loving sin shows that one's will is in sin; and the more of one's will that is in sin, the greater the sin (Heb. 10:26).

Believers in Christ must understand what is in sin and that should create a hatred of sin. First, it must be understood that sin is a cursed thing because of its origin, Satan, as it is his work (I John 3:8, c.f. Rom. 7:11-13). Second, sin in its nature is against holiness; it dishonors God (Rom. 2:23), it displeases God (I Sam. 2:23), and it crucifies Christ again putting His work to shame (Heb. 6:5-6). Third, sin is the cause of affliction and judgment from God; as God's justice is quiet until sin causes it to be enacted (Luke 12:16-21). The greatest judgment of God on sin is to allow a man to sin without control (Psa. 81:12; Rom 1:28-32). Finally, it must be understood that the consequence of sin is the destruction of the soul (Matt. 16:25-26, c.f. Matt 10:28).

A genuine repentant must have a holy hatred of sin. They should hate sin infinitely more than they love sin; as sin should not be habitual in the life of a believer. A believer is not sinless, as sin is active and alive in each life, but genuine believers should have an active hatred of sin and not habitually practice sin. Genuine repentance begins in the love of God and ends in the hatred of sin. The genuine repentant hates sin, but loves the person who is a sinner.

6. **Turning from Sin.** The sixth characteristic of genuine repentance is turning from sin. Genuine repentance breaks the bondage of sin in the repentant's life. Turning from sin is forsaking sin (Isa. 55:7). The genuine repentant dies to sin daily - as dying to sin is the life of repentance. Turning from sin is very visible to others observing the life of the repentant, it is like turning darkness into light (Eph. 5:8; illustration – Acts 16:29-34, repentance turned a jailor into a nurse). A genuine turning from sin in the life of a repentant has 5 characteristics.
 - a. **It is a turning from sin with the heart.** The heart is the first thing that lives so it must be the first thing that turns to God from sin. If the heart is not turned from sin, it is a lying heart as illustrated by a "treacherous" Judah (Jer. 3:8-11). God desires that the whole heart turns from sin, because genuine repentance does not withhold any portion of the heart for sin.
 - b. **It is a turning from all sin.** Genuine repentance turns away from all sin; every sin is to be abandoned and forsaken (Isa. 55:6-7). Just as one who would hide a traitor in their house makes them a traitor as well; the individual who indulges one sin is a traitorous hypocrite before God.
 - c. **It is a turning from sin due to love to God.** A man may restrain the acts of sin in his life due to fear or self-discipline, but the genuine repentant turns from sin because of love to God (because God loves us – I John 4:19; II Cor. 5:14).
 - d. **It is a turning from sin and a turning to God.** Counterfeit repentance pretends to turn from sin but there is no turning to God. In genuine repentance there is a definitive turning to God (illustration - Paul – Acts 26:19-20). This is God's desire and He observes the heart to see its genuine intent (Hosea 7:14-16); God desires a turning to Him.

- e. **It is a turning from sin that does not have a returning back to sin.** Turning from sin means that there is no willful returning back to sin (illustration - Israel – Hosea 14:1-2, 4, 8).

Counterfeit repentance is not lasting because the individual returns back to their sin; and this returning back to sin is a fearful thing because it is against the clear light of scripture. The one who returns to sin, by implication, charges God with doing evil; it is an outright slandering of God. It is a fearful thing to return to sin after one has “turned from sin” because they are exposed to having Satan take control of their life (Matt. 12:41-45). A genuine turning from sin is to never come near it anymore. Whoever truly turns from sin is a blessed person (Acts 3:19-26).

God’s desire is that we turn from sin (Ezek. 33:11); God would rather have our repentant heart than our blood in judgment. Turning to God is for our own profit. If we turn from our sins to God, it does not profit God, but rather it profits us as we reap the benefits. If we turn to God, He will turn to us (Psa. 86:16-17; Zech. 1:3). When God turns to us all things turn to our good (Rom. 8:28).

Means Conducive to Repentance

We know repentance is commanded by God for all men, yet men are reluctant to genuinely repent. Why do men not contemplate repentance? What must they consider (what are the means to repentance)? Do men seriously consider what sin is? Do they consider God’s mercy and God’s judgments? What will they have to answer for if they do not repent? Men do not contemplate repentance because they do not seriously consider their future eternity.

First, man must consider what sin is. Sin is evil and there are 20 characteristics of sin that must be considered and understood.

1. **Sin is withdrawing from God.** Sin is man’s return to the ownership and master of natural man – Satan. Every step forward in sin is a backward step from Christ (Isa. 1:4 - estranged, to turn away, to remove; Jer. 2:5). The sinner, by engaging in sin, voluntarily leaves God and actively rejects Christ and God’s mercy.
2. **Sin is the exact opposite of God.** Sin is the exact opposite of God; sin strikes at God’s very being. In the Hebrew, the same word is used to define sin as a committing of sin is also used to define rebellion against rule. Sin is action contrary to God and God’s commands (Lev. 26:1, 14-30).
3. **Sin is injury to God.** Sin is high treason against God; sin injures God. Sin is an action of contempt against the laws of God; it is the casting of the law behind one’s back (Neh. 9:26). Man’s soul belongs to God: He has double claim on it because He created it and He paid for it by the death of Christ. Sin actively steals man’s soul from God and gives it to Satan; a soul that rightfully belongs to God.
4. **Sin is deep, penetrating ignorance.** It has been said that all sin is founded in ignorance. If men knew and understood God’s holiness, purity and justice, they would not go forward in sin. Natural man proceeds forward with sin and its evil (Jer. 9:3-6); while the repentant man seeks to be holy in their conduct (I Pet. 1:14-19).
5. **Sin is filth.** Sin is filthiness (James 1:21). Sin is filth that is inward in one’s being, which defiles the mind and conscience (Titus 1:15-16). Sin can so fill a person with filth that God comes to a point that He cannot stand the sight of that person (illustration: Israel - Zech. 11: 7-17).
6. **Sin is ingratitude.** God’s mercies will accuse and bring a reproach on (find fault with) the sinner in the Day of Judgment. God has done much for the sinner in providing him with life and the

means to maintain the life given; but often the gift of God's mercy is in vain (Hosea 2:1,8). The question must be asked; did God give you life so you could sin against Him?

7. **Sin debases and degrades.** Man is born as a natural man that is an enemy against God; and sin is in his nature. The man who pursues sin will find that sin degrades a person of their honor (Nah. 1:14). Sin blots man's name from the Book of Life (Rev. 20:11-15, c.f. Matt. 7:21-23).
8. **Sin is infinite loss.** In every sin there is infinite loss; one loses God, one loses peace, and one ultimately loses their soul (Mark 8:34-38; Matt. 10:28). If the soul is destroyed by sin, then why pursue sin? Sin is such a trade (an exchange) that whoever engages in it will be ruined, even ultimately destroyed.
9. **Sin is a burden.** Sin is a burden; it burdens the heart and soul of the sinner (Psa. 38:3-4; c.f. Heb. 12:1). The sinner lives life with the burden and weight of sin dragging down their life; a burden that will ultimately crush and destroy them.
10. **Sin is a debt.** Sin is a debt to God that must be paid (illustration – Matt. 18:21-35). Of all the debts we may owe, sin is the worst and has the worst of all consequences. With other debts, one can declare bankruptcy or receive mercy; but with sin there is no escaping the debt as God knows where to find all who have a debt of sin that must be paid for (Psa. 139:7-12). Death may free a man from payment of a debt, but death will not free a man from the debt created to God for sin; and death is the permanent payment for sin (Rom. 6:23).
11. **Sin is deceitful and creates deceitfulness.** Sin is deceitful (Heb. 3:13). Man's heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9) because sin is deceitful (Eph. 4:21-22). Sin pretends to please mankind by providing temporary pleasures, when in reality it is deceiving us. Sin courts the imagination of a man and then it kills the man (James 1:24-25; Rom. 6:23).
12. **Sin is bondage.** Sin is bondage that imprisons the sinner (Hosea 13:12). Every man is bound by his own sin, making him a servant to Satan because sin is imperious (dictatorial, domineering, overbearing in command) and tyrannical (unjustly cruel, oppressive, harsh, severe). Sin operates as a law (Rom 8:2) therefore it has power over natural man and natural man does what sin commands him to do (because Satan is the master of sin and natural man – John 8:44). The sinner serves sin and ends up working to meet sin's demands.
13. **Sin is vexation.** Sin vexes meaning it torments, irritates, disturbs and afflicts. This was evidenced by the judgment of God upon Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16-19). Sin vexes the mind and conscience of the sinner because it causes him to become unbalanced and he obsesses on sin, which eventually brings forth death (James 1:24-25, illustration - Zech. 5:1-4).
14. **Sin is absurd.** Sin is totally senseless; it is foolish and contrary to all reason and common sense. Sin gratifies Satan; and it is an offense to God. Men become senseless when they sin, as evidenced by how they make sin a sport. Sin causes men to strive to make other men sin, and they are happy and pleased when other men engage in sin. Such men are fools (Rom. 1:28-32).
15. **Sin is spiritual death.** The life of sin is the death of the soul. Man is born as a sinner – born dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-2). Man in this condition has no sense of God or their sin (Eph. 4:17-19). The condition of spiritual death within the sinner continues to be aggressive, just like decay, until repentance occurs.
16. **Sin is damnation.** Sin without repentance leads to a final and eternal damnation in hell (Rev. 20:11-14). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Sin is like oil and God's judgment is fire – sin fuels the unquenchable fire of hell (Mark 9:43-48; illustration - Isa. 33:10-14).

Observations on what sin is....

1. **Sin is a hazard.** Sin is a hazard (an unavoidable danger and risk) because it puts man's soul at risk of eternal death. Sin is like a poison, when it is introduced into the body it exposes the person to death. One sin cost Adam his life and expulsion from the garden. One sin of

- the angels cost them an existence in heaven. One sin cost Saul his kingdom. For the man who habitually practices sin, the question is: Will God spare his life for one more day?
2. **Sin is cruel.** When you sin, you attack your soul (you beat up your soul). When you sin, you are literally killing yourself. If the soul could cry out when you sin, it would be crying out that it was being murdered.
 3. **Sin is spiritual disease.** Sin functions like a disease. Sin is with a sinner like a disease is with a sick man – it affects the entire body and life. Sin is like distemper (disease of the mind) which causes the life and mind of a man to be in disorder, disturbed, and deranged. Sin causes men to lust and obsess, which has drastic consequences. If sin was viewed as a disease that kills, it would not be cherished by man.
 4. **Sin is a cancerous, malignant disease that spreads.** Sin not only hurts the individual who is sinning, it also hurts others. Sin, when it is practiced, serves as an example to others to practice sin. One sinner can defile many by their public example of sin. In reality, if you (as a believer) are practicing sin in your life, there may be many in hell because they followed your example in rebelling against God.

Second, man should consider God's mercy. Man, many times does not consider the mercy God has provided them; "do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance," (Rom. 2:4). Do we consider the mercies that God has shown us? God's mercy has always been a screen between us and danger/judgment (Psa. 94:16-19). Should not God's mercy lead us to repentance? God is a bountiful benefactor – we are or have been enemies of God, yet God has provided for us. God has been kind to us not giving us what we rightly deserve. God labors to provide mercy to us so that our hearts would be broken by the mercy He has shown us. For the chosen of God, He has and continues to show mercy; when He has every right to judge harshly. All that we get from God each day is mercy – whatever pain, pleasure, good or bad fortune that comes our way is a demonstration of God's mercy. (Rom. 9:16; I Pet. 1:3). Whatever the timing or form of God's mercy, as believers, we never raise above the status of being beneficiaries of God's mercy; we are always utterly dependent on what we do not deserve. If anything should move us to tears, it should be the demonstrated mercy of God in our lives.

Third, man should consider God's judgments. Man often ignores or dismisses God's discipline and judgment in their lives. God often does judge sin in a man's life while here on earth, but such judged men continue to go forward with sin. God sends judgment so man can come to Him in repentance (Micah 6:9-16). God's judgment of sin is meant to humble sinful man to break away from sin and turn to righteousness (illustration – Dan. 4:27). God uses judgment of sin to stop men from sinning and to move them toward repentance (Amos 4:6-11). God is patient and waits for man to repent; but there comes a time when God's longsuffering ends (Jer. 8: 4-6; Rom. 1:18-32). If man does not repent when God judges' sin in a man's life, then such a man stands in contempt of God and by that action they bid God to send more judgment into their life (illustration – Isa. 22:8-14). God's judgment of sin in our life should cause us to seek repentance; and to not repent when God's judgment is upon us means that we are asking God for greater judgment in our life.

Fourth, man should consider what they have to answer for if they do not repent. In consideration of this fourth question, there are two considerations that must be examined.

1. **First,** the unrepentant unbeliever will one day be faced to answer the question why they did not repent as God had commanded them (Acts 17:29-31). For the unrepentant man, all their sin

must be accounted for at the last day when they stand before God to answer in their own person for their sins against God – and there is no advocate or counsel allowed to plead their case for them (Rev. 20:11-15). For sinful man, now is the time to think about how you will stand before God and give an account of yourself (illustration – Job. 31:14). Today is the day of repentance, now is the time before it is too late.

2. **Second**, the repentant believer will also one day stand before God to give an account of themselves and the life they have lived (II Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10-12). They will not have to answer for sin in their life as Christ will answer to God for them (He is the Advocate for the genuine repentant before God; I John 2:1-2) because His blood has washed away all their sin (II Cor. 5:17-21). God's grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-10) saves the genuine repentant (illustration – Jer. 50:20). Yet even in the life of a believer, today is the day of repentance, now is the time to repent of sin in our life so we may live a life of righteousness before others (Rom. 6:1-4).

Motives for Repentance

Repentance is necessary for all men. God commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30). Yet many men do not genuinely seek repentance because they are not motivated to seek genuine repentance. Men have deceived themselves into believing repentance is not necessary in their lives, yet without repentance man is condemned to hell under God's righteous judgment. Why should men seek repentance?

1. **Repentance reconciles man to God.** Repentance is delightful to God because it ascends to God from a broken heart (Acts 2:37-40). No prayer touches God like the prayer that comes from a broken heart that is touched with the sense of sin and sorrow for sin in one's life (Luke 18: 10-14).
2. **Repentance makes the heart fit for service to God.** Repentance is required to mold the heart of man to fellowship with and serve God. Lead as a metal lump is useful for a weight but little else, but when it is melted by heat it becomes molten and able to be cast into a mold for multiple uses. So is the heart; a heart hardened by sin is of little use, it is a hardened lump; but a heart becomes molten (pliable) when it is repentant it becomes a heart fit for service to God (i.e. Paul's conversion, Acts 9:1-19). A hard heart is the worst heart because it is not pliable – it is a heart of stone that heat cannot melt (Ezek. 36:26). The hardness of man's heart grieves Christ (Mark 3:1-6). It has been said that "a hard heart is the anvil on which the hammer of God's justice will striking throughout all eternity." A repentant heart is pliable; it submits to God's will and answers His call.
3. **Repentance is desired by and sought after by God.** Repentance is desired by God and it delights God. God esteems the broken heart above all things (Psa. 51:7-17). God hears the repentant heart (Psa. 6:1-4, 8-9). Repentance, though bitter and painful for the repentant, is desired by God because it produces joy and peace in the heart of the repentant because of the reconciled relationship with God. The heart is never tenderer to the desires of God than when it is repentant.
4. **Repentance enacts God's mercy.** Repentance enables God's mercy to be specifically bestowed upon the genuine repentant for sin in their life. God's mercy upon the genuine repentant unravels and expunges sin and makes sin as if it never occurred; sin and its judgment is cast away (Isa. 1:18). Christ provides the example of this in Matt. 18:21-22, when He commands us, as believers, to forgive others; if Christ commanded us to forgive, how much more will He forgive us our sin when we truly repent (the repentant is justified)!
5. **Repentance enables God's blessing.** Repentance is a returning to God. Such a returning to God allows God to bless the repentant; the repentant is enriched by God's grace through greater understanding of Him and His word (II Cor. 3:16), through the leading and fruit of the Holy Spirit

(Gal. 5:18, 22-26), and through blessings (Joel 2:12-14, 17-19; Job 22:21-27). In contrast, sin blocks God's blessing (Hag. 1:5-7).

6. **Repentance brings joy in heaven.** As praise is the music of heaven, repentance is the joy of heaven. When men reject the offer of salvation and die in their sin, Satan is delighted; but when men accept the offer of salvation by repentance this creates joy in heaven (Luke 15:10).
7. **Repentance brings reward in heaven.** Repentance is bitter but it yields future rewards in heaven. Repentance brings everlasting life in heaven and all that it provides for eternity (I Cor. 2:9; Rom. 6:22-23). God will bring the genuine repentant from an imperfect life assaulted by sin into a perfect life of peace, security and joy (Rev. 21:3-4).
8. **Repentance prepares one for the Day of Judgment.** God will judge all men for the life and time God has given to them (Acts 17:30-31). The repentant (Rom. 14:10, II Cor. 5:10) and the unrepentant (Rev. 20:11-15) will all stand before God and give an account of their life and time that God has given them. For those who did not genuinely repent during their life, God will judge (Matt. 7:21-23; Rev. 20:11-15).
9. **Repentance can save a nation.** Genuine repentance of a people can stay God's judgment on a nation that ultimately saves the nation (Jonah 3, I Kings 21:29; i.e., II Chron. 7:14).

All men should seek repentance as God has commanded it; and one day all men will stand before God and give an account to Him for the obedience to that command or to the rejection and rebellion against that command.

Time of Repentance

Repentance is necessary for all men, yet men have a natural tendency to procrastinate and put off repentance. Men often say, "the time has not come", just as Haggai wrote in Haggai 1:2 concerning the nation of Israel's attitude in building the Temple. Men often have good intentions to repent when they have been convicted of sin, but they delay repenting until it is too late and their intention is never executed. Unfortunately, many are in hell today that purposed to repent but delayed until it was too late. If we feel the leading to repent, we should do so at that time and without delay. Here are some reasons not to delay in engaging in genuine repentance.

1. **Now is the time for repentance.** "Now is the accepted time" is the key action item for repentance as Paul indicated in II Cor. 5:20-21 – 6:1-2. Today is the time for repentance, not tomorrow. If your heart is leading you to repent, do so immediately without delay.
2. **It is dangerous to put off repentance.** It is dangerous to delay repentance when the heart is led to repent (Luke 13:3-5). It is dangerous to procrastinate when it comes to repentance because the longer we allow sin to remain unconfessed the harder we will find it to repent because we become calloused to repentance. Delay strengthens sin and hardens the heart; and there comes a day when God's grace is no longer available to man (Rev. 22:8-11). Delay is often based on faulty thinking that we know the length and time of our life and by doing so we deceive ourselves to delay until a later day. What security do we have that we will live another day when we know that we are moving forward daily to our end (Psa. 39:5, 103:15)? It is dangerous to delay repentance when death can come to us suddenly and without warning; we are not guaranteed tomorrow. We are admonished by the writer of Hebrews to respond to God's conviction to repent "today" (Heb. 3:7-13); we are to repent without delay.
3. **Repentance without delay yields peace and reward.** Many people have delayed repentance until a later time. But such a delay in repentance causes man to lose out on peace and reward. Men often wish that they had acted differently when they were

younger. Unbelieving men will be held accountable for their rebellion against God's command to repent (Acts 17:30) when they stand before God (Rev. 20:11-15, i.e., Matt. 7:21-23) and are sentenced to an eternity in hell where there is no peace or reward only pain, loneliness, isolation, and anguished torment. Believing men will be held accountable for any delay in repentance (Matt. 12:36; Rom. 14:7-12; I Cor. 3:10-15; II Cor. 5:9-11); but we have an Advocate in Christ before God (I John 2:1-2) and our reward is an eternal life of peace, joy, fellowship without sin, stress or sorrow (John 3:16). Also, any delay in repentance takes away time from serving God and bringing Him glory in one's life. When men repent, they give God the first-fruits of their life because their heart is sensitive to His leading. The more men honor God with their life after genuine repentance the greater He is glorified and the greater is the reward (Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).

There is no good reason to delay repentance when the heart is convicted to repent; there are only sinful reasons to delay repentance. There are only detrimental consequences for delaying repentance and there is great reward for an immediate response to repent.

Effects of Repentance

Genuine repentance generates genuine effects in the life of the repentant. In II Cor. 7:9-11 Paul outlines the genuine, observable effects of genuine, authentic repentance ("fruits worthy of repentance" – Luke 3:8).

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 (KJV)

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. ¹⁰ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. ¹¹ For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 (NIV)

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. ¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

1. **Diligence (carefulness / earnestness):** Repentance creates a commitment to righteousness. The Greek word ("spoude" means diligence) used here means earnest eagerness (a commitment to shun; being motivated to keep away from, to take steps to avoid). Diligence is the earnest eagerness to aggressively pursue righteousness, no matter the cost. Diligence ends indifference and compliancy to sin and evil.
2. **Clearing (eagerness):** Repentance creates a motive to seek God's mercy (Psa. 139:23-24). Clearing is the desire to clear one's name of sin and the stigma that willful sin causes in one's life. The repentant will not let sin fester within his conscience but will judge himself and will cry out to God, in the name of Christ, for mercy. The language

implies that the repentant will continue to seek God's mercy until he has gotten his pardon and he is cleared of guilt in his conscience. Clear means pure/holy; meaning the genuine repentant demonstrates the integrity of their repentance by the commitment to purity and holiness in their life. Clearing, in genuine repentance, is outwardly demonstrated in one's public life for all to see and that public demonstration is without shame.

3. **Indignation:** Repentance creates anger over sin within one's life. Repentance leads the repentant to indignation over sin; it is anger over sin in one's life and displeasure in the shame that this sin has brought to the Lord's name, His work, and His people. The genuine repentant is disturbed, upset with himself for the sin within his life (Psa. 73:21-24). God is pleased when we become indignant over sin in our life.
4. **Fear (alarm):** Repentance creates fear (alarm) in the heart of the repentant (Prov. 16:6). Repentance creates a strong reverence toward God because God is the One who is offended by sin; and it is God who chastens and judges' sin in the life of a believer (Heb.12:5-11). The repentant heart should always be full of fear (Prov. 28:14); he should be afraid to sin and should be afraid of God's chastening and judgment of sin. The genuine repentant fears and seeks not to sin willfully (Gal. 6:7-8); the sinner continues to sin and has no fear of God and His judgment (Num. 32:23).
5. **Vehement Desire (longing):** Repentance creates a strong desire to not sin again. The genuine repentant desires more power against sin and to be released from sin in his life; there is a strong desire (yearning, longing for) to restore their relationship with God – the one who they sinned against. The repentant desires to be freed from corruption (Rom. 7:24) and desires to be with Christ.
6. **Zeal (concern):** Repentance creates zeal (enthusiastic diligence, eager desire, fervor). Zeal means loving someone or something so much that one despises anyone or anything that harms the object of that love. Zeal is the force that animates the spirit to do right – it causes fervency. Zeal makes the repentant heart to persist in Godly sorrow. Zeal carries a man above himself for God's glory because it emboldens one during trials, oppositions, temptations, discouragements, and danger. Vehement desire and zeal are fit together to show that genuine repentance results in zealous endeavors. As fear is a bridle to sin, zeal (loving so much) is a spur to righteousness. Genuine repentance is inseparable from loving God (Jude 21).
7. **Vindication (revenge/readiness):** Repentance creates a pursuit to crucify sin in one's life (Gal. 5:24). The genuine repentant pursues sin in his life with malice with the intent to destroy sin and seeks to have the sin in their life avenged (vindicated). Avenging sin in the life of the genuine repentant means that they seek to see justice accomplished in their life no matter the cost – that is vindication. The repentant no longer tries to protect themselves but seeks to see that the sin in their life is avenged – no matter what it may cost. It has been said that the genuine child of God seeks to be vindicated of their sins that have dishonored God the most.

These 7 effects outlined in II Cor. 7:9-11 are the fruits of genuine repentance in one's life. The effects of genuine repentance result in the aggressive pursuit of holiness in one's life. If these observable effects are not demonstrated publicly in one's life, then it is a counterfeit repentance. If these observable effects are demonstrated publicly in one's life, then it is genuine repentance, which is never to be repented of (II Cor. 7:10). Yet ongoing repentance is absolutely necessary in the life of a genuine believer in Christ as genuine repentance is the ongoing action of conforming and adjusting our affections and our will to the Word of God and His commands; and in so doing bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 5:8-10).

Conditions Exhibiting Repentance

We know repentance is commanded by God for all men, yet men are reluctant to genuinely repent. What are the appropriate conditions of the heart within a man that are needed in repentance?

1. **First, man should check and understand the condition of their heart, is it penitent or impenitent?** Penitent means being contrite and sorrowing for sin that produces an openness and willingness to being reconciled to God. Impenitent means feeling no regret for sin resulting in no desire or willingness to being reconciled to God. You are either in one condition or the other – there is no middle ground. If a man continues in his impenitency, then he forsakes Christ and His mercy and will forever experience pain, suffering, and judgment in hell (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:11-15, 21:8). But, if a man places his faith in Christ and repents of his sin, then he is Christ's and he is reconciled to God experiencing peace, joy, and heaven forever (Rev. 21:1-7). Compare the fate of the penitent man who places his faith in Christ and repents to the fate of the impenitent man who rejects Christ and does not repent of his sin. Which one is the better fate? What is the condition of your heart?
2. **Second, man must intentionally determine to leave sin.** Man is often sorrowful that they have been caught in sin, but they do not intentionally determine in their heart to leave sin. Often men wish to leave sin but they put no effort to actually leave sin; they do not intentionally resolve to exercise their will and choose to leave sin. A repentant man who is reconciled to God through faith in Christ intentionally chooses to leave sin (Psa. 119:105-112). Until we make this an imperative resolution in our life (Phil. 4:8-9; II Tim. 2:21-22), sin will continue to gain ground in our life bringing us to defeat every time. It is no wonder that that he who has not resolved to be an enemy of sin is conquered by it.
3. **Third, man must intentionally pray for repentance.** A repentant man looks to God for repentance, it is his prayer to God – as God desires that all men come to repentance (Acts 17:30; i.e., Acts 3:19). We are to pray to God for a repentant heart; it is His gift to us (Acts 11:4-18). We are to pray to God for a repentant heart because He has promised to answer that prayer (Psa. 51:17; illustration - Ezek. 36:22-27; Jer. 24:4-7). Our prayer should be: "Lord, have mercy on me. Give me grace to repent! Lord, give me grace to return to You with my whole heart!"
4. **Fourth, man must see himself as God sees him.** A condition of repentance is that we see ourselves as God sees us. Job is our example that we are to follow – Job. 42:1-6. Job, after he had observed God's glory and purity, repented and humbled himself before God – because he saw himself as he really was and he abhorred what he observed. Are we truly honest with ourselves in comparing "us" to the holiness and purity of God? If we are, there is only one thing that can occur – and that is repentance.
5. **Fifth, man must seek to build faith.** Faith (confidence/belief) breeds union (the uniting of two things) of a man with Christ; and there is no real separation from sin in the life of a man until there is union with Christ. This is illustrated by the unbelief of the nation of Israel (no faith in Christ as Messiah- Rom. 11:7-10) as Paul explained in Rom. 11:19-24. The unbelief of the Jews caused them to be "branches broken off" (Rom. 11:17). Therefore, those who believe in Christ are the ones who are "grafted in" (Rom. 11:17). They are saved by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:4-10, it is the gift of God; as it is God who takes the initiative and exerts life-giving power to awaken and unite sinners with His Son. Only through union with Christ (Col. 2:10-12) can we who are hopelessly dead in sin receive eternal life. Yet we need to daily build our faith in Christ, and just as the father of the child in Mark 9:24 cried out, we need to cry out daily to Christ – "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" As our faith in Christ grows it should drive us and motivate us to repent of sin in our life (Heb. 11:1, 6; II Cor. 5:7; Eph. 6:16).

Impediments to Repentance. We know repentance is commanded by God for all men, yet men are reluctant to genuinely repent. What is the cause of men not seeking repentance? Why do we not see genuine repentance in the lives of men? There are 10 reasons that act as impediments to genuine, genuine repentance.

1. **Men do not comprehend that they need to repent.** Often men think everything is well with them and they cannot think of any sin they need to repent of (illustration - Laodicean church – Rev. 3:15, 17, 19). Men often do not see or recognize sin in their life; sin deceives men making them blind to their need of repentance (illustration - Israelites – Mal. 3:7).
2. **Men think that repentance is easy to do.** Men have been led to believe that repentance is as simple as a prayer to God – “Lord, have mercy on me” (illustration – Luke 10:25-37). While such a prayer is genuine it is not representative of the reality of genuine repentance, therefore man can be deceived by a perceived simplicity of repentance. Such rationalistic thinking can lead a person to become bold in sin because they believe that a simple prayer of words, without a change of heart, will rescue them. When a man willfully seeks to satisfy his lust – his desire for sinful pleasure – rather than follow Christ and His commands, then sin has power over him and genuine repentance does not occur when he offers up a simple prayer of words for mercy without a change of heart and life.
3. **Man presumes on their perception of God’s mercy.** God is a merciful God, but because of God’s mercy men presume that they can go on in sin (Rom. 5:20 – 6:1; “Christ died for sin therefore I have no need, as sin shows God’s grace”). There is mercy with God for man, but God’s mercy is shown so man may fear Him, not that man may go on sinning (Psa. 130:3-4). Can man expect mercy when they willfully sin? God will not show mercy to those who willfully sin just because He is a God of mercy (Mal. 4:1-2).
4. **Men experience pleasure and delight in sin.** Man knows there is danger in sin but there is also pleasure and delight in sin. Often the danger in sin does not create the proper fear in man to deter him from seeking out the pleasure and delight sin temporarily brings (II Thess. 2:9-12). The love of and delight in sin by man deceives and hardens the heart. In genuine repentance there is grieving over sin; so how can one grieve for that which he loves? He who delights in and loves sin will hardly pray against it.
5. **Man is not willing to exercise the labor and commitment required for repentance.** As stated before, men often do not comprehend their need for repentance and they often believe that repentance is an easy thing to do, but if or when they see their need of repentance they often do not act on that need because of the intentional commitment and labor that genuine repentance requires. God has created a world where labor and diligence is required to live and survive and that is the reality of genuine repentance; it requires labor and diligence on the part of man. Satan desires that man be lazy and slothful (Prov. 19:15-16, 24); so, men who rest in their apathetic state will find that their lack of labor in genuine repentance will lead them to an eternal hell with Satan (Matt. 7: 21-23). Genuine repentance (to change one’s mind for the better, heartily amending one’s life with abhorrence of one’s past sins; to turn to, to cause to return, to bring back, to turn one’s self about, conversion) requires intentional labor and commitment.
6. **Men believe that repentance will take away joy and happiness in life.** To believe that repentance will take away joy is a mistaken, misplaced belief; a misplaced belief that is established by a love for the material, temporal world. Repentance does not crucify joy but rather clarifies and enhances joy because it frees the heart from the burden of sin. It has been said that worldly joy is a “pleasant frenzy” that has only a temporary effect. Genuine repentance results in joy in righteousness (Rom. 14:17-18). Truly repentant individuals are truly

joyful and pleasant to be around. Who should not rejoice the most but the repentant because God dwells with the repentant heart (Isa. 17:7-8)?

7. **Men believe that their sin is too great and they have no hope; they despair.** Men can believe that their sin is too great and they are beyond repentance. Such thoughts can lead to deep despair. This is illustrated by the Israelites in Jer. 18:11-12, when they responded to Jeremiah's message from God to turn from their evil ways with the response; "That is hopeless." When we recognize sin in our life, we often run from God – and that is dangerous because despair and discouragement results in the rejection of God's mercy. God loves the repentant heart (Joel 2:12-13) and shows His mercy to the repentant man for He is a God of mercy (II Cor. 1:3; illustration - Ex. 33:17-19); He is a God of compassion, as illustrated with Israel (Hosea 11:8-9). No sin is so great that God cannot forgive; He is a God of mercy and compassion.
8. **Men believe (and hope) that God will not punish their sin.** Men often deceive themselves into believing that God will not punish them for their sin. Often God does not immediately judge sin in the life of man; and man takes that delay in judgment to mean that God will not judge them for their sin (Psa. 10:4, 11). God is longsuffering, but men often take God's patience to mean that they can delay in their repentance. God does take notice of the time that men delay in their repentance (Rev. 2:20-21); and the sin of delaying repentance will result in an increase in God's judgment on man for the sin that is not repented of.
9. **Men fear the reproach and ridicule of others when one repents.** Men often think about what others will think if they repent of sin, since genuine repentance results in a public change of life. When one repents, the one thing they should not think about is what men may say or do; the wicked sinners will ridicule the repentant, but the believing saints will encourage the repentant. It is better that sinner's ridicule you for repenting than to have God judge you for not repenting. It has been stated: "If you cannot bear a reproach for your faith in Christ, then never call yourself a Christian; for a Christian shall suffer for Christ."
10. **Men love the world immoderately (excessively).** Men love the world and the things of the world so much that they do not consider repentance or will not repent. They would rather seek temporary things of this world than seek repentance and the fruit of repentance (Luke 14:15-24). Too often men love the world excessively (with total focus, without bounds) devoting their time and energy to gaining prestige, money or what money can buy rather than repent. This bondage to the world and its temporary gain will ultimately result in God's judgment on the unrepentant.

Final Thoughts on Repentance

Faith and repentance are inseparable companions. Justification is by faith and faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Repentance is commanded by God (Acts 17:30). Repentance is the fruit of faith, the evidence of genuine faith. Each individual is responsible for their choices before God. For the unrepentant unbeliever they will spend eternity in hell for their choice. For the repentant believer they have placed their faith in the Christ and His sacrifice on the cross (Heb. 10:12-14); the shedding of His blood to satisfy the righteous demands of God the Father.

As believers in Christ, we have complete forgiveness and cleansing of our sin, along with a restored fellowship with God. This is possible because of the blood of Christ atones for the soul (Heb. 9:22; cf. Lev. 17:11); and it cleanses from all sin (I John 1:7; I Pet. 1:18-19). Through faith and repentance, we apply the shed blood of Christ by honestly and sincerely confessing and forsaking our sin (I John 1:9; II Cor. 7:10; I Cor. 11:31). An honest confession of sin calls the sin out by name (Prov. 28:13); and it means

forsaking in (turning away from sin – Acts 3:19, Psa. 51:17). Sin that is not forsaken has not been honestly confessed; as honest confession that pleases God must involve the will and it's intentional turning away and forsaking sin.

Action Steps to Repentance

1. Pray the prayer of the psalmist (Psa. 139:23-24).
2. Be brutally honest with yourself and with God.
3. Agree with God about sin and need in your life – as He reveals them to you.
4. Confess each sin with a willingness to forsake (turn away from) it (I John 1:9; II Cor. 7:9-11).
5. Renew your mind through prayer, meditation, and application of God's Word (Rom. 12:1-2).
6. Create sensitivity to your need of an ongoing intimate relationship with God / Jesus Christ and your need for ongoing revival in your heart and mind (Psa. 51).

Repentance – Scripture to be Studied and Questions to be Answered

1. **II Cor. 5:17 – Salvation**
 - a. Have I genuinely repented of my sin?
 - b. Have I placed all my trust in Christ alone to save me?
 - c. Have I completely surrendered to Christ as Master and Lord of my life?
2. **Psa. 119:97, 140 – God's Word**
 - a. Do I love God's Word?
 - b. Do I have consistent and meaningful personal devotions?
 - c. Do I apply God's Word to my everyday life?
3. **Psa. 119:97, 140 – God's Word**
 - a. Do I love God's Word?
 - b. Do I have consistent and meaningful personal devotions?
 - c. Do I apply God's Word to my everyday life?
4. **Isa. 57:15 – Humility**
 - a. Do I agree with God in confession of sin?
 - b. Am I quick to admit to others that I was wrong?
 - c. Do I rejoice when others are praised and I am unnoticed?
 - d. Do I esteem others better than myself?
5. **Heb. 13:17; I Sam. 15:22 – Obedience**
 - a. Do I consistently obey what God wants me to do?
 - b. Do I consistently obey human authority God has placed in my life?
6. **I John 1:9 – Pure Heart**
 - a. Do I confess sin by name?
 - b. Do I confess as God convicts me of sin?
 - c. Am I willing to give up all sin for God?
7. **Acts 24:16 – Clear Conscience**
 - a. Do I seek forgiveness from those I have wronged or offended?
 - b. Is my conscience clear with every man I interact with?
8. **Matt. 6:33 – Priorities**
 - a. Is God first in my life – in schedule, work, and activity?
 - b. Does my checkbook reveal that God is first in my life?
 - c. Is my relationship with God my highest priority?
 - d. Is my relationship with my family a higher priority than work?

9. Col. 3:12 – Values

- a. Do I love what God loves and hate what God hates?
- b. Do I highly value the things that please God?
- c. Are my affections and goals fixed on eternal values or temporal values?

10. Phil. 3:7-8 – Sacrifice

- a. Am I willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to see God work in my life and church?
- b. Is my life characterized by genuine sacrifice for the cause of Christ and the gospel?

11. Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:18-21 – Spirit Control

- a. Do I allow Christ to be Lord of every area of my life?
- b. Do I allow the Holy Spirit to control my life each day?
- c. Is there consistent evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in my life?

12. Phil. 1:21-23 – First Love

- a. Am I as much in love with Jesus Christ as I have ever been?
- b. Am I thrilled with Jesus as the object of my love, filled with joy and peace?

13. Acts 5:29; Matt. 10:28 – Motives

- a. Am I more concerned about what God thinks than about what others think?
- b. Would I pray, worship, give, serve, and meditate as much if nobody but God noticed?
- c. Am I more concerned about being accepted and praised by men than I am about pleasing God?

14. I Cor. 6:18 – Moral Purity

- a. Do I keep my mind free from things, events, stimulations that are not morally pure?
- b. Do I keep my conversation, thoughts, and behavior pure and above reproach?

15. Col. 3:12-13 – Forgiveness

- a. Do I seek to resolve conflicts as soon as possible?
- b. Am I quick to forgive those who hurt and wrong me unfairly and without cause?

16. Matt. 5:23-24 – Sensitivity

- a. Am I sensitive to the conviction of God and the Holy Spirit?
- b. Do I respond quickly in humility and obedience to the conviction of God and the Holy Spirit?

17. Rom. 9:3; Luke 24:46-48 – Evangelism

- a. Do I have a burden for lost souls?
- b. Do I consistently witness for Christ?

18. I Tim. 2:1 – Prayer

- a. Do I faithfully pray for the needs of others?
- b. Do I pray specifically, faithfully, fervently for revival in my life, my church and our nation?

Evidences of Genuine Repentance

Through faith and repentance, we should seek to honestly and sincerely confess and forsake our sin (I John 1:9; II Cor. 7:10; I Cor. 11:31). Genuine repentance of sin within the life of an individual calls sins out by name (Prov. 28:13), and then the repentant believer, through the act of the will, forsakes sin (Acts 3:19, Psa. 51:17). Sin that is not forsaken has not been honestly repented of as one must intentionally take action to “put off” the sin and “put on” Christlikeness in genuine repentance.

Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in genuine righteousness and holiness.

Romans 13:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

“Put Off” (Eph. 4:22) / “Put On” (Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:23-24)

1. *Put Off* – Lack of love (I John 4:7-8,20-21); **Put On** – Love (John 15:12)
2. *Put Off* – Judging (Matt. 7:1-2); **Put On** – Search my heart (John 8:9; 15:22)
3. *Put Off* – Bitterness (Heb. 12:15); **Put On** – Forgiving (Eph. 4:32)
4. *Put Off* – Unforgiving spirit (Mark 11:26); **Put On** – Forgiving spirit (Col. 3:13)
5. *Put Off* – Selfishness (Phil. 2:21); **Put On** – Self-denial (Matt. 16:24)
6. *Put Off* – Pride (Prov. 16:5); **Put On** – Humility (Jam. 4:6)
7. *Put Off* – Boasting/conceit (I Cor. 4:7); **Put On** – Esteeming others (Phil. 2:3)
8. *Put Off* – Stubbornness (I Sam. 15:23); **Put On** – Brokenness (Rom. 6:13)
9. *Put Off* – Disrespect Authority (Acts 23:5); **Put On** – Honor authority (Heb. 13:17)
10. *Put Off* – Rebellion (I Sam. 15:23); **Put On** – Submission (Heb. 13:17)
11. *Put Off* – Disobedience (I Sam. 12:15); **Put On** – Obedience (Deut. 11:27)
12. *Put Off* – Impatience (James 1:2-4); **Put On** – Patience (Heb. 10:36)
13. *Put Off* – Ungratefulness (Rom. 1:21); **Put On** – Gratefulness (Eph. 5:20)
14. *Put Off* – Covetousness (Luke 12:15); **Put On** – Contentment (Heb. 13:5)
15. *Put Off* – Discontent (Heb. 13:5); **Put On** – Contentment (I Tim. 6:8)
16. *Put Off* – Murmur/complain (Phil. 2:14); **Put On** – Praise (Heb. 13:15)
17. *Put Off* – Irritation to others (Gal. 5:26); **Put On** – Preferring in love (Phil. 2:3-4)
18. *Put Off* – Jealousy (Gal. 5:26); **Put On** – Trust (I Cor. 13:4)
19. *Put Off* – Strife/contention (Prov. 13:10); **Put On** – Peace (James 3:17)
20. *Put Off* – Retaliation (Prov. 24:29); **Put On** – Good for evil (Rom. 12:19-20)
21. *Put Off* – Losing temper (Prov. 25:28); **Put On** – Self-control (Prov. 16:32)
22. *Put Off* – Anger (Prov. 29:22); **Put On** – Self-control (Gal. 5:22-23)
23. *Put Off* – Wrath (James 1:19-20); **Put On** – Soft answer (Prov. 15:1)
24. *Put Off* – Easily irritated (I Cor. 13:5); **Put On** – Not easily provoked (Prov. 19:11)
25. *Put Off* – Hatred (Matt. 5:21-22); **Put On** – Love (I Cor. 13:3)
26. *Put Off* – Murder (Ex. 20:13); **Put On** – Love (Rom. 13:10)
27. *Put Off* – Gossip (I Tim. 5:13); **Put On** – Edifying speech (Eph. 4:29)
28. *Put Off* – Evil speaking (James 4:11); **Put On** – Good report (Prov. 15:30)
29. *Put Off* – Critical Spirit (Gal. 5:15); **Put On** – Kindness (Col. 3:12)
30. *Put Off* – Lying (Eph. 4:25); **Put On** – Speaking truth (Zech. 8:16)
31. *Put Off* – Profanity (Prov. 4:24); **Put On** – Pure speech (Prov. 15:4)
32. *Put Off* – Idle words (Matt. 12:36); **Put On** – Controlled tongue (Prov. 15:4)
33. *Put Off* – Wrong motives (I Sam. 16:7); **Put On** – Spiritual motives (I Cor. 10:31)
34. *Put Off* – Evil thoughts (Matt. 15:19-20); **Put On** – Pure thoughts (Phil. 4:8)
35. *Put Off* – Complacency (Rev. 3:15); **Put On** – Zeal (Rev. 3:19)
36. *Put Off* – Laziness (Prov. 20:4); **Put On** – Diligence (Prov. 6:6-11)
37. *Put Off* – Slothfulness (Prov. 18:9); **Put On** – Wholeheartedness (Col. 3:22-25)
38. *Put Off* – Hypocrisy (Job 8:13); **Put On** – Sincerity/genuineness (I Thess. 2:3)

39. *Put Off – Idolatry* (Deut. 11:16); **Put On – Worshipping a genuine God** (Col. 1:18)
40. *Put Off – Left first love* (Rev. 2:4); **Put On – Fervent devotion** (Rev. 2:5)
41. *Put Off – Lack of rejoicing* (Phil. 4:4); **Put On – Rejoicing** (I Thess. 5:18)
42. *Put Off – Worry/fear* (Matt. 6:25-32); **Put On – Trust** (I Pet. 5:7)
43. *Put Off – Unbelief* (Heb. 3:12); **Put On – Faith** (Heb. 11:1, 6)
44. *Put Off – Unfaithfulness* (Prov. 25:19); **Put On – Faithfulness** (Luke 16:10-12)
45. *Put Off – Neglect of Bible* (II Tim. 3:14-17); **Put On- Bible Study** (Psa. 1:2)
46. *Put Off – Prayerlessness* (Luke 18:1); **Put On – Prayer** (Matt. 26:41)
47. *Put Off – No burden for lost* (Matt. 9:36-38); **Put On – Compassion to witness** (Acts 1:8)
48. *Put Off – Bury talents* (Luke 12:48); **Put On – Develop abilities** (I Cor. 4:2)
49. *Put Off – Irresponsibility* (Luke 16:12); **Put On – Responsibility** (Luke 16:10)
50. *Put Off – Procrastination* (Prov. 10:5); **Put On – Diligence** (Prov. 27:1)
51. *Put Off – Irreverence* (Eccl. 5:1); **Put On – Reverence** (Psa. 89:7)
52. *Put Off – Inhospitable* (I Pet. 4:9); **Put On – Hospitable** (Rom. 12:13)
53. *Put Off – Cheating* (II Cor. 4:2); **Put On – Honesty** (II Cor. 8:21)
54. *Put Off – Stealing* (Prov. 29:24); **Put On – Working** (Eph. 4:28)
55. *Put Off – Lack of moderation* (Prov. 11:1); **Put On - Temperance** (I Cor. 9:25)
56. *Put Off – Gluttony* (Prov. 23:21); **Put On – Discipline** (I Cor. 9:27)
57. *Put Off – Wrong friends* (Psa. 1:1); **Put On – Godly friends** (Prov. 13:20)
58. *Put Off – Temporal values* (Matt. 6:19-21); **Put On – Eternal values** (II Cor. 4:18)
59. *Put Off – Love of money/greed* (I Tim. 6:9-10); **Put On – Love of God** (Matt. 6:33)
60. *Put Off – Stinginess* (I John 3:17); **Put On – Generosity** (Prov. 11:24-25)
61. *Put Off – Moral impurity* (I Thess. 4:7); **Put On – Moral purity** (I Thess. 4:4)
62. *Put Off – Fornication* (I Cor. 6:18); **Put On – Abstinence** (I Thess. 4:3)
63. *Put Off – Lust* (I Pet. 2:11); **Put On – Pure Desires** (Titus 2:12)
64. *Put Off – Adultery* (Matt. 5:27-28); **Put On – Martial Fidelity** (Prov. 5:15-23)
65. *Put Off – Homosexuality* (Lev. 18:22); **Put On – Moral purity/heterosexual** (I Thess. 4:4-5)
66. *Put Off – Incest* (Lev. 18:6); **Put On – Moral purity** (I Cor. 7:2,5)
67. *Put Off – Pornography* (Psa. 101:3); **Put On – Pure thoughts** (Phil. 4:8)
68. *Put Off – Immodesty* (Prov. 7:10); **Put On – modesty** (I Tim. 2:9)
69. *Put Off – Flirtation* (Prov. 7:21); **Put On – Gentle, quiet spirit** (I Pet. 3:4)
70. *Put Off – Worldly pleasure* (Prov. 21:17); **Put On – Spiritual pursuit** (Gal. 5:16)
71. *Put Off – Fleshly music* (Eph. 4:29-30); **Put On – Edifying music** (Eph. 5:19)
72. *Put Off - Alcoholism* (Prov. 20:1); **Put On – Abstinence** (Prov. 23:30)
73. *Put Off – Bodily harm* (I Cor. 3:16-17); **Put On – Glorify God in body** (I Cor. 6:19-20)
74. *Put Off – Witchcraft/astrology/horoscopes* (Deut. 18:10-11); **Put On – Worship of true God** (Deut. 6:5)
75. *Put Off – Following crowd* (Prov. 1:10); **Put On – Following God** (Prov. 3:7)
76. *Put Off – Gambling* (Prov. 28:20,22); **Put On – Trust God / stewardship** (Luke 16:11)
77. *Put Off – Preferential treatment* (James 2:1-9); **Put On – Love neighbor, no preferential treatment** (Luke 6:31)
78. *Put Off – Presumption of future* (Prov. 27:1); **Put On – trust in God’s will** (James 4:14-16)

Conclusion

Remember, Repentance is first a *decision* – Put off and Put on. Repent literally means to “change one’s mind.” Penitent people take a deep look inside and face the truth about themselves; how they’ve been excusing their sins and hurting others. They come to a decision point, what Paul calls, “the point of

repentance” (2 Corinthians 7:9), in which they change their mind from pleasing the flesh to pleasing God; from trusting in self to trusting in a Savior.

Repentance is second a principle of *turning*. Turning in repentance is to take a completely new direction in life. This implies two parts: turning away from sin and returning to the Lord. And it implies a relationship between us and God—much like the relationship between the prodigal son and his father in Jesus’ parable. After the son comes to his senses in the pigsty, he *turns* from his sin and *returns* to his father (see Luke 15:11-32).

Repentance is third a producer of *fruit*. The decision of repentance and the turning of repentance are evidenced by the *fruit* of repentance—deeds that flow from the life of a changed person. The prophets described these deeds in practical terms: “Therefore, return to your God, Observe kindness and justice” (Hosea 12:6a).

Repentance is fourth *not merely feeling sorry for sin*. A person may feel deep remorse for his or her critical spirit, anger, or greed. There’s a difference between repentance and remorse. Judas “felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest and elders” (Matthew 27:3). He even confessed his crime: “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (v. 4). Judas had come face to face with the hideous beast of evil in his soul, and he shrank back in terror and shame. Tragically, instead of leading him to God and life, his guilt hounded him to the gates of death. Eventually, his shame turned to self-hatred, and it drove him to suicide. The apostle Paul calls this “the sorrow of the world” because the world offers no hope for people racked with guilt (2 Corinthians 7:10b). Today a pastor caught in immorality may kneel before the congregation and weep bitterly over the condition of his soul. As important as it is to feel the weight of our sin, these emotions are not repentance. In fact, if we accept these tears as repentance, we can actually hinder the person from doing the really hard work of change.

Repentance is the process of turning from our sinful way of life and turning to godliness. It is characterized by a change of thinking, a change of behavior, and an intentional turning from sin.

The path of repentance often leads through dark periods of self-examination and painful surrendering of selfishness and pride. Repentance includes letting go of cherished sinful pleasures and being accountable to others who help us as we walk a new course in life. It marks a renewed relationship with the Lord based on a revived belief that His way is truly best and His righteousness is life’s greatest treasure.

Question: Have you truly repented? Have you truly repented in the manner the Bible defines repentance?

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Gen. 3:5-12. After God created man, He placed them in the Garden of Eden to live together, work and fellowship together, with Him. But man’s pure relationship with God was disrupted by sin. Sin within man’s heart caused the fellowship of man to be broken with God; and sin was initiated, not by God, but by Satan. Satan deceived Eve by first planting a doubt in her mind (v.4). He then denied God’s Word (v.5). In denying it, he imputed motives to God that were not consistent with God's character. God's true motive was the welfare of man, but the serpent implied it was *God's welfare at man's expense*. Eve sinned when she disobeyed God’s command. When Eve sinned, she did become more like God by obtaining greater knowledge, because now she had the knowledge of good *and evil*. However, at the same time she became *less* like God, because she was no longer innocent of sin. She had made the decision to act like God in that she became the center of her world and assumed the authority to do what she pleased. Eve’s sin resulted in separation from God (broken fellowship with God), which is spiritual death that ultimately leads to eternal death and a permanent separation from God. The first doctrine (truth) that Satan deceived man to believe was to deny that sin results in death (separation from God). The first false doctrine taught by Satan was that God will not punish sin. This work of Satan is still ongoing today, because Satan works very hard to get people to disbelieve that their sin will result in their eternal life in hell. Satan initiated the temptation but it was Eve who made the decision to disobey God’s command. Eve’s natural desires (her self-will, her heart blinded by pride) caused her to sin. All three avenues of fleshly temptation are present in verse 6:

1. She saw that the tree was "good for food" (the lust of the flesh: the desire to do something contrary to God's will, i.e., eat the tasty fruit).
2. It was a "delight to the eyes" (the lust of the eyes: the desire to have something apart from God's will, i.e., possess the beautiful fruit).
3. It was "desirable to make one wise" (the pride of life: the desire to be as God, i.e., to be in control of your own life, to ‘do it my way’).

Adam was not deceived (cf. I Tim. 2:14). Adam was with her (v.6) and allowed her to disobey the command of the LORD. In so doing he chose his wife over God (cf. 3:17); and for the same reasons that Eve chose to eat of the forbidden fruit – 1) to do, 2) to have, and 3) to control. His love and desire for her was greater than his love and desire for God. Together, Adam and Eve had failed in their responsibility to follow and submit to God’s command; and as a result, they were now sinners. They had rebelled against a specific command of God (cf. 2:16-17), and this rebellion marked a transition to the knowledge of good and evil. Their new responsibility now becomes to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God for forgiveness and reconciliation through blood sacrifice, which anticipated the sacrifice of Christ.

The foundation of all sin lies in man's pride and his desire of self-control in being independent of God. Man does not like to be dependent upon or submit to the authority of anyone. He does not like to submit and be subject to obedience to authority or commands from someone else. He desires to go his own way and to be his own master. Man rebels against God because he wants to be the center of his

universe, autonomous from all others. This is pride at work – the center focus of pride is “I.” Pride allows one to be deceived, which is true today because we are easily deceived when we are tempted – because we always rationalize our behavior.

Pride has a serious consequence; separation from God, which is spiritual death (v.7). "Death" means *separation* in the Bible, never annihilation. Sin always results in alienation: theologically (between God and man), sociologically (between man and man), psychologically (between man and himself), and ecologically (between man and nature). Often temptations are attractive because they promise freedom, power, enjoyment, peace and happiness. Satan tempted Jesus similarly to the way he tempted Eve. However, Jesus overcame Satan *victoriously* by accurately using the Word of God to remain faithful to the will of God.

Now God’s relationship with man has changed. Man has now sinned against God and is in need of forgiveness to be reconciled to Him. Man does not ask God for forgiveness but God’s love for man causes Him to initiate forgiveness so man can be forgiven. God took the initiative in seeking out the sinners to re-establish a relationship with them. Evidence of God's love is His unwillingness to abandon those He loved, even when they failed to do His will. His approach was tender as well as gracious (vv. 9, 11, 13). In this text we see the effects of sin in the lives of men; Adam and Eve: 1) felt guilt and shame (v.7), 2) tried to change the effects of sin by their own efforts (v.7), 3) fled from God’s presence out of fear of Him (vv. 8,10) and 4) tried to blame their sin on another rather than confessing personal responsibility (vv. 12-13). And that is how we are still reacting to God today. It is our pride that causes us to reject God’s forgiveness. It is pride that keeps us from submitting to and obeying God's Word. It is pride that causes us not to reach out to others to forgive or seek forgiveness.

Gen. 3:16-19. The sin of man not only resulted in broken fellowship with God, but it also resulted in temporal and eternal consequences. First, women would experience increased pain in bearing children (v.16 - "I will *greatly multiply* your pain"). Second, women’s desire will be to dominate the relationship with a man. There are several interpretations to the phrase “your desire will be for your husband,” but the construction of the Hebrew in Gen. 4:7 supports the interpretation that a woman’s desire will be to dominate their relationship with a man. Scripture provides numerous examples of women seeking to control men, which we see today in husband-wife relationships. From this time forward, there is a battle between man and woman. Men must work to be the leader in a man-woman relationship. Women desire to control the relationship they have with men. Sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband; and now we see the relationships of men and women struggle with tyranny, domination, and manipulation. Third, all of mankind, men and women as represented by Adam, would now have to "toil" hard to obtain a living from "the ground" (vv. 17-18). Man must now work to provide provision to live, something that was provided before by God while Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. God’s punishment for sin was retaliatory justice. Adam and Eve sinned by eating, so now they will have to suffer and labor in order to eat and sustain themselves. Eve manipulated Adam, so now she was placed in a position of being subject to the leadership of Adam. Satan destroyed the human race, so now he will be destroyed for eternity; he cannot escape his punishment. Fourth, mankind would now "return to dust" when he died (v. 19). Now rather than mankind living forever, they will experience death both physically and spiritually (cf. Rom. 5:12-14). Fifth, because Adam and Eve failed to observe the command of the LORD, innocence was lost and conscience was born. But God did not leave mankind in a “lost” position; He promised mankind that He would provide a way for them to be forgiven and reconciled to Him (cf. Gen. 3:15). God initiated forgiveness by His grace toward mankind. Matthew Henry wrote this: "How admirably the satisfaction our Lord Jesus made by his death and sufferings answered to the sentence here passed upon our first parents. (1) Did travailing pains come in with sin? We read of *the travail of Christ's soul* (Isa. 53:11). (2) Did subjection come in with sin? Christ was made under the law (Gal. 4:4). (3) Did the curse come in with

sin? Christ was made a curse for us, died a cursed death (Gal. 3:13). (4) Did thorns come in with sin? He was crowned with thorns for us. (5) Did sweat come in with sin? He for us did sweat as it were great drops of blood. (6) Did sorrow come in with sin? He was a man of sorrows; his soul was, in his agony, exceedingly sorrowful. (7) Did death come in with sin? He became obedient unto death. Thus is the plaster as wide as the wound. Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!" God judges sin with retaliatory justice; but His love for mankind, along with His mercy and grace, initiated forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

Ex. 20:13. This is the 6th commandment given by the LORD to Moses. Life is sacred and it is to be treated as sacred. God commands that man is not to murder man. The Hebrew word used here specifies "murder," not just *killing* ("You shall not murder"). God is prohibiting man taking the life of another man without divine authorization; and this includes suicide. However, God did not forbid "killing" *per se*. In fact, He *commanded* capital punishment and some war, both of which involve killing. The Israelites were to execute murderers and others under the Mosaic Law. The purpose of this commandment is to instruct men to be concerned about the safety of all men as they dwell together. This law also forbids murder of the heart; meaning that we are not to have internal anger and wrath that creates a desire within the heart to wish death upon someone (cf. 1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:22). Murder of the heart comes from pride, judgmental judging and bitterness.

Ex. 22:1-15. Restitution was required when property was stolen or when property damage occurred at the hand of someone who was not the owner of the property. There were harsh penalties leveled on a person for stealing, damaging or abusing the property of another person. The restitution outlined here is an illustration of God's respect for the rights of others. This respect for the things of others is required of us today. Restitution, as outlined here, also demonstrates the truth of scripture that we "reap what we sow" (cf. Gal. 6:7) and 'sow the wind...reap the whirlwind' (cf. Hosea 8:7). We need to be very careful about what we are "sowing" in our life today.

Lev. 17:11. In Leviticus 17:10-16, God is giving instruction on the misuse of blood. God prohibited the ingesting of "blood." From this law, the Jews developed methods of draining or washing the blood out of meat, that resulted in *kosher* (meaning "fit" or "proper") meat. "Blood" is the life-sustaining fluid of the body (vv. 11, 14). Blood, as life-sustaining, that was poured out (shed) made atonement for sin. Consequently, the eating or drinking of blood was inappropriate, since blood had expiatory value and represented life. To eat blood is to despise life. Since God forbade "eating blood" before the Mosaic Law (Gen. 9:4), care should be taken today and it is suggested that we, as believers today, should also refrain from eating it,

Lev. 18:6, 22. Leviticus 18:6-18 addresses the sin of incest. God designed men and women to have sexual relationships within a marriage of a man and a woman. Here God prohibits sexual relationships between blood relatives or within family relationships. In vs. 19-23, God also condemned other kinds of unacceptable sexual behavior, including adultery (v. 20), homosexuality (v. 22, cf. 20:13; Deut. 23:18), and bestiality (v. 23). The identification of these sexual sins still applies to us today. It is the law that identifies sin (cf. Rom. 7:7).

Lev. 26:1. Here we find the introduction to the final conditions of the covenant the LORD has with Israel. The LORD speaks directly to His uniqueness and exclusivity (Lev. 26:1), a fact that demanded unquestioning loyalty (26:2). "Idols" (gods) were nonentities and are not real. The term "image" means it is a representation of a "god" one who belonged to the world, since an image of a "god" represents an entity that is not real. A "sacred pillar" or standing stone was an object used in idol worship, which

implies being tied to one specific place. "Figured stones" were sometimes used to mark boundaries, and implied that a particular deity guarded the property. We must take care not to allow temporal things on earth to become our idol, such as material things.

Lev. 26:14-39. The LORD now clearly states the punishments that would come upon the Israelites, not for individual errors and sins, but for a settled contempt for the whole covenant; for willful rebellion and rejection of the covenant (vv. 14-15). The LORD will judge Israel in a series of judgments for their rebellion. The LORD would bring a series of judgments; after He brought the first judgment, if they continued to rebel, He would then bring the second set of judgments against them, and so on. In vv. 16-17 (the first judgment), the Israelites will experience "terror" (a feeling of panic) when they experience the judgments of disease, lack of harvest and defeat by their enemies. In vv. 18-20 (the second judgment), the Israelites will experience a barren land ("your land will not yield its produce") because there will be no rain ("make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze"). In vv. 21-22 (the third judgment), the Israelites will experience the death of their children and livestock. In vv. 23-26 (the fourth judgment), the Israelites will experience war ("sword"), plagues ("pestilence"), and famine ("break your staff of bread ... eat and not be satisfied"). In vv. 27-33 (the fifth judgment), the Israelites will experience the destruction of their families ("you will eat the flesh of your sons and ... daughters"); the destruction of their idolatrous practices ("your incense and altars" and "idols") and places ("your high places," "sanctuaries"); the destruction of their land and "cities"; and the destruction of their nation ("you ... I will scatter among the nations") through dispersion. J. Sidlow Baxter noted this: "We point to the people of Israel as a perennial historical miracle. The continued existence of this nation up to the present day, the preservation of its national peculiarities throughout thousands of years, in spite of all dispersion and oppression, remains so unparalleled a phenomenon, that without the special providential preparation of God, and His constant interference and protection, it would be impossible for us to explain it. For where else is there a people over which such judgments have passed, and yet not ended in destruction?" It is clear from God's treatment of Israel that He judges sin. And this applies to us today.

Num. 5:5-10. The LORD was speaking to Moses about the conduct they were to observe when dealing with one another. In Num. 5 the LORD emphasized to Moses the importance of maintaining proper interpersonal relationships within the camp. Moses repeated the law concerning the restitution of and compensation for a trespass against one's neighbor here (cf. Lev. 5:14—6:7; Matt. 5:23-24). The "sin" being referred to in vv. 5-10 can refer either to sin committed *by* an individual; or to sin committed *against* an individual. The sin in v. 6 represents a sin where a person who had defrauded someone but later denies it under oath. The sin in v. 8 represents a situation where a person who had committed a sin against another could not fulfill his responsibilities of restitution because the person against whom he had committed the sin had died. Sin against one's neighbor (cf. Lev. 6:1-7) needed atonement, because they constituted acts of "unfaithfulness" to God (v. 6). The Israelites had to maintain proper *horizontal* relationships with their neighbors—in order to maintain a proper *vertical* relationship with the LORD. (cf. Matt. 5:23-24). The point of this passage is clear, sin committed by one person against another person is a sin committed against God. It is also clear that true repentance demands honest restitution, which should include forgiveness and reconciliation.

Num. 22:18. Numbers 22 tells the story of Moabites and their attempt to have Balaam put a curse on the nation of Israel. In the story Balaam is talked to by God and told not to curse the nation of Israel, which the nation of Moab reacted angrily to Balaam. In v. 18 and again in v.38, Balaam tells the king of the Moabites, Balak, and the Moabites that he cannot go against the word of the LORD. Balaam feared the LORD more than he feared man.

Num. 32:23. Moses was talking to the two tribes of Israel, Ruben and Gad, who desired to stay east of the Jordan River and not enter into the Promised Land on the west side of the Jordan River. Moses was concerned that if the two tribes stayed on the east side of the Jordan River that they would not help the other ten tribes conquer the Promised Land, which would lead the ten tribes to defeat. He knew this because earlier he had experienced 10 tribes not wanting to enter into the Promised Land when 2 tribes wanted to enter into the Promised Land (cf. 9-15; Num. 13:26-14:4). The two tribes committed themselves to provide men to help fight alongside the men of the other 10 tribes, to which Moses responded in v. 23. Moses stated that if they did not help, this would be sin and the LORD will judge their tribes for this sin. This principle remains true today: "Be sure that your sin will find you out."

Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy is widely used in the New Testament. All but 7 chapters of Deuteronomy, chapters 3, 12, 15, 16, 20, 26 and 34, are cited at least once in the New Testament. It is striking that four of these passages of Deuteronomy stand out as being the clear centers of focus in the N.T.: Deut. 6:4-5; 18:15-19; 21:22-23; and 30:11-14.

Deut. 6:4-5. Deut. 6:1-3 announces the commandments the nation of Israel is to follow as they prepare to enter into the Promised Land. Moses has presented that the LORD is the one true God who requires complete devotion. In vv. 4-5 we are presented the command around which everything else revolves around: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." That is why Jesus later said that this was the greatest of all commandments as all the law and the prophets hang on this commandment (Matt. 22:37-38; Mark 12:28-30; cf. Luke 10:27). The LORD is the only God to be loved with "all your heart...soul...and strength." The 'heart' (Hebrew: *'leb'*) means 'the seat of the intellect, equivalent to the mind or rational part of humankind;' also as the seat of the emotions generally and of love in particular. The demand "with all the heart" excludes any division of the heart in its love. The 'soul' (Hebrew-*'nephesh'*) means 'being' or 'essential person' which is a reference to the invisible part of a person, including the will and sensibilities; to include the center of consciousness. The 'strength' (Hebrew: *'me'od'*) means the physical side of a person with all its functions and capacities. "Heart," "soul," and "might" are three different internal human functions. In other O.T. passages, only two of these are mentioned ("heart" and "soul"; Deut. 4:29; 10:12; Josh. 22:5). In other N.T. passages 'mind' is added ("mind"; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). The meaning is the same in all cases: We are to love the LORD wholeheartedly and "all that is within me" (Ps. 103:1). Clearly stated, we are to love the LORD with our whole selves, with our whole being. How are we doing?

Deut. 11:16-17, 26-28. In Deuteronomy 11 we see the consequences of obedience and disobedience outlined for the nation of Israel. In vv. 16-17, they are not to be deceived to worship other gods, because they would be punished with no rain resulting in no crops. In vv. 26-28, the LORD promises blessings if they obeyed Him and judgments if they did not obey Him. That principle remains true today. We cannot expect the LORD to bless us if we are being disobedient to His commands.

Deut. 16:18-20. Moses is instructing the nation of Israel about proper justice through good judges that render good judgment. "Judges" were individuals responsible for administering justice, and "officers" were administrators charged with the enforcement of law, perhaps similar to modern police officers. Judges were to judge impartially and without acceptance of any bribe or gift of any kind that would pervert righteous justice. Right judgment is what is required for peaceful living and existence between people; and right judgment establishes equality among people and before God. We must always be found desiring and providing 'right judgment' with others and especially among fellow believers.

Deut. 18:10-12. The context of this passage of scripture is addressing 'prophets.' Moses was giving guidelines for the nation of Israel to follow. The context of this section is significant; vv. 1-8 deals with those who ministered to the LORD in various ways for the people; vv. 9-14 contrast worship of idols with worship of the LORD; and vv. 15-22 concern the delivery of the LORD's revelations to His people. Of the priests and prophets, only the prophets were non-successive. Prophets were men and women raised up individually by the LORD and were called and empowered by Him to communicate His purposes to the people. Child burning ("makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire"; as in the worship of Molech (v. 10) was condemned as an abominable practice from "divination" in the worship of idols. Pagan use various phenomena as instruments to divine (foretell) the future; such as the patterns of birds as they flew, the arrangement of the organs of an animal offered as a sacrifice, and the relationship of the heavenly bodies to one another. "Witchcraft" involved dealing with Satan and his demons to obtain desired ends. "Omens" were signs of coming events or conditions. "Sorcerers" cast spells. "Mediums" and "spiritists" supposedly call up the dead (though often demons do respond). The practices of idol worship are sin and the LORD will punish the people who worship idols.

Deut. 32:35. Moses had finished the instruction that the LORD had given to him to give to Israel. He ends with a song that he sings (cf. Deut. 32:1-43). In his song we find v. 35. Israel will fail to follow the LORD's commands. The LORD will use other nations ("adversaries") to discipline His people, but He would *judge them*, too ("the LORD will vindicate His people"; cf. Hab. 1—2). Here we find a principle that the LORD follows: the manner and timing of the judgment of man's sin and wickedness is God's prerogative. He will judge in His time (cf. Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). We must keep this in mind as we live our life.

Deut. 29:18-19. Moses is reminding the Israelites about the dangers of idolatry. Moses was concerned about the actions of one family, one person, or one tribe becoming a worshiper of an idol, because if that occurred, the entire nation of Israel was exposed to the poison of idolatry and turning from God. Moses knew if that occurred, God's wrath and judgment would be upon the entire nation. If one selfish, prideful person falls away, that root would bare a poisonous fruit. Moses went on to explain it only took one person who deceived himself to think that he was safe to disobey God and follow his willful heart to turn the nation against God. This is true today in one-on-one relationships and one-to-many relationships (such as a local church). Are you one who believes that by ignoring God's Word you can do what you want, without having any consequences for your pride and self-will?

I Sam. 2:23. Here the sons of Eli were willfully sinning against the commandments of the LORD. They were practicing a ritual of Canaanite worship rather than the instruction of the Mosaic Law. Ritual prostitution was part of Canaanite worship, and Eli's sons adopted this ritual. However, the women with whom they "lay" were not temple prostitutes, but women who performed simple duties in the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 38:8). Even when Eli confronted them with their sin, they refused to repent. Unintentional sin was pardonable under Mosaic Law, but deliberate, willful, rebellious sin was not. The punishment for such willful sin was death (Num. 15:30). God initially judged Eli's sons by giving them hard hearts as a result of their sin; but He finally judged them by putting them to death (cf. Exod. 7:3; Rom. 1:24). And this is the pattern we see God following today; people who habitually practice sin harden their heart against the truth of God's word – and they will pay the price for their sin by spending their eternity in hell, the final destruction.

I Sam. 12:15. Samuel was addressing King Saul at his coronation as king of Israel. The key to Israel's future blessing would be fearing the LORD, serving Him, listening to His voice through the Mosaic Law and the prophets, and not rebelling against His commands (v. 14). In v. 15 there is a warning ('disobey –

not heed – forsake’) from Samuel to King Saul that disobedience to the LORD’s will and His commands will result in curses, similar to the curses outlined in Deut. 28: 15-68. We need to heed this admonition, for God is still the same God who hates sin and rebellion – and there are consequences for disobedience to His commands.

I Sam. 13:14. King Saul’s relationship with the LORD was superficial. Here Samuel is telling King Saul that his rule as king of Israel will not continue because his heart was not a heart that sought after God. Saul had assumed more authority than was his. For this reason, God would not establish a kingdom for him (cf. 24:21). Instead of Saul, the LORD was going to choose a man whose heart was like His own; meaning He was looking for one who had a will to obey Him. The LORD found who He was looking for – David, a man after God’s own heart. Where is our heart? Are we seeking to obey the LORD with all of our heart?

I Sam. 15:22-24. King Saul had disobeyed the command of the LORD given to him by Samuel to destroy the Amalekites and King Agag, by his sparing King Agag and bringing home spoils that were to be destroyed. Now, instead of confessing sin and repenting, Saul persisted in justifying his actions and in calling partial obedience total obedience (v. 20). He placed the responsibility for sparing some of the spoils taken in the battle on the people (v. 21), but as king he was responsible for the people’s actions. Just as King Saul, many of us are prone to deflect responsibility for our wrong actions (cf. Gen. 3:12-13). We try to justify our mistakes in order to escape blame and punishment. King Saul tried to justify his actions by claiming that he did what he had done to honor God. He betrayed his lack of allegiance by referring to the LORD as "your" God, not "our" God or "my" God, twice to Samuel (cf. v. 30). In verses 22 and 23, Samuel spoke in poetic form, indicating to all who listened that the LORD had inspired what he was saying. These verses prioritize total obedience and worship ritual for then as well as for today. The LORD desires reality above ritual. Sacrificing things to the LORD is good, but obedience is "better" because it involves sacrificing ourselves to Him. Worship that does not proceed from obedience to His Word and commands is not worship at all. Samuel was pointing out a basic truth that ‘sacrifice’ (worship) on our terms (based in self) is not genuine worship; such worship is not accepted by the LORD. True worship must be based on genuine faith and obedience to the LORD from the heart. Also, there is a difference between obedience and sacrifice. Sacrifice is one aspect of obedience, but obedience involves more than just sacrifice. We should never think that we can compensate for our lack of obedience to some of God’s commands by making other sacrifices for Him. Suppose one Saturday morning a father asks his teenage son to mow the lawn for him since he has to work that Saturday and cannot do it himself. Company is coming and he wants it to look good. The son decides that his dad’s car needs washing more than the grass needs cutting. Besides, the boy plans to use the car on a date that night. When the father comes home, he finds that his son has not cut the grass. "I decided to wash your car instead," the boy explains. "Aren't you pleased with me?" His father replies, "I appreciate your washing the car, but that's not what I asked you to do. I would have preferred that you mow the lawn, as I told you." Our failure to obey the LORD’s commands and His will is rebellion against the LORD. When we ‘do what we think is right’ we know take the position that we are in control of our life. Failure to carry out the LORD’s commands and His will (insubordination) is wicked (iniquity) and puts the insubordinate person in the LORD’s place. This is a form of idolatry. King Saul did confess (v.24) but his confession was superficial. The Hebrew word translated "transgressed" (*abarti*) means "overlooked." Saul only admitted that he had overlooked some small and relatively unimportant part of what God had commanded because he feared the people (or the soldiers, v. 24). Saul evidently believed that it was easier to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission. Kenneth Chafin wrote: "Most of us like to think that however serious our disobedience, once we repent of that sin, we are forgiven and experience no real loss. The Scripture teaches that genuine repentance always meets forgiveness, but it does not teach that there are no losses. Actually, every reflective Christian knows of permanent losses that are the

result of our failure to live up to God's ideals for our lives." How are we doing in obeying God's commands and worshiping Him with a clean, obedient heart? Or do we think we can do what we want, then ask God to forgive us – which is willful rebellion for which you will pay a high price for.

I Sam. 16:7. Samuel was directed by the LORD to select a king to replace Saul. This time the LORD's choice was not a king for the people according to their desires, but a king for Himself who would put the LORD first (cf. 16:1; 13:14; cf. Gal. 4:4-5). Samuel faithfully carried out the LORD's command to go to Bethlehem despite the possible risk to his life. There Samuel judged Jesse's sons by their external qualities, just as the Israelites judged Saul acceptable because of those characteristics. But the LORD had a different standard than men. The LORD evaluates people on the basis of their hearts (affections), not their appearances or abilities (cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 10:31; 1 Cor. 1:27). The Hebrew concept of 'heart' embodies emotions, will, intellect and desires. The life of an individual will reflect their heart condition (cf. I Sam. 13:14; Matt. 12:34-35). What are people observing about your life?

II Sam. 12:13-14. David had sinned against the LORD by his affair with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. David's sin was carried out in secrecy but now it is laid open by the LORD through Nathan (12:1) when Nathan confronted David about his sin (cf. II Sam. 12:1-12). Psalm 32:3-4 records David's misery during the time between his sinning and his confessing. This psalm, and especially Psalm 51, gives us insight into David's feelings when he confessed his sins. David should have been killed for his sins (Lev. 20:10; 24:17) but the LORD spared David's life by pure grace. When David was confronted with his sin he did not attempt to justify his sin. He called his sin what it was rather than trying to cover it up or explain it away, which is typically our response. David's confession was genuine. He acknowledged that his sin was primarily against the LORD, not just against Bathsheba and Uriah (cf. Prov. 10:17). The LORD's forgiveness followed immediately after David's confession (v. 13). It could appear to us that this was unfair that forgiveness was given so easily by the LORD, especially from the perspective of Uriah's family or the soldiers killed at Rabbah. Yet forgiveness is always unfair: that is what makes it grace ("Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" - Rom. 5:20). This is how God deals with sin – by grace He forgives sin when we genuinely acknowledge our sin and repent of it. He forgives and chooses not to remember our sin; but He usually allows the consequences of sin to follow and uses them for discipline and instruction in our lives. Do we readily confess sin and repent of our sin? Or do we seek to justify our actions? Do we readily forgive others of offenses made against us?

I Kings 21:27-29. King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, had murdered Naboth to gain control of his vineyard. The LORD spoke to Elijah about this and told him to go to King Ahab and tell him of the judgment that would come upon him because of the murder of Naboth. Ahab was a wicked king, one of the worst kings Israel has ever had (v. 25; cf. 16:30). He was as bad as the Amorites whom God drove out because of their wickedness (v. 26; cf. Lev. 18:25-30). But he was the king over God's chosen people, though not of the Davidic line. King Ahab reacted strongly to Elijah's message of the LORD's judgment; he genuinely repented when he heard of his judgment from the LORD. His genuine repentance resulted in the LORD responding to his repentance by relenting and lightening His sentence. Because of this genuine repentance, the LORD extended Ahab's rule for twelve more years. This is an example of how important our response is to the LORD and His will. If the LORD will hear repentance from one like Ahab, what is He hearing from us? If we are not genuinely repenting of sin, the LORD will not hear or bless us.

II Chron. 7:14. This passage of scripture speaks to the conditions of national forgiveness of Israel's sin. The LORD responds to Solomon's prayer (cf. II Chron. 6:40-42) with a special revelation (v.12). The LORD promised to grant the petitions of the people, as Solomon had requested, if they manifested a true heart for Him (vv. 12-14). In this scripture we are shown how to avoid the consequences of

disobedience: 1) submit to the LORD, 2) pray, and 3) repent (i.e., change direction, not just feeling sorry). This applies to us today just as it did to Israel. However, the promise that the LORD would "heal their land" ties in with His earlier promise to bless *the Israelites' land* with rain and fertility if they obeyed His commandments *in the Mosaic Law* (Deut. 28:11-12). This is not a 'promise' to other nations that He will "heal the land" of other believers who obey His will for them. But the principle of how to avoid the consequences of disobedience does apply to each believer today. How are you doing?

Neh. 9:26-33. The context of this passage begins with the reading of the Law by Ezra (Neh. 8); and the people's response to the Law. Nehemiah 9 records the prayer of the people and one of the most eloquent recitals of the works of the LORD in Israel's history. This is one of the great prayers of the Old Testament. The prayer of the people of Israel demonstrates that they were not content to go about their business as usual after hearing the Word of God read. They realized they needed to hear more and to get right with God more completely. In verses 26 and 27 they acknowledged their disobedience, their judgment, and their cry of repentance that always found the LORD willing to forgive and restore. In verse 33, the people of Israel acknowledge that the LORD is just in all of His dealings with Israel; He has been faithful, they have done wickedly. We must remember this holds true today. The LORD is faithful. We are the ones who have strayed away from the LORD in sin. We need to repent. He is faithful to forgive and restore.

Job 8:13. Bildad is addressing Job and what he believes is Job's need, repentance. He uses an illustration of the water plant (vv. 11-13) to emphasize his view of the cause and effect of what he believes is sin in Job's life. Bildad advises Job not to forget God. Although Bildad was in error in his address to Job, what he said in v. 13 is true – 'the path of those who forget God, and the hope of the hypocrite will perish' for eternity.

Job 22:21-27. Eliphaz is challenging Job to repent of his sin (v. 23) because he believes that Job has unconfessed sin in his life. While Eliphaz was wrong about sin in Job's life, he was not wrong about the LORD blessing the life of a believer who has a repentant heart, open before the LORD.

Job 42:1-6. Job's confession is found in these 6 verses. Job did not know why he had suffered so much, but he was now done complaining, questioning and challenging God's actions. Job's words reveal the changes that God's revelations had produced in him. He was aware as never before that God had all power and all wisdom. This resulted in an attitude of awe and submission (v. 2). He saw that it was foolish for him to question God's actions. God knew what He was doing even though Job did not. By quoting God's first question back to Him (v. 3a), Job was saying 'You were exactly right in asking, 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' That is just what I have been doing.' Job admits that he had spoken presumptuously (v. 3b-c). Job also repeated what God had said in v.4. Now Job gives his answer (v.5). It was not the courtroom accusation he had said he wanted to deliver to God (Job. 31:35-37); but instead, it was a confession of his own foolishness. He had realized his folly in passing judgment on things that were beyond his understanding. He had not learned the cause of his sufferings or the explanation of the apparent injustices that he had suffered; however, he had found the answer to his situation, fellowship with God. He now knew that he could have fellowship with God even in his sufferings. To Job the important thing is that God has come to him in his suffering, showing him that he is not isolated from God by his suffering. Job found God *in* his suffering and found relief while *in* his sufferings. In v.6, Job not only withdrew his charges against God but also repented of his attitude of pride and arrogance; he grieved over his sin that had hindered him from knowing the LORD better. Job expressed his sorrowful regret and repented that he had not just accepted God's will without complaints and questions. He had lost all, but he had found God and was now content. He had stopped asking,

"Why?" since he had come to know close fellowship with God. We do not need to know 'why' if we truly know God. Or, as Charles Swindoll has put it; "Knowing God is better than knowing answers."

Psa. 1:1-3. Psalm 1 separates all people into two spiritual categories – godly and ungodly. In v.1 a trilogy of expressions describes the person who is blessed or right with God. "Happy" ('deep seated joy and contentment') is a better translation than "blessed" since the Hebrew language has a separate word for "blessed." The Hebrew word for "man" in this context describes a person, without specifying gender. There are three expressions that describe the "happy/blessed" man; the godly man shuns every form of evil at all times and in all places – "walks not...nor stands...nor sits." Each of the three expressions is more intense than the former one; 1) "ungodly/wicked" people willfully persist in evil, 2) "sinners" miss the mark of God's standards and do not care, and 3) "scoffers" make light of God's laws and ridicule what is sacred. In v.2 is the declaration of what godly people do. The godly allows the Word of God (Heb. *torah*, i.e., instruction that comes from God) to shape his conduct rather than the wicked. The godly man is characterized by the consistent contemplation and internalization of God's Word for ethical direction and obedience. The godly man's meditation (lit. "to mumble" or "speak to oneself") on God's Word involves prolonged thinking about it that takes place in study and review throughout the day; it is the reflection on the Word of God in the course of daily activities (Josh 1:8). In v. 3, all who delight in and meditate on God's "law" (i.e., the Word of God) will prosper like a flourishing fruit tree. Their fruit will appear at the proper time, not necessarily immediately, and their general spiritual health will be good. The most important part of a tree is its root system because it draws up water and nourishment that feeds the tree. Without a healthy root system, a tree will die, just as a believer without a healthy "root system" will die. Fruit, in biblical imagery, is what is visible to other people, not just what is hidden within a person; so, it also benefits other people, what others can take from us that nourishes them (cf. John 15:1-11). How is your walk? What kind of fruit are you bearing?

Psa. 6:1-4, 8-9. This is a psalm that David has written; it is a song of lament. Apparently, David is sleepless and his circumstances seem hopeless and helpless. A more literal translation of verse 1 would be, "O Lord, not in Your anger rebuke me; not in Your wrath chasten me." By putting the negative first, David emphasized the manner of the Lord's discipline. The Lord's discipline was upon David for sin that David had committed; and the Lord was disciplining David with an illness as the consequence of the sin. David felt God was dealing with him very severely and despaired of the suffering he was enduring (vv.2-3). Sometimes the Lord's discipline can be so harsh that we may conclude, falsely, that He is angry with us. Sometimes He chastens us to punish (discipline) us for our sins (Heb. 12:4-11), but sometimes He does so to purify and to prove our love for Him (e.g., Job 1–2). In verse 4 David appeals for deliverance; 'deliver' is a synonym for 'salvation,' meaning David desired that the Lord extricate him by His grace. In verses 8b and 9 David apparently received an answer to his prayer; the Lord had responded to David's request because it was a request based in repentance. This psalm is a good example of a prayer for deliverance based on the grace (v. 2), loyal love (v. 4), and glory (v. 5) of God. The LORD will or will not answer all such prayers on the basis of His sovereign will (Mark 14:36). However, the important thing to know and understand, what is the condition of your heart when you pray to the LORD?

Psa. 10:4, 11. Psalm 10 is a song of despair; injustice is rampant and it appears that God is not interested in verses 1-11. The psalmist colorfully pictures the wicked that oppress the righteous in graphic terms; all of which are fruits of pride. They are proud, boastful, greedy, blasphemous, arrogant, haughty, self-sufficient, prosperous, careless about God, belligerent, self-confident, complacent, abusive, deceitful, oppressive, destructive, mischievous, and wicked. They oppose both God and His people with their speech, as well as in their actions (cf. Rom. 3:14). Using the figures of a predatory animal, a lion, a hunter and a fisherman, the psalmist describes how the wicked pursue and ensnare the righteous in

their traps. And with the appearance that God does not punish them quickly encourages them to continue their sinful ways. The wicked deny the thought and existence of a personal God; therefore, they place their faith in that there is no God, there is no accountability, there is no consequence for actions, there is nothing that can intervene or interfere with what they are doing. How wrong the wicked are? But the challenge for believers is the same, do we act as though there is no God who will hold us accountable?

Psa. 12:2. The multitude of liars, deceivers and hypocrites that surrounded David moved him to cry out to God for deliverance from them. It seemed to David, as it did to Elijah years later, that those who followed the LORD had almost become extinct. Liars, hypocrites and double-minded flatterers had gradually replaced people who were true to their word and commitments. Scripture is relevant to today. How are you living your life; as a believer or as a hypocrite?

Psa. 25:7. David asked God for forgiveness for his sins based on the LORD's mercy and love. David's request is presented to the LORD – so David asked for forgiveness because he knew God would forgive and not remember them. As David did, we are to ask God for forgiveness – and He will forgive and choose not to remember. This is a principle we are to follow with others.

Psa. 38:3-5, 18. This is a lament psalm of David's, which has been called "the penitent's plea." In the title of this psalm is the phrase "to cause to remember." Since with God "to remember" is an action, this phrase means to lay out before Him a situation that cries out for His help. The cause for this psalm may have been David's adultery with Bathsheba. David expresses penitence that he had sinned against God and had thereby incurred His discipline. This discipline came in the form of opposition from enemies that he asks God to remove. In verses 3-5, God's discipline is being felt by David as he laments over the physical consequences of his sufferings. He has lost good health and was in pain. His agony extended to his spirit as well as to his body. In verses 15-18 David must feel as if he is at the end of his rope but he expresses hope that the LORD will respond to his prayer. David had confessed his sin had led to his painful condition. He could do nothing more except wait for God to deliver him. The LORD would hear and answer David because of the condition of his heart – it was a repentant heart.

Psa. 39:5. This is a wisdom psalm, in the form of a lament, composed by David after a long illness. He petitions God to extend his days rather than to continue the chastening. In verses 1-6, David talks about the brevity of life. In verses 4-6 he prayed that God would teach him to appreciate the brevity of human life (cf. 90:10, 12). It is probable that David was an old man at this time; and looking back on his life it seems to have been very short. People measured short distances with handbreadths in David's time (v. 5). The pursuits of life are relatively insignificant in view of the short time we live. Do we understand the brevity of life and the results of this life that will live for eternity?

Psa. 50:16-21. Psalm 50 is about God as the Righteous Judge. In verses 16-21, the psalmist writes about hypocritical living. The Lord charges the wicked in Israel with professing allegiance to Him while disobeying Him. The hypocrite loves what God hates. The hypocrite does not allow God to govern their speech (cf. James 3:1-12). The hypocrite also enjoys viewing sin second-hand while they keep out of the sin themselves (v.18). The hypocrite engages in deviousness (vv. 19-20). The hypocrite often concludes that since God did not judge them for their sinful ways, their sins did not matter to Him. Hypocrites often take God's patience for consent and the longer they continue in sin the harder their hearts become. Their sins did not matter to *them*; but their sins do matter to God. Judgment was coming; and they will have to give an account for their actions. Be careful not to be hypocritical.

Psa. 51:1-17. David writes this penitential individual lament psalm upon his confession of the sins he committed against Bathsheba and Uriah. It is a model of confession that we need to follow because we all sin frequently and need to confess frequently. David does not use one word of excuse for the sins he had committed, nor did he seek to downplay his sin or blame others for what he had done. In verse 1, David expresses deep inner grief over his sin by appealing directly to God (Elohim) to cleanse him of his sin. He knew he did not deserve the Lord's forgiveness nor could he earn it. David asked God to blot out the record of his "transgressions," namely, rebellious acts that go beyond the limits that God has established for conduct. In verse 2, David asks God to wash away his "iniquity" (perverse, twisted moral evil) like dirt that was on his garment (behavior). David was sick of sin as sin; he cried out for forgiveness of the evil of the sin, not against the painful consequences of it. In verses 3 and 4, David acknowledges his sin is always before him, probably because Bathsheba had given birth to the child she had conceived illegitimately (cf. 2 Sam. 12:13-18). True acknowledgement of sin comes through a living sensitive consciousness of it. David came to the place of calling his sin what it was and admitting it was primarily a sin against God. Once we understand that no sin is against a fellow human being alone and that all sin is transgression against God, we will no longer treat it so lightly. He made no attempt to blame God for what had happened but took full responsibility himself. Taking personal responsibility for our sins is an important part of true confession. In verse 5, David states clearly that he had been a sinner from the time he came into existence as a human being, namely, at his conception. The sinful condition that he had inherited from his parents was the root of his actual sin. But that was not an excuse for his sin. In verse 6, David acknowledges that God wants him to be completely honest in getting his heart right with God. His confession had to be genuine rather than the superficial repetition of some words. The same thing holds true today – God wants honesty and a right heart before Him. David's prayer of confession for restoration included requests for God's forgiveness (vv. 7, 9), a renewal of his joy (v. 8), and a heart of wisdom and full restoration to divine favor (vv. 10-12). In verse 7, David pleads for purification and cleansing. If God would wash David morally, he would be thoroughly clean. In verse 8, he makes a request for renewed joy in a reconciled relationship with God. In verse 9, David asks God to put his sins in a place where He would not see them, and to blot out any record of them from His record books. In verses 10-11, he asks God for spiritual renewal; for a 'clean heart' and a 'spirit' that was faithful to the LORD. David did not want God to withdraw the Holy Spirit from him (as what happened to King Saul - 1 Sam. 16:1, 7). In verse 12, David asks for renewed joy (cf. v.8) and a "Spirit" that would collaborate and cooperate with God. David's confession of his sins and prayer for inner renewal formed a basis for him to instruct sinners (v. 13), praise Yahweh (vv. 14-15), and deepen his own commitment to the Lord (vv. 16-17). In verse 13, David promises, in light of God's forgiveness and pardon, that he would show others how God deals with penitent sinners. He would do this as an example, as well as verbally. Then sinners would turn to the Lord for deliverance. David then makes a second promise that he would joyfully praise the Lord for His righteousness. In verses 16-17, David makes his third promise, which was to sacrifice his heart to the Lord. His sacrifices of worship would be to come to Him with a broken spirit and a repentant heart. That is what He wants and accepts and delights in. In David's case, there was no sin or trespass offering that he could present that God would accept. Since he had sinned in rebellious defiance of the LORD and the Law, his sentence was death (Num. 15:30-31; cf. 2 Sam. 12:9). The only reason he did not suffer this fate was that God pardoned (forgave) him. When we deal seriously with our sin God will deal gently with us. When we hate what the Lord hates, He will restore our fellowship with Him (reconciliation), which will result in our joy and peace.

Psa. 55:20-21. David writes here about traitors; former friends who turned on him through deceit and treachery. These verses describe not only treachery and deceit, but also hypocrisy. They were saying one thing and doing another.

Psa. 66:18. In this declaration of praise (Psa. 66) there is this distinct and clear statement: God will not hear anyone's prayer if there is iniquity (sin) in their heart. God will not listen to the prayer of a person who nurses sin in his or her heart. An unforgiving heart is a sinful heart; it is a heart with iniquity dwelling within. If your prayers are not being answered, you must check your heart condition. It is clearly understood that God hears every prayer because He knows all; but He will not hear the prayer of a person who harbors sin in their heart. When a believer is in need, they should carefully examine and purify their hearts by confessing of their sin and repenting of that sin to the LORD in prayer before they bring their prayer requests before the LORD. When they do, the LORD will hear their prayer.

Psa. 73:21-24. The psalmist is encouraged as he reflected on his own future and the future of all the faithful who placed their faith in God. The awareness of the relative prosperity of the godless had produced wrong thoughts (v. 21). But he realized that he was wrong and his viewpoint was similar to an animal's (v. 22). Upon reflection, he was reminded that God had not abandoned him but would one day provide the good things He presently withheld (vv. 23-24). Verses 25 and 26 are a great expression of faith and contentment with the spiritual blessings God has promised His people.

Psa. 75:6-7. God as Sovereign Judge is clearly seen here. In verses 4-8, there is a call to the wicked to repent. They are to stop boasting and acting proudly, but the wicked refuse to bow before God. No help from any direction will deliver the ungodly when God judges them. As the Sovereign Judge, God will cause those He judges to 'drink from the cup' the judgment that He has prepared for them (cf. 60:3; Isa. 51:17-23; Hab. 2:16). They cannot escape doing so, or the consequences of doing so, at His appointed time. God is the Sovereign Judge; man is not.

Psa. 78:31-32. This is a didactic ('intended to teach with moral instruction as an ulterior motive) psalm to teach present and future generations to learn from the past; and it stresses the grace of God. Here the nation of Israel has been unfaithful while God remained faithful to provide for them. In spite of God's provisions, the Israelites rebelled against Him. They put God to the test by demanding that He provide for them on their terms, rather than simply trusting and obeying Him (vv. 17-20). In response to their murmuring, God sent fire that burned on the outskirts of the camp (Num. 11:1-3). This was a warning to the people. When they requested bread, He sent it to them abundantly (Exod. 16:14-31). When the people insisted on having meat, God sent abundant quail (Exod. 16:13; Num. 11:31). However, He also sent a plague that should have taught them to be content with His provisions (Num. 11:33). What Israel experienced demonstrates that sometimes God's greatest judgment on us for our rebellious sin is to give us what we want. Be careful what you ask for.

Psa. 79:8-9. The psalmist Asaph requests that the LORD not remember the sins committed by their forefathers or themselves. He requests that the LORD help them. Again, this is the same principle we found in Psa. 25:7, we are to ask for forgiveness and we are to choose not to remember the offense or sin. Here Asaph is asking for God forgiveness and for Him not to remember.

Psa. 81:12. This psalm of praise, with admonition, is a joyful celebration of God's deliverance of His people. The Israelites probably sang it at the Feast of Tabernacles, since it is a review of God's faithfulness and focuses especially on the wilderness wanderings. In verses 8-10, is a summary of God's revelation of His Law at Mt. Sinai. In verses 11-12, it shows Israel's response to God's Law. Israel had not kept God's law. Consequently, He let His people go their own way (cf. Rom. 1:28-32) so they would learn to return to Him. All wickedness in this world is a direct result of the willfulness of a wicked will.

Psa. 86:4-5. David is calling out to God to ‘hear...answer...guard...save...have mercy on...and bring joy’ to him because of his poor and needy condition. David is calling out to God because God is always ready to forgive those who call on Him (cf. v.15). A genuine call out to God for forgiveness by a believer or unbeliever is always heard by God. He always stands ready to forgive those who call out to Him. Through Christ God has provided the means for forgiveness. God draws men to Himself (John 6:44, 12:32) and gives them the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8-9) to call out to Him for salvation (forgiveness). This passage of scripture accurately portrays what we are to do by the example of God Himself. We, as the offender, are to seek forgiveness from God and men whom we have offended. But also, we, as the offended, are to actively make provision for the offender to seek forgiveness (‘draw them to yourself’), just as God has done for us. With this as our example, we are to seek to forgiveness, either as the offender or the offended. We are on both sides of the equation at the same time as we deal with relationships with other men.

Psa. 86:16-17. This is a psalm where David asks for strength. In verses 14-17, he is asking for strength. David's actual complaint appears in verse 14. Rebels against God and His anointed king were harassing David. He contrasted their characters with God's. Specifically, David needed strength of all kinds to deal with these opponents. The sign he requested would have been some physical, tangible proof that God was supporting His servant. God's deliverance would constitute such a sign. This is a prayer for help from a very mature believer. It is especially helpful to read when we feel like we are barely hanging on. David's understanding of God resulted in his taking a humble place of submission to His Lord. His confidence during his trial was strong because he knew how great and loyal God is. Rather than exhibiting panic in the face of danger, David demonstrated peace, confidence, and even joy.

Psa. 89:7. This is a didactic psalm. It begins with praise but ends in lament. In verses 5-14, the uniqueness of the LORD is proclaimed. The LORD is praised for His attributes in verses 5-8, and for His works in verses 9-14. We are to ‘fear’ the LORD and hold Him in reverence.

Psa. 101:3, 7. David is voicing his desire and commitment to maintain holiness in his life. In verses 3 through 8, David expresses his desire for purity among those who work with him. Specifically, David promised God that he would guard his life and his court from sin. Worthless or vile things are things that make no positive contribution to godliness. A perverse heart means a crooked or twisted affection, namely, one that turns away from the straight path of rectitude. David promises to deal severely with even minor deviations from holiness in others' lives (v.5). This expressed his strong allegiance to righteousness. He also promised to reward people who were faithful to God. Those who work for and with David also needed to maintain fellowship with God and walk in His ways (vv. 7-8). David would not tolerate lying; and he would extend his requirements to all the people who lived in his kingdom. In his daily administration of justice, he would cut off the wicked who practiced iniquity. This commitment to holiness is a model for all of believers today. Yet, we find that David was not able to hold to the standard he set. This may be due to personal leniency and/or devious people; but his commitment to holiness is a standard for us today.

Psa. 103:12. David establishes in v.11 that God has mercy on those who fear Him. Here he writes that the LORD removes sin from those who fear Him as far as the east is from the west. This means the sin is removed for infinity for those who believe in Him. It is important to note that if someone travels north or south, he finally arrives at a pole from which he can proceed no farther north or south. However, if someone travels east or west, he never reaches such a point. God did not say He forgives (or removes) our sins as far as the north is from the south, but as far as the east is from the west, namely to infinity. This is an act of “not remembering,” which we are to have. God’s “not remembering” is an act of His will

whereby He separates sin from the sinner by forgiving him, actively not remembering, and reconciling the sinner to Himself. We are to have mercy on those who offend us and remember it no more – which is true forgiveness; and genuine forgiveness always results in reconciliation.

Psa. 103:15. David writes about God's compassion in verses 13-18 that is father-like because He is mindful of man's finite limitations. Verses 15 and 16 beautifully describe the transitory nature of human life. It is both frail and short-lived (cf. Isa. 40:8). In contrast, God's loyal love to those who fear Him abides strong forever. It transcends generations and continues on to the descendants of those who obey His law (vv. 17-18; cf. Exod. 20:5-6). We must keep these thoughts in our mind as we live our life.

Psa. 116:12-19. This is an intensely personal psalm that is written as a 'thank you' song to the LORD for saving the psalmist from death. Verses 1-11 describe the Lord's respond to the psalmist's prayer for deliverance from death. Verses 12-19 are the psalmist's reaction to the Lord's deliverance of him from death. The Jews traditionally sang Psalm 116 after the Passover meal. It is difficult to tell if the writer used "cup" (v.13) in a literal or in a figurative sense. The "cup" may represent his physical salvation. Think of Jesus singing verses 12-14 and raising the cup as He sang. It is probable that when He sang these verses, He raised the third of four cups of wine the Jews drank at that meal. They called the third cup "the cup of salvation." He knew that that cup would only become a true cup of salvation if He paid His vows to the LORD and proceeded to the cross. This is supported by verses 15-19. The death of the godly is significant to God; it is costly to Him (cf. Matt. 10:29-31; John 10:28-29). He does not treat their dying as trivial. Consequently, the fact that He delivered the psalmist from dying meant that He had good reason for doing so. H. C. Leupold wrote: "... "the death of His godly ones" is "precious in the Lord's sight" involves at least two things: "One is that He is manifestly watching over what takes place even when His saints are not rescued but seemingly perish. The other is that He frequently intervenes and will not allow them to perish. His saints can have assurance either way [cf. 72:13-14]." Death is an enemy. Therefore, when God extends our lives, He is saving us from an enemy. The continuation of life is something we should never take for granted. God could take the life of any person at any time—and be perfectly righteous—since we are all sinners and deserve to die. However, He graciously extends life, and for this we should give Him thanks.

Psa. 119:6. The major theme of Psalm 119 is 'the Word of God in the child of God.' In verses 1-8 we read of the blessing that is received by obeying the Word of God. The psalmist rejoiced in the fact that people who obey God's Word ("law") wholeheartedly enjoy His blessing (vv. 1-3). Consequently, the psalmist wanted to be more consistently obedient himself (vv. 4-6) and he promised to be more thankful as he continued to learn more about God's Word (vv. 7-8). One cannot seek or receive God's blessing if he only obeys Him as it suits him or is convenient to do so. One who seeks to receive God's blessing must keep all the commandments of God while submitting to God's will *in everything*. Our love for God and His word is expressed by our doing the will of God.

Psa. 119:65-72. Here the psalmist writes about his confidence in the Word of God. The psalmist relies on the fact that God will deal with him according to what He had revealed (v. 65). However, he felt the need for further instruction to prevent him from wandering away from God's will (vv. 66-68). The psalmist would trust in God even though other people slandered Him (vv. 69-70). Affliction had taught him to appreciate God's statutes more than he had previously done (vv. 71-72). William Secker wrote: "As waters are purest when they are in motion, so saints are generally holiest when in affliction." We need to be students of God's Word; and 'livers' of God's Word.

Psa. 119:97, 104. The psalmist loved God's law because it gave him more wisdom than his enemies, his teachers, and the elderly teachers who did not have it (vv. 97-100). J.I. Packer wrote: "Meditation is the

activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let His truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. It is a matter of talking to oneself about God and oneself; it is, indeed, often a matter of arguing with oneself, reasoning oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief into a clear apprehension of God's power and grace." When a believer understands God's Word ('precepts'), it results in the believer "hating every false way."

Psa. 119:105-112. God's Word is a light that illuminates the path of life, and for this reason the psalmist is determined to follow it (vv. 105-106; cf. v. 130; Prov. 6:23). The Word of God gives us the information we need to determine God's will, which is a commitment to obedience, away from sin. The psalmist called on God for help while meditating on His Word (vv. 107-110). The psalmist declares that he would continue to follow God's Word forever (vv. 111-112). He was rejoicing in God's Word (v.111), now he now commits himself to God's Word, not for a day, but forever, *even to the very end*. Are we making this same commitment?

Psa. 119:140. God's Word is righteous (vv.137-144). The righteous God has given us a righteous Word, but His righteousness is demanding (vv. 137-138). The psalmist had a pure zeal for God's Word, even though his enemies looked down on him for his commitment to it (vv. 139-142). The Word of God is pure, it is without impurity; it is inerrant in all that it declares (v.140). The psalmist found comfort in God's righteous Word when troubles overwhelmed him (vv. 143-144). Charles Haddon Spurgeon stated: "Men are good and bad as the objects of their delight are: they are good who delight in good things, and they are evil who delight in evil things." What are the objects of our delight?

Psa. 119:165. The psalmist wrote that there is joy in being in God's Word (vv. 161-168). The opposition of powerful individuals did not intimidate the psalmist (v. 161). He continued to love God's Word and to find it a ceaseless source of joy, but he hated falsehood (vv. 162-164). The more reverence we have for the Word of God the more joy we shall find in it (v. 162). The more we engage in the truth of God's Word, the more we should hate all forms of lying, exaggeration or deviation from the truth (v. 163). 'Seven times' (v. 164) signifies and indicates the frequent praising of the Word. Great peace (Heb. *shalom*, the fullness of God's blessings) is the fruit given to those who love God's Word and hope in His salvation (vv. 165-166). Love of God and His word motivated the psalmist to keep the Lord's commandments and to live openly before God (vv. 167-168). Is this what our life portrays? This psalm is a song of ascent for the restoration of the people to the land of Israel.

The psalm strikes a note of strong comfort and encouragement. It is a psalm for those who have known adversity but have in the midst of it have cast their burden upon the Lord. For the returned exiles during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, farming was a tough and painful pursuit since the ground had become hard and wild. However, the farmer who worked hard could expect a rich harvest in the future. Future joy would replace present weeping. The psalmist used this terminology to represent the restoration of the nation as well as its crops. His point was that even though the Jews who had returned had a hard time reestablishing life, they could anticipate that God would reward their labor. It was as certain as reaping follows sowing (cf. Gal. 6:7). This applies to us today. Even if the work is slow, hard, and discouraging, we can look forward with hope to a rewarding harvest in the future. But we must be found faithfully persevering in carrying out the work He has given to us to do (cf. Matt. 13:1-8, 18-23; Gal. 6:9).

Psa. 130:3-4. This is a penitential psalm. The psalmist is in distress. In these verses he is expressing his trust. The psalmist realized that if God gave people what they deserve, no one would be able to survive.

To mark iniquities means to keep a record of them and hold the sinner accountable for each one. Fortunately, God forgives. He does not "keep track" of every sin and exact punishment for it. The psalmist was speaking of how God deals with His redeemed people. The consequence of God forgiving should be that His forgiven people fear Him. Fearing God, a term that in the Old Testament virtually means trusting God, shows itself in obedience and worship. Warren Wiersbe wrote: "If you take seriously the guilt of sin, you will take seriously the grace of forgiveness."

Psa. 139:7-12, 23-24. In this psalm, David is praising the LORD for His omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence; and it is a plea for God to search his life to expose sin. In verses 1-6, David praises God's omniscience. In verses 7-12, David praises His omnipresence. In verses 13-24, David praises God's omnipotence. And he closes the psalm with a declaration of his dependence on God, verses 19-24. David begins verse 7 with an acknowledgement of God's omnipresence. His two rhetorical questions in this verse express his inability to hide from God (cf. Jer. 23:24). In verses 8-10, David gives hypothetical examples of where he might go to hide from God. The answer is that there is nowhere in the universe he could go to escape God. Because anywhere in the universe he could go, even there God's hand would gently lead, guide and hold him. In verses 11 and 12, David spoke of being in darkness, but even there God was there with him. Darkness does not hide things from God's sight as it does from human eyes. Darkness and light are the same to God so even in darkness God was with David. David concludes that God's plans for His people are very good and comprehensive (vv. 17-18). With these thoughts in his mind, David turned his attention to his present situation. His enemies were attacking him. He prayed that the Lord would slay those who were trying to kill him (v. 19). These enemies were evidently hostile to God, as well as to David, and were using the Lord's name for an evil purpose. In loyalty to God, David affirmed his "hatred" for (i.e., rejection of) those who "hated" (rejected) God. He concludes this psalm with a prayer (vv. 23-24). He prayed that the LORD would search him (a reference to God's searching knowledge - cf. v. 1). David wanted God to test him, as a refiner tests metal, to show that he was loyal to the Lord. Since God knows all, he would know David's thoughts. David desired for God to search his heart to see if there was sin in his life that would cause God not to bless him or answer his prayer. David ended his prayer with his expressed desire and expectation of eternal life. Knowledge of God's attributes can bring great peace into the lives of believers. His comprehensive knowledge, personal presence, and absolute power are all working for the welfare of His people. Therefore, we should commit ourselves to Him in loyalty and resist those who oppose Him. May this be true of us?

Psa. 141:4-5. This psalm is an evening prayer where David is asking God to protect him and enable him to continue living for God's glory. It is an individual lament, imprecatory psalm. David, in his prayer, asks God to help him control his speech (v. 3). He also wanted the Lord to help him control his thoughts and actions (v. 4). In asking the Lord to help him, David humbled himself by expressing openness to the constructive criticisms of the righteous (v. 5). The righteous are to confront with gentleness and kindness. This constructive criticism (right judgment) is effective if it is given and received in humility. Confronting someone should fall like the dew and not like a crushing hail-storm.

Prov. 1:10-19. This section is a warning against enticement by sinners – people who are unbelievers whose sin is continual. The warning itself appears twice (vs. 10, 15). The sinner will succeed if the believer fails to embrace wisdom. It should be noted that 'my son' is not to be taken in a gender exclusive since, it is a reference to all believers. The pressure of peers can be very strong – "come with us." The answer to peer pressure is to refuse the invitations to wrong doing which comes from sinners. To consent to their pressure is the first step on the path to self-destruction. Sin must be rejected at the first temptation. This warning appeal consists of three parts: 1 - the hypothetical invitation of those who seek to ambush (attack) the innocent (vs. 11-14), 2 – the warnings to reject those invitations (vs. 10, 15),

3 – three reasons for ignoring and rejecting the invitations (vs. 15-19). The sinners promise to divide their ill-gotten gain with the young man is a false promise. There is a problem – the sinners become trapped in the very trap they are setting for others. The ill-gotten gain does not provide happiness or safety but rather it takes their lives. The lifestyle a person chooses lead to a certain destiny; therefore, a person should not try the wicked lifestyle for even a moment. The invitation of the sinner is founded on the immorality of the conduct of the sinner (vs. 16); they seek trouble which will ultimately result in eternal death. The audaciousness of the invitation is seen in verse 17. Verse 18 identifies the self-destruction which the sinner brings upon themselves. An animal that sees a net has the sense to avoid it, but the wicked who know their lifestyle is self-destructive don't have the sense to turn away from the snare. The fact that this alarm of the dangers of bad company is the first specific warning sounded in Proverbs suggests that foolishness is not just an individual matter but a social one as well. We travel in groups—whether they are our social friends, our service club, our fellow believers or our business colleagues. What we become is determined in some significant measure by the company we keep. It is important that we avoid the beginnings of sin at the first temptation. Verse 19 articulates the point of the comparison. The Hebrew word translated "gains" (v. 19) implies a money-grabbing attitude.

Prov. 3:5-8. The trust of the wise son (Prov. 3: 5-6) comes from heeding sound teaching (Prov. 3:1-4), and it leads to confident obedience (Prov. 3: 7-8). The context suggests that the teachings of the parents are in view here rather than the Mosaic Law. Prov. 3:7-8- This proverb suggests some of the ways that God will reward the commitment of verses 5- 6. Verse 7a gives the converse of verse 5a, and 7b restates 6a (cf. Rom. 12:16). This is the act of acknowledging God in all one's ways. No wise man is ever arrogant. Turning away from evil and worshiping the Lord is repentance, which requires humility. In the end, fearing the Lord and not pursuing evil will generally yield health, as spiritual health and physical health are many times related. This is a promise as well as a proverb, and it refers to the totality of one's life experience. How can we tell if a proverb is a promise as well as a proverb? We can tell by consulting the rest of Scripture. If a proverb expresses a truth promised elsewhere in Scripture, we know that we can rely on it being absolutely true. A proverb is by definition a saying that accurately represents what is usually true, not what is true without exception. In the case of Prov. 3:5-6 we have the repetition of a promise made numerous times in Scripture that people who trust God will experience His guidance through life (cf. Heb. 11; et al.). In our attempt to "handle accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) we must carefully distinguish proverbs that restate promises from those that do not and are only proverbs. Failure to distinguish proverbs from promises has led to confusion and disappointment for many readers of this genre.

Prov. 3:34. God mocks arrogant mockers, which causes their actions to boomerang on them; whereas the humble receive His grace. James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 quote the Septuagint version of verse 34. The humble are those who are poor, not from laziness but because they are exploited or oppressed.

Prov. 4:23-24. Prov. 4:23, in conjunction with Prov.4: 20-22, help us see that the life in view is not some prize that one gains all at once. It is rather a growing spiritual vitality that empowers the wise person and enables him or her to reach out and help others effectively (cf. Mark 7:15-23; Luke 6:45; John 4:14, 7:38). The inclination of your heart directs your mortal life – and it will determine whether you enter into eternal life. One's words (Prov. 4:24) reflect his or her heart's affections (life actions). We must be single-minded in our pursuit of wisdom (Prov. 4:25; cf. Ps. 101:3; 119:37). We must give attention to practical planning so we end up taking the steps we need to take to arrive at our intended destination (Prov. 4:26-27; cf. Heb. 12:13). We must remove all that can become a moral hindrance or a dangerous obstacle in our life-course, in order that we may make right steps with our feet. Attention to the right path assures that your way will be established; the passive voice used here implies that it is God who

does this. It is interesting that God is never mentioned in this fervent appeal 'to walk the walk.' However, there is no question that God is in view here. The goal is successful living and the route to it is the way of Wisdom. Though Wisdom keeps one in the right path, the encouragement here is to keep oneself on the straightway. It is important not to leave the only good way. That can only be accomplished through submission of oneself to God.

Prov. 5:15-23. There is a better way, namely fidelity (faithfulness) to one's marriage partner; the first marriage partner, not looking for another partner. Strict faithfulness does need not result in unhappiness or failure to experience what is best in life, as the world likes to try to make us think. Rather, it guards us from the heartbreak and tragedy that accompanies unfaithfulness. The figures of a cistern and a well (vs. 15) refer to one's wife (cf. Song of Sol. 4:15); a woman who satisfies natural desires. One drinks water to quench thirst; here drinking is a figure of the satisfaction of conjugal love. This figurative language presents a clear contrast: the wife's water is sweet and life-giving, as contrasted to the seducer's honey, while temporarily sweet, turns bitter and is life destroying. The Hebrew text favors taking verse 16 as a positive statement ("Let your streams . . .") rather than as a question, as in the NASB / KJV. When taken as a positive statement the meaning of verses 17-18 then becomes, "The influence of the faithful man (His 'springs') become a blessing to others." However, this verse also tends to call the imagination of the reader to understand how he would feel if his wife were to commit adultery – "show your springs to be scattered abroad." "Hind" and "doe" (vs. 19) are common Semitic figures for females on account of their beautiful limbs and dark eyes. The erotic language of verses 19-20 may be surprising, but it shows that God approves sexual joy in marriage and it is a defense against unfaithfulness (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5, 9; Heb. 13:4). A man is to find his exhilaration (sexual stimulation, also translated intoxication in 20:1 and Isa. 28:7) in his wife. The issue is self-discipline empowered by God's Spirit. Unfaithfulness offers no benefits, so to justify it is senseless. Fidelity (faithfulness) should be desired and sought after. Four motivations are given to be faithful: one – God sees man's ways (vs. 21); two – God examines man's conduct (vs. 21); three – unfaithfulness ensnares and ties down a man into bondage (vs. 22); and, four – undisciplined morality results in death (vs. 23). (Note: "Lack of discipline" is a better translation than "lack of instruction.") People usually do not become unfaithful to their spouses because they do not know better but because they do not choose better. The man is exhorted not just to a single- focused commitment but also to a single-hearted, impassioned affection for his wife. If he is not captivated (intoxicated) by his wife but becomes captivated (intoxicated) with a seducer, then his own sin will captivate him, and he will be led to ruin. To yield to sexual lust is folly. Being unfaithful is foolish because it leads one astray from God's standards. The wicked man will be lost to eternal death because he did not let discipline replace his stupidity with wisdom.

Prov. 7:10-23. Verses 10-12 pictures a woman as being on the prowl for sensual gratification, preying on anyone foolish enough to encourage her. She went out dressed seductively, looking for self-satisfaction or looking to satisfy the power to control another person. Verses 22-23 portray the "kill" of the naïve young man with two figures: a dumb ox led to slaughter, and a foolish criminal led to prison. Evidently the youth hesitated, but then "suddenly" (vs. 22) yielded. Sin leads to death (cf. Rom. 6:23; James 1:15)—along the same line, Solomon looked at the end result of the youth's action, not its immediate effect. It is known that animals see no connection between traps and death; similarly, morally foolish people see no connection between their sin and death. They are oblivious to the danger of such immorality. Those consumed by seeking relationships outside of marriage always rationalize their behavior. One commentator wrote: "Such a story as this would serve the lewd profane poets of our age to make a play of, and the harlot with them would be the heroine; nothing would be so entertaining to the audience, as her arts of beguiling the young gentleman. Her conquests would be celebrated as the

triumphs of wit and love, and the comedy would conclude very pleasantly; and every young man that saw it acted would covet to be so picked up. Thus, fools make a mock at sin."

Prov. 9:7-9. Simply stated, wise people receive reproof and rebuke (correction) with appreciation; fools do not, they reject it. People develop a pattern of life which becomes evident to all (expect the fool does not recognize or chooses to ignore it). If a person is open to God and is teachable, they will become wise, but if they do not accept this instruction and close their mind, they become a fool. The person who tries to help a fool by correcting him will get no honor from the fool. The fool's folly has closed his mind to correction. These proverbs present 3 statements (7a, 7b, 8a) about what happens if one corrects a scoffer (fool), and 3 contrasting statements (8b, 9a, 9b) about reproving (correcting) a wise man. The statements create a point that is two-fold: (1) if a person desires to be wise they must examine how their heart responds to correction, and (2) in order to be wise, one must have the prudence to observe other people's actions. It is clear that a wise person does not rest content with the current attainment, nor do they view themselves as being "perfect". A wise person becomes wiser and will increase in learning through correction. A wise man will continue learning from God all his life. It has been said: "The less a man knows, as a rule, the more he thinks he knows. The more he really does know, the more he realizes his ignorance and his limitations."

Prov. 10:4-5. These proverbs show how one person succeeds and another fails. They contrast the sluggard ("negligent") and the "diligent" (cf. Prov. 12:24, 27; 19:15). If a person refuses to work, he will be poor whereas a hard worker will eventually be rewarded. The diligent (wise, righteous) person works and the reward is stability (rich). There is an indication in Proverbs that it is the Lord who instills diligence in the righteous....and this His means to provide for their physical needs. There reference to the necessary timing in agriculture can be applied to all work – we need to take hold of opportunity when it is presented. If a person does not take an opportunity when it is timely presented, it may not come again for some time, if ever. When a person takes opportunity when it is presented, it usually will bring success. Hard work and prudence are rewarded. The Apostle Paul is an example of one who redeemed the time that he had and put it to good use (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58), while Demas quit too soon (2 Tim. 4:10).

Prov. 10:12. Hatred of someone, which is of itself an evil, has companion bad effects; it creates strife, feuds, and factions, for it incites man against man. Hatred results in strife because people who despise each other cannot work together or live in the presence of another in peace. In contrast, love covers not merely little errors, but also greater sins of every kind by pardoning them, concealing them, and excusing them. Love covers (overwhelms) the faults of others by the one loving forgiving the other; love does not dwell on the faults of others. People who have genuine love within are willing to put up with insults or slander, and are willing to forgive those who wrong them.

Prov. 10:17. We observe today that spoiled (undisciplined) children often live unproductive lives. A person who learns from discipline is an example to others of the way to a meaningful life. Those who refuse to learn from discipline cause others to go astray. God exerts loving and careful correction on His children (Heb. 12:3-11). Discipline is God's way to lovingly return His children to the right path.

Prov. 10:19. When a person's heart is evil, he or she readily "listens to" lying, "wicked lips" and an evil, "destructive tongue." It has been said - "Birds of a feather flock together." A wicked person and a liar both feed on what their heart is presupposed to do. They are ready to listen to gossip, slander, lies, and evil schemes. They listen eagerly to malicious tongues that seek ruin and destruction. They make their

situation worse because they listen to lies. In contrast, when a person's heart is godly, he or she rejects untruthful and hateful speech.

Prov. 11:1. God detests dishonesty. A false balance refers to deception by altering the standard of either the scale or the weight being used to measure the quantity of an item being bought or sold. The O.T. Law instructs against such practice (Lev. 19:35-36, Deut. 25:13-16) as being a practice against what God desires. This proverb puts commercial matters (daily business) into the spiritual realm because a deceitful balance indicates a lack of honesty in the heart. In the absence of coinage in the O.T and N.T. scales were used for daily commercial transactions. Dishonest merchants of the day had two sets of stone weights that they used; when weighing merchandise, they were selling they used the lighter stones on the scale, when weighing merchandise, they were buying they used the heavier stones on the scale.

Prov. 11:9. The righteous person knows how to conduct themselves appropriately. He can escape the injury of slander from the ungodly in one of two ways: (1) he knows it is not true and moves forward, or (2) he knows to stay away from profane people. Godless men seek to destroy their neighbor through slander. Those who know the righteous person will realize that the slander is untrue.

Prov. 11:12-13. "Despises" means "belittles". A man of understanding remains silent rather than spreading harmful information that he might know about his neighbor. The person who gossips and/or slanders destroys others with words. It makes no sense to slander someone who lives close by since that makes for dissension and friction between neighbors. It is wise to keep quiet even when you know something unpleasant about your neighbor. God wants His people to treat their neighbors well (Matt. 22:37-40). Bearing tales about people and incidents can too often result in revealing "secret" information (cf. Prov. 20:19; Lev. 19:16). The person who slanders cannot be trusted with private, confidential matters. One who slanders speaks words deliberately intending to harm. It makes no sense to slander since it only creates friction and dissension. A gossip spreads slander. It is wise to keep quiet, even if you know something unpleasant about someone. Jesus advocated loving, "private" confrontation rather than gossip (Matt. 18:15). Divulging a secret is a betrayal of trust.

Prov. 11:24-26. These proverbs encourage generosity. By giving freely a person has plenty, a seeming paradox. Paradoxically, the possessions of the generous giver ("one who scatters") typically increase, even though he gives many of them away. But the possessions of the selfish person normally decrease, even though he retains ("withholds") them. Generosity usually brings a blessing. "Scatters" here means distributing widely, generously, perhaps brashly, and paying little attention to where the gift or giving goes. The synonymous parallelism of verse 25 commends "generous" giving. By being generous a person prospers and is in turn helped when they are in need. The stark, contrasting parallelism of verse 26 contrasts the outcomes of stinginess and generosity. If one has what others need and does not give it to them, they "will curse him." But if he distributes it, even at a cost, others will bless him. God, the One who is the Great Giver, will not be out given. God makes sure that generosity is returned (II Cor. 9:6-7). With Him giving is an opportunity for gain. Through Him generosity is profitable, while stinginess and greed lead to an impoverished life, even poverty. Perhaps these proverbs were in the mind of Apostle John when he wrote about sharing what one has with others in need (1 John 3:17).

Prov. 12:15. The fool (hardened, thickheaded) is one who believes that they are always right. They see no need to seek instruction or counsel from others. They are unwilling to listen to correction or advice. They are immediately annoyed by correction or discipline (vs. 16). A fool is easily self-deceived, which

leads to a hard, callous, cold heart. A wise person is open to advice and controls their response to correction or discipline.

Prov. 13:1. A wise child is receptive to parental instruction. "Heeds" is not in the Hebrew but it is implied. The opposite of a wise child is a scoffer (mocker) who refuses to listen to rebuke (correction) or discipline. It is part of true wisdom that the more experienced person can freely instruct the younger based on what they have learned from their experience in life. The self-confident scorner (fool) will ignore the experienced teacher, they are indifferent to the words of the wise and they learn only by bitter experience; experience they might have been saved from had they been humble enough to accept counsel from those competent to teach.

Prov. 13:10. This proverb contrasts those who proceed on the basis of their own "wisdom" with those who seek the "counsel" of others before making important decisions. Pride, in the Hebrew used here, means an "unyielding arrogance" ('a know it all'). A person of pride will not accept advice from another person. The result of the conduct of pride is "strife." However, the wise person accepts advice from other people and this conduct results in "wisdom." Strife can be avoided by seeking the counsel of others, rather than simply proceeding to do what appears at first glance to be the right course of action. Those that are humble and peaceable will ask and take advice. They will consult their own consciences, their Bibles, their spiritual leaders and mentors and their friends to preserve quietness and prevent quarrels.

Prov. 13:20. Outcomes are contrasted – regular companions inevitably influence each other. The result of making friends with, and keeping company with, wise people—is that one becomes wiser himself. But the result of spending a lot of time with (being a "companion of") "fools," is that "harm" eventually befalls him or her (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33). The power of association does shape one's character – choose your associations wisely.

Prov. 15:1. A gentle answer can dispel a potentially tense situation by calming down a person's rage. Gentle is best described by the soothing oil used to treat a wound. Being conciliatory in such a situation requires forethought, patience, humility, self-control, and kindness. A harsh word (a word of pain, a word that is hurtful), by contrast, arouses anger. Wisely chosen words promote calm interactions; they instruct by example and they encourage rather than discourage. It has been said, "It is considered unmanly by many not to resent an insult, and to allow wrathful words to pass unchallenged; but it takes far more true character to meet an angry man in quietness of spirit, and to return cool, calm words for heated, hasty ones, than it does to give railing for railing, or malice for malice. The latter bespeaks a man who does not yet know how to rule his spirit; the former, one who has his personal feelings in subjection."

Prov. 15:4. "Soothing" words can heal and sustain life, like a fruit tree. But words used inappropriately can have the opposite effect; they can wound, "crush the spirit," and discourage. A gentle, rightly spoken word will often bring life and 'healing', but gentle speech can also be used to mask evil intent, which crushes the spirit, damages morale, and causes injury. Words that are deceitful ("subversive", used only once in the O.T.) and duplicitous crushes the one the words are used against. Speech has as much power to help or hurt today as it ever had. It lies so close to the center of human life that it is still the most important art for each of us to master. A tranquil tongue heals and a healing tongue is tranquil.

Prov. 15:30-33. Happy people and the "good news" they bring, both have a heartwarming effect (v.30). Good news uplifts people. A positive person's attitude and communication, whether non-verbal (a

cheerful look) or verbal (good news), is always helpful and uplifting for others. "Bright eyes" in this proverb characterize one who brings "good news," so the eyes can be thought of as bringing gladness to the heart of the hearer. Healthy bones (lit. "fat . . . bones") represented health and prosperity to the Jews (cf. Prov. 17:22; 25:25; Gen. 45:27-28; Isa. 52:7-8); so, the idea in the second line is that good news promotes health and happiness; it refreshes and strengthens a person. (v. 31) People who pay attention to justified criticism ("life-giving reproof") that is designed to benefit them are on the path to wisdom. Heeding a rebuke (correction) demonstrates wisdom, and is a condition for being considered wise; they are at home with the wise (meaning "to spend the night"). (v.32) If a person "neglects" or does not submit to "discipline," he is hurting himself. This applies to self-discipline as well as to discipline imposed by others. Conversely, if a person pays attention to corrective discipline ("listens to reproof"), rather than resisting or rejecting it, he learns valuable lessons (cf. Heb. 12:4-13). To ignore discipline (moral correction) results in loss of life and knowledge, this shows that the "ignorant" actually hates and/or harms himself. To acquire good sense literally means "to buy a heart." The fear of the Lord is not just the foundation of a wise life (Prov. 1:7; 9:10); it is also the whole path of wisdom (v.33). To fear the Lord amounts to being wise in one sense, while it is also the foundation for wisdom in another. The fear of the Lord is the willingness to humble oneself before God and to let His Word guide us. The fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom, but it also teaches wisdom. By fearing (which means reverencing, trusting, obeying, serving, and worshiping) the Lord, a person learns wisdom. The one seeking wisdom has a clear obligation as well—an obligation to recognize the need to learn and to do everything possible to aid that learning.

Prov. 16:5-6. God detests pride; understood here to be independence from God. Therefore, He will punish those who are proud. The phrase translated "though they join" or "be sure of this" literally means "hand to hand". This refers to the clasping of hands to close an agreement – God is assuring the proud that they will be punished for their pride. Pride here is a reference to arrogance where one thinks of himself as being better than anyone else – including God. We do not atone for our own iniquity by being loving and truthful (v.6). This proverb is not a denial of our need for God's atonement. However, we can and should cover (atone for) the mistakes of others lovingly and truthfully (1 Pet. 4:8), just as God covers our sins. What will keep us all away from evil is the fear of the Lord. By God's mercy and truth, He affects the atonement for sin, which, for the believing sinner, inclines him to turn away from evil. After a person's sin has been atoned for by his trust in the Lord, he is not to continue in sin. He is to avoid evil by fearing the Lord.

Prov. 16:32. Contrary to those who say it is good to "vent" one's anger, most proverbs advocate being slow to anger. The ability to restrain anger is developed as a person yields to the Lord's control and the Holy Spirit's leading. A bad temper is often excused on the ground of "that is the way I am" or "that is the way he/she is", but it is rather the evidence of unbridled pride and impatience. Unless anger is controlled in your life, you will always be at its mercy. It is harder, but "better," to master one's "anger" and rule one's own "spirit," than it is to master many other people. The reason it is harder is that our own desires are frequently stronger than the antagonism that we face from others. The reason it is better is that if one cannot master his or her passions, then that one is vulnerable to mastery by others. It is generally a sign of weakness when one allows himself to become angry in the face of opposition. Only a mighty person (one who is strong enough to take a city) is capable of controlling his anger. Conquering oneself is of greater virtue than conquering a city. A person who does not let his passions control him is better than a powerful military hero who lacks such control. Jesus demonstrated remarkable self-mastery during His unjust trials. 'Learn of Me,' said Jesus, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart' (Matt. 11:29). It has been said - "This is a proverb that is constantly quoted and very little believed. If men only recognized that there is more valor and heroism in self-control than in doughty

deeds which others acclaim in song and story, how different our world would be. The meek man is not a spiritless man, but he is slow to anger. He can be righteously stirred when occasion requires, but not when it is his own dignity that is in question.”

Prov. 17:9. When we minimize the mistakes of others, rather than drawing attention to them, we provoke "love" in the heart of the person whom we protect; and perhaps even others who are onlookers. God has covered our sins with the blood of Christ, and we love Him for it (1 John 4:19). But if we "repeat" (tell) someone's failings to others, we can lose even our closest friends, including the friend who made the mistake because retelling someone's failures creates distrust and suspicion (cf. Prov. 10:12; 11:13; 25:23). When we do this, we take the part of "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10; i.e., Satan himself). "Concealing transgression" here does not mean ignoring it, but refraining from broadcasting it. Covering over an offense is evidence of love and therefore promotes love; as it is an acknowledgement that God is in control and any vengeance is God's to perform. Silence is never more golden than when we refuse to make personal capital by gossiping about the failings of a friend.

Prov. 18:1-2. He who separates himself from other people does so because he wants his own way and does not want others to restrain him. This man seeks selfish gratification and accepts advice from no one. Their self-centeredness makes them enemies of sound judgment. Such an approach runs counter to sound wisdom because we all need input from other people to make wise decisions. Sound judgment is competence that leads to success. When the fool should be listening and learning from others, he is speaking and trying to impress them with how much he knows (v.2). It is the simple fool who is always talking and babbling. A compulsive talker never listens, only pausing long enough to plan what he will say next. Every speech confirms what a fool he is. The dual trouble of a fool is a closed mind and open mouth.

Prov. 18:9. The negligent person is as destructive, in his own way, as the deliberately destructive person (the master, skilled in destruction). The latter wastes his goods, the former wastes his time; both come to poverty. A person who does his work poorly or carelessly is the same as one who destroys a work or project. A poor or unfinished job differs little from a project or work effort that is destroyed by someone – both are worthless and of no value. To leave work half-done or poorly done is the same as destroying it. To be truly lazy is to sink down, relax, and let go to the point of being slack, feeble, and ineffective.

Prov. 18:13 – This proverb indicates the need to be teachable. When one "answers" a question too soon before they hear the whole question, they often suffer "shame" or embarrassment for answering too quickly. The best course of action is to get all the information one needs before making a decision.

Prov. 18:17 - This is another warning against making premature judgments. Get all the facts first. Do not rely on superficial research or limited information. The context here seems to be a judicial setting. This is the way things work in court. The prosecutor's "case" may seem strong ("right"), until the defense attorney has his say. To cross examine is literally "to search"; to diligently test and scrutinize to find what is hidden. Proper cross examination avoids hasty judgment and incorrect conclusions. This is true in court but also in life. It has been said, "We must remember that we have two ears, to hear both sides before we give judgment."

Prov. 19:11. It has been said - "An uncontrolled temper, manifested in hasty anger unjudged, bespeaks a man who has never learned, in the school of God, the great lesson of self-government. It is the pompous, conceited person who is focused on minor issues that cannot overlook an injury done to him,

but must vent his wrath upon the offender whenever an occasion presents itself. A man of sound judgment and discretion has learned to pass lightly over offences and seeming insults which would goad the one who lacks wisdom to intense indignation (Prov. 14:29; 26:21).” In many cultures any sign of disrespect to a man is a challenge to his honor, and he can only regain it by fighting whoever insulted him. Here patience and overlooking insults actually bring honor to a man. Patience is a mark of wisdom. A prudent, patient man is not easily impacted by people who offend him; in fact, he overlooks and forgives the offenses knowing that to harbor resentment or to attempt revenge only leads to more trouble. When through insight a person gains patience, he gains the capacity to overlook sin when someone sins against him. Overlooking an offense and insult is his glory that is honorable.

Prov. 19:15-16. This proverb is one of many that warns against "laziness" (Prov. 6:6, 9-11; 10:26; 13:4; 20:4; 24:33-34; 26:16; Cf. Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). Laziness is evil because it involves squandering a precious gift from God of which we are stewards: time. The lazy person is always too tired to work. Then his laziness becomes more and more severe until he is in dire poverty. "Deep sleep" refers to heavy sleep where one is oblivious to everything that is occurring round about him. "Idle/shiftless" literally means "lax" – being oblivious to one's needs. Such laziness and laxness is dangerous because it leads to worse things: idleness generally, and hunger eventually. "The commandment" in view is the commandment of God (v.16). "Soul" is the life. Normally people who live by God's instructions live longer than those who disregard them, though there are exceptions. Those who follow His instructions concerning salvation experience eternal life (keep their "soul"), but those who do not suffer eternal death ("will die"). The word "keeps" means "obeys" and "guards". To obey instructions (commandments) is self-preserving; to be careless (contemptuous, to despise, to disregard with contempt) of instructions is to be self-destructive. As the old saying goes: "God's Word will keep you from sin; or sin will keep you from God's Word." Disregarding one's own ways has to do with not wanting to watch carefully what one is doing, not taking responsibility – the opposite of making sure that one's ways are God's ways.

Prov. 19:24 (26:15). This humorous and ironic picture is of a person so lazy that he cannot even lift his food from his plate to his mouth. The sluggard is so lazy that he will not even do the work necessary to move his food from his dinner plate to his mouth. The point is that a lazy person will bear the consequences of his own laziness. Perhaps there is a connection, between at first being unwilling to feed oneself (19:24), and later being unable to feed oneself (26:15). Laziness is irrational and it leads to poverty and hunger. Paul instructed that if any Christian refused to work, he should not eat (2 Thess. 3:10). This warning is applicable to those who are too lazy to finish the projects they begin.

Prov. 20:4. In Israel, the grain harvest began after Passover (around April) and the plowing / sowing of the crop began in the fall after the Feast of Tabernacles (around November). So, the lazy man avoids working during the fall/winter rainy season because it is hard labor, but the result is no harvest since nothing was planted. "He looks" indicates that he comes to his fields to inquire about the harvest coming off them – there is none because they were never planted. One commentator wrote, "Ready upon any pretext to abandon his labor, the sluggard neglects the cultivation of his fields when others are at work. Therefore, when harvest-time arrives, his fields are bare, and he is found begging of (as he would put it) his more fortunate neighbors. The fact is that fortune has nothing to do with it. Their diligence has brought its own reward and his slothfulness its natural consequence." Without advance planning, initiative and work, there are few-to-no results; a lack of work leads to a lack of benefits. This is another proverb that demonstrates the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7).

Prov. 21:1 – The heart of the king (ruler, leader) is in God's hand (Eccl. 9:1). A farmer directs water by digging a canal or ditch for the water to follow – and a skillful farmer can turn flowing water to wherever

he wants it. Similarly, the Lord directs the heart of the king – as God is sovereign (Prov. 21:30). God gives to the world good or bad kings (rulers), according as He seeks to bless it or to visit it with punishment. This is one of the great affirmations of the sovereignty of God in Scripture (cf. Prov. 16:14-15; 19:12; 20:2, 24). There are many proofs of the truth of this proverb: Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4), Belshazzar (Dan. 5), Ahasuerus (Esth. 6:1-10), and Cyrus (Ezra 6:22; Isa. 45:1-7), to name a few.

Prov. 21:2 - The implication of this proverb is that people should carefully examine their hearts (reasons, motives), because God does (cf. Prov. 16:2; 20:6; 24:12). Our natural tendency is simply to justify ourselves ("man's way is right in his own eyes"). It has been said: "Self-righteousness is perhaps the most human of all sins. Men will excuse and explain away in themselves what in others would be censured with severity." God, as a sovereign and omniscient being, will accurately evaluate man's heart (motives). See Prov. 16:2.

Prov. 21:17. It was customary at feasts in these days in Israel for the participants to drink "wine" and to pour "oil" and other fragrances on people's heads and clothes (cf. Prov. 27:9; Amos 6:6). Loving pleasure and luxurious living can lead to poverty (deficient, destitute, in need). The proverb's point is: be moderate in your celebrations, because excess will drain away your money. This is a warning against living only for pleasure and self. Wine and oil are blessings from God, but when God's blessings are pursued without God, they become vices. The Prodigal Son lost his inheritance because he celebrated excessively (Luke 15:11-30).

Prov. 23:6-8. It is futile to try to please an unwilling host. It is better to decline a dinner invitation from a miser because, if you accept, you will only have a miserable experience. He will begrudge you what he gives. When a guest realizes his host is only thinking about the cost of the food, while hypocritically pretending to be generous, the guest is repulsed. The guest wants to vomit up the food since it was not served honestly with kindness and generosity; he finds that his compliments were wasted. The guest of the unwilling host gains nothing from his visit.

Prov. 23:19-21. This is the 14th saying of 30 sayings in Proverbs. Overindulgence in food and drink can lead to sleepiness, then laziness, then poverty (Prov. 23:29-35; 20:1). We should avoid the constant companionship of people marked by the characteristics of "heavy drinkers" and "gluttons." These two sins of excessive eating and drinking are often symptoms of deeper problems; but they cause laziness and create poverty. Moderation is preferable. This saying also implies that the influence of bad companions is strong. By listening and heeding to his father's instruction and desiring the right path, the son is wise. One way to stay on the right path is to avoid drunkenness and gluttony.

Prov. 23:29-35. This is the 18th saying of 30 sayings in Proverbs. This classic description of drunkenness, in the form of an ode, ironically illustrates the folly of excessive drinking of alcohol. The ode presents 6 questions (vs. 29) and the answers (vs.30). Following the questions and answers come the exhortations (vs. 31-32) and a description of a drunkard's delirium (vs. 33-35). The father urges his son to remember how too much drinking will end—so its present enjoyment will not enslave him. The father's instruction was real and valid as one of the marks of an incorrigible son in Israel, that justified his execution, was drunkenness (Deut. 21:20). Paul wrote to the Corinthians not to keep company with a professing Christian who was a drunkard (1 Cor. 5:11; cf. Eph. 5:18). Alcoholic beverages seem attractive – they are colorful, sparkling, and smooth – they appeal to the senses of sight, taste, and smell – and they are associated with happiness and fun. But in the end alcohol is as devastating and painful as a snake bite. This is a powerful exhortation on the tragic consequences of overindulging in alcohol. While many

consider alcoholism is a medical problem, it is definitely a moral problem because it involves choices and brings danger to other people.

Prov. 24:29. This is the 5th saying of the additional 6 sayings. This proverb expresses the opposite of the golden rule (cf. Prov. 20:22; Matt. 5:43-45; Rom. 12:9). We are to commit to giving an honest answer when requested, and are to refrain from false testimony or deception to get back at a person for past acts of injustice. This is a warning to not seek revenge for an injustice through perjury; we are not to seek vengeance.

Prov. 25:6-7. This proverb advocates humility in the presence of rulers and others in authority. Honor is better bestowed than wrongly presumed. The person who thinks highly of himself or herself may not be so regarded by others—either legitimately or illegitimately. Self-seeking and pride will cause one to fall, so be humble. The elevation of the humble is honorable but the humbling of the proud is disgraceful when it occurs before those in authority. There is a decent middle way between being a braggart and 'pushy,' and simply groveling; one has to have the understanding and wisdom to know one's ability, one's place. Such prudence will be observed and rewarded accordingly.

Prov. 25:19. Relying on an untrustworthy person ("faithless man") to do a job can (and usually does) result in as much pain (for those who place "confidence" in him) as a rotten "tooth" or a dislocated "foot" (Prov. 14:22; 17:17; 19:22; 20:6). An untrustworthy person passively causes pain because he fails to deliver when needed. Untrustworthy / unreliable literally means "treacherous."

Prov. 25:21-22. Clearly the point of this proverb is to return good for evil (cf. Matt. 5:40-46; Rom. 12:20-21). Such conduct will bring blessing from God and remorse to the evildoer. Still, what does "heaping burning coals on the head" of the abuser mean? This clause alludes to an ancient custom. When a person's fire went out at home, he or she would go to a neighbor and get some live coals to rekindle the fire. Carrying the coals in a pan on the head involved some danger and discomfort for the person carrying them, but it was evidence of the neighbor's love. Likewise, the person who receives good in return for evil feels somewhat uncomfortable even though he receives a good gift. His discomfort arises over his guilt for having wronged his neighbor in the first place. So, returning good for evil not only secures the blessing of God (v. 22b), it also convicts the wrongdoer of his ways (v. 22a) in a gentle way. The way to turn an enemy into a friend is to act towards him in a friendly manner. Compassion, not revenge, should characterize the life of a believer.

Prov. 25:28. Both "a city with defective (without) walls" and "a man who cannot control himself (one who cannot control his spirit)" are vulnerable to attack and defeat by an enemy. Given the right pressure, anyone can lose control of himself or herself. For this reason, we need to submit control of ourselves to the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), who will produce the fruit of self-control within us (Gal. 5:23). Self-control relates to control of passions (anger, love, attention, etc.), appetites (desire for food, sex, material things, etc.), and will (impulsive decisions). The lack of self-control is the characteristic of a fool. Those who lack self-control expose themselves to temptation and evil influence and control. This proverb is a direct contrast to Prov. 16:32.

Prov. 27:1-2. A person should not praise himself (boast) about what he will do the next day because he has no way of knowing for sure what will happen. Boasting "about tomorrow" involves relying confidently on what one will do and experience in the future, even the near future (James 4:13). If anything is certain, it is human ignorance of what will happen—this is a sphere that belongs to God. Jesus' parable of the rich fool, who planned to live many more years but died the next night, should be a

warning to all self-confident people (Luke 12:16-21). The implication of this proverb is that we should use each day profitably, rather than procrastinating (cf. Exod. 8:10; Acts 24:25). (v. 2) Praising oneself is evidence of pride and therefore is wrong, it is sin. A person should not boast about what he will do (Prov. 22:1) nor should he boast about what he has done.

Prov. 27:5-6. It is better to be corrected—by anyone—than to be loved by someone who does not demonstrate that "love" overtly. Genuine love is demonstrated by telling the truth, even if it means to rebuke (or correct). A person may profess love yet do nothing to show it. Conversely, a person may be critical of us and let us know it by rebuking us ("open rebuke"). The latter person is more helpful than the former. Open rebuke affords a person the chance to reflect on their course of life, whereas hidden love fails to communicate the challenges and down falls that will occur if the person's course of life does not change. True love for another will result in occasional confrontation and correction, if needed. False love simply lets things go— that need correcting—in order to selfishly avoid conflict. Criticism by one who truly loves us is beneficial, and thus "faithful," even though it may hurt. Therefore, we should not despise the "wounds" of the true friend. On the other hand, someone who professes to love us (with "kisses," either literal or figurative) may gloss over our faults and mistakes, but by doing so reveals that he is really our "enemy." He cares nothing for the welfare of that person, because he is self-centered.

Prov. 28:9. Refusing to obey God has disastrous results; to reject God's Law implies lack of trust in God. When people refuse to listen to (pay attention to; obey) what God has said in His Word; He will not listen to what they say to Him in prayer. External acts of worship, even when they follow biblical standards, are repulsive to God when the heart of the worshiper is wicked. Such is prayer from a hypocritical person; those prayers are hated by God and not heard or answered.

Prov. 28:13. This unique proverb speaks of God's mercy and defines true repentance. Trying to cover up one's sins rather than confessing and forsaking them will not work. They destroy the sinner like a cancer, and they incur the judgment of God. Confession results in God's mercy and forgiveness. "Confess" and "forsake" summarize what the Bible means by repentance. It is a good thing to confess and renounce sin – which is the definition of repentance. Genuine repentance elicits God's favor—and often the respect of others.

Prov. 28:17. This is an interesting proverb. This proverb presents the case of a murderer who is in flight until the end of his life, whether pursued by an avenger or driven by a bad conscience. This observation applies to those who are inwardly tormented by the murder of someone, who then takes flight to escape the just punishment for the crime. The murderer who flees will find no rest until he dies. The innocent should be rescued from death but not those who are guilty of shedding innocent blood. The advice that is given in this situation is: Do not interfere; do not work to save him from his punishment for in doing so you become a partner in his sin; let justice be done. We are to let justice take its course; we are not to give a murderer any assistance in escaping justice. A commentator wrote, "Grace cannot come into the place of justice till justice has been fully recognized. Human sympathy or empathy, shown under the false title of grace, does not stand in contrast to this justice." God's sentence on Cain was that he would be "a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth" for murdering his brother (Gen. 4:12). Cain feared that whoever found him would kill him (Gen. 4:14).

Prov. 28:20-22. The "faithful" person in view is one who conducts his affairs in harmony with God's will. Blessings are the product of honest labor. "He who makes haste" is one who cuts ethical corners to get rich (cf. Prov. 22:1, 16; 23:4; 27:24); meaning they may use unethical or immoral means to gain wealth. The way to become richly blessed is by being faithful and trustworthy. Being eager to get rich often

leads to dishonest means and devious actions. We usually suspect anyone who gets rich quick. Bribery is a get rich quick scheme. It is one reason that showing "partiality" to some people at the expense of others is not good. Even "for a crust (piece) of bread" some people will show favoritism. Once a person takes money in return for a favor, it becomes more tempting to repeat the act. Money gained so easily becomes addictive, and eventually the person taking the bribe will do so for very little. It is ironic that justice can be so easily perverted by bribery – when it is so firmly denounced. This proverb counsels us not to start down that road (cf. Prov. 18:5; 24:23). Also, a miser is motivated by greed. The "evil eye" represents the wicked purposes or intent of a person. In this case it is a selfish desire to get rich. The person with the "evil eye" is miserly and hates mankind, whereas the person with the "good eye" (Prov. 22:9) is generous and others oriented. The person with an "evil eye" fails to look into the future to when he will stand before God, if not before men. Greed leads to poverty (cf. Prov. 20:21). The first servant in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant wanted to extract every last cent out of his fellow servant, but in the end his master ended up condemning him for his unbridled greed (Matt. 18:21-35).

Prov. 29:22. Where there is anger, conflict ("strife") is sure to follow; and a "hot-tempered" person will violate many boundaries. The "angry" (literal meaning – owner of wrath) person causes strife and commits many sins. Evident sins of anger that cause strife – cursing, insulting, being rude, being ungrateful, being oppressive, being proud and arrogant are a few that could be named.

Prov. 29:23. Paradoxically, pride brings humiliation while humility brings honor. It is ironic – pride (seeking recognition for oneself) will result in one being brought down, while humility (not seeking recognition for oneself) will result in one being elevated with honor. The proud person is headed for a fall, because his attitude toward himself is unrealistic and inappropriate, and others will make him aware of it sooner or later. In contrast, a "humble" person will normally "obtain more honor," because his humility makes him worth it, and because others will confer it upon him, since he refuses to confer it on himself (Prov. 11:2; 16:18).

Prov. 29:24. The bad thing about being a thief's "partner," is that when the thief gets caught, and the authorities haul his partner into court, the accomplice finds himself in a "no win" situation. Companions of criminals cannot avoid getting mixed up in their crimes; associating with the wicked is self-destructive. Once a criminal is caught, the companion is usually called to testify of what they know in court. If he defends his partner, he shares his guilt, but if he says nothing his accusers assume that he shares his guilt. The companion of a criminal usually cannot testify against the criminal who is caught because that action will cause consequences – so by his lack of testimony he brings the full force of the law against him.

Ecc. 5:1-6. This is an exhortation on rash vows and irreverence to the LORD. "The sacrifice of fools" in view (v. 1) is a rash vow. We are to speak carefully and appropriately to the LORD (v. 2). The irreverent fool rashly speaks many words, often making rash vows to the LORD. If a person makes a rash promise to the LORD and then does not keep it, the LORD may destroy the work of his hands (v. 6). Pleading with a pastor ("the messenger of God," v. 6) that the vow you made was a mistake will not rescue you from the vow (from the promise made). Our promise may involve giving or attendance to church, or pledging to pray, or any other form of ministry; and when the pastor or others look for the fulfillment of our promise, you cannot draw back and make an excuse about not having understood what you promised to do. Are you following up with the promises you have made to serve the LORD?

Isa. 1:2-3. Isaiah is presenting his vision. This is a courtroom setting where the LORD is the plaintiff and Israel is the defendant. Instead of responding to the LORD's care and provision for them, they have

failed to obey Him. Israel was guilty of forsaking her God and, as a result, she had become broken and desolate. The LORD Himself charged the Israelites with their sin. He called the heavens and earth to witness His indictment against His people (cf. Deut. 30:19; 32:1). His people had not only violated His covenant but common decency and good sense. Even stupid oxen and donkeys know their master, but the Israelites did not realize who cared for them. The Israelites made animals look intelligent. How do we respond to the care the LORD provides us?

Isa. 1:18. The Lord now challenged Israel to a formal trial. In the light of Israel's condition (vv. 2-17); there was only one reasonable course of action. The Israelites could continue as they were and be destroyed, or submit to God's will and be blessed. If they would repent and obey, God would again bless them. But if they decided to refuse and rebel, He would allow their enemies to defeat and destroy them (v. 20). Behavioral change, the fruit of repentance, needed to demonstrate an attitude of repentance. It always does. The LORD pardons the guilty who desire forgiveness and obedience.

Isa. 14:12-17. This passage speaks to the image of the fall of Satan from heaven. Jesus' use of verse 12 (Luke 10:18; cf. Rev. 12:8-10), has led many scholars to see this passage in this light; and that the 'king of Babylon' is a reference to Satan. Though many expositors have applied this description of self-exaltation and judgment to Satan, it appears most likely that the pride and destruction of a human ruler's tyrannical reign is in view here based on the content of verses 12-15 but also the contexts of vv. 4b-21 and chapters 13—23. It is believed that Satan rebelled against God in a fashion similar to what Isaiah wrote here, but this passage probably does not specifically describe his rebellion; but it is a type that shows Satan's rebellion and consequences of that rebellion. This personification of Babylon's pride has led Babylon's king to exalt himself to the position of God Himself; which Satan did. The five "I will's" in verses 13 and 14 express the spirit of the Babylonian king. The 'king of Babylon claimed to be as Venus, the morning star, the brightest light in the night sky; the name "Lucifer" means "Day Star" and refers to the planet Venus. Rather than being king of the gods, Babylon's king proved to be only human, albeit having weakened nations through his domination of them. Even though he had exalted himself to near deity status, he would die and go to Sheol like every other proud person (cf. Gen. 3:5, 22; 11:1-9). The reactions of people on the earth were challenged. They expected that such a "great man" would enjoy an honorable burial, but this man received no burial at all. He died covered with the bodies of his fellow warriors rather than with earth. Viewing his unburied corpse, onlookers would wonder if this was really the 'king of Babylon,' who had ruined his own country, and ravaged his own people, as well as his enemies? They would view his lack of burial as divine judgment of him. They would then take measures to assure that his sons would not rise to power by cutting off his posterity. The whole point of this passage is the futility and folly of self-exalting pride, which this idealized Babylonian king modeled (cf. Dan. 4:25), and which also was experienced by Satan.

Isa. 17:7-8. Isaiah has written an oracle that deals with the alliance of Syria (Damascus) and Israel (Ephraim) and the judgment that will come. The judgment of the LORD will lead them to repentance as noted in verses 7-8; they will turn to the LORD, placing their trust in Him and away from idols.

Isa. 43:25. Isaiah wrote that the Lord Himself (v. 11) would forgive His people for His own sake, not because they had earned forgiveness with their worship. Forgiveness of sin is a divine prerogative (cf. Matt. 9:2-6); it is a choice He makes. He pictured forgiveness as erasing something previously written on a record (cf. 44:22; 2 Kings 21:13; Ps. 51:1, 9). He included in forgiveness the forgetting of sins committed against Himself (cf. Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:18-19). Since God is omniscient, He never forgets anything (cf. Amos 8:7), but in this promise He compared Himself to a person who chooses not to remember things to illustrate the fact that He would not hold their sins against them. He would not call

their sins to His mind with a view to punishing them or holding their sin over them. When God forgives, He chooses not to remember; which is the principle that we are to follow when we tell someone “I forgive you.”

Isa. 55:6-7. Isaiah writes here about a person resting in faith and salvation’s transforming power. In verses (1-5), the Lord has reached out to mankind by promising free salvation. Mankind needs to respond to Him because those promises would not always be available to them. The LORD cannot be found at any time but only when He desires to be found. What is implied is that the present, when these commands are given, is the time of salvation. The thought is similar to that expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:2 and John 12:35. Seeking and calling on the LORD is reaching out to Him in faith (cf. Acts 2:21; 15:17; 17:27; 22:16; Rom. 3:11; 10:14; 2 Tim. 2:22). True seeking in faith is accompanied by repentance. The way is open for anyone to return to the LORD who has wandered away from Him or rebelled against Him. The promise of a compassionate reception and abundant pardon is to all from who repent of sin (cf. Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28). The person who genuinely seeks the LORD and calls on His name has come to grips with his or her sin and is willing to turn it over to the LORD. After all, an unsaved person cannot forsake sin—or even desire to do so—without the LORD’s help. The LORD will pardon sinners because of Christ’s work in paying the debt of their sins in their place.

Isa. 57:15. Isaiah is writing here about the Lord’s grace, specifically to the nation of Israel. In verse 15 we find a principle that is timeless – the LORD sends revival to the humble and contrite of heart. The LORD’s grace enables people who are sinners to experience spiritual healing and restoration when they humble themselves and repent.

Isa. 58:2. The hypocrite is often good at publicly showing a ritual of worshiping God (cf. 58:1-5). Many of the Israelites were relying on their practice of the Mosaic rites to satisfy God. The true meaning of the rites had not affected their lives. God intended the system of worship He prescribed to illustrate the importance of a heart relationship with Himself that should affect interpersonal relationships. This passage of scripture exposes the superficial attitude of many of God’s people through the use of strong irony. In verse 1, we see Israel’s attempt to manipulate God. In verse 2, even though the Israelites sinned, they sought the Lord constantly and inquired concerning His ways. They claimed to be a righteous people who had observed the Mosaic Law carefully. They asked God for justice, and they delighted in the thought that He was near them. In verse 3, the true mark of the hypocrite, they cannot understand why God has not blessed them—because they had fasted and humbled themselves (cf. Mal. 3:13-15). The reason God had not blessed them was that when they fasted, they did not demonstrate the attitudes and activities that fasting represented. The Israelites did not sacrifice their own desires when they fasted, and continued to treat other people inconsiderately. They pursued their personal interests and worked when they fasted, and they insisted that their employees keep on working. They were practicing religious ritual to try to manipulate God into blessing them.

Isa. 59:1-3. In 58:1-3, the people of Israel were complaining that God was not answering their prayers. Isaiah assures them, in verse 1, that His silence was not due to His inability to help them (a shortened hand) or to His disinterest in them (an insensitive ear); meaning that God is able to help in need and is ready to listen. The problem Israel was having was with their own hearts. It was their sins that had separated them from God. Sin separates men from God; and He will not hear prayer when sin is in one’s life. The only exception to that truth is the prayer of repentance. Scripture teaches us that unforgiveness is sin; therefore, God will not hear the prayer of a person who holds sin in their heart. In verse 3, Isaiah presents evidence to Israel of their sin; violence and bloodshed among themselves were signs of their sinfulness, along with lies and deception.

Jer. 2:5. Jeremiah is writing that the LORD has dealt justly with His people. Here the Lord wanted to know what He had done to provoke His people to leave Him and pursue other gods that left them empty. The LORD deals justly with mankind, even today as in the days of Jeremiah.

Jer. 6:15. Jeremiah is speaking to the guilt and judgment of the prophets and priests in Israel. All men are sinners, guilty and worthy of judgment. This included the prophets ('false prophets') and priests ('unfaithful priests') who behaved selfishly and deceived others (cf. 4:3-5). These leaders did not even feel ashamed or embarrassed by their actions; they were completely insensitive to their sins (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22-23). When sin is pursued and practiced habitually, it produces a moral blindness in the person where they no longer recognize their actions to be sin – and rather look upon their actions as normal behavior.

Jer. 17:9. Jeremiah writes about the foolishness of following one's heart. The Old Testament frequently uses "heart" (Heb. *leb*) to identify the source of a person's thinking and acting. "Heart" and "mind" (lit. kidneys, from the Heb. *kelayoth*, meaning "hidden depths") are not distinct in the Old Testament; they are virtually synonymous here and in many other places. Together these terms cover the range of hidden elements in human character and personality; they describe the root of unconscious as well as conscious motivation within us. The human heart is deceptive; we may think we know why we do something, but really, we may be doing it for another reason. It is naturally incurably sick, totally depraved and in need of healing. No one really understands his or her own corrupt heart, nor do we understand why our hearts behave as they do. The heart and mind of each of us have been so separated from God's righteousness that our heart conceives, desires, and undertakes, only that which is self-centered and sinful. Our heart is naturally hypocritical and deceitful. Even though we cannot really understand our hearts, the Lord searches our heart and knows our inner thoughts and motives (v. 10). God gives to each person what he or she actually deserves. He judges on the basis of works because what we do reflects what we truly value, the condition of our hearts.

Jer. 31:33-34. The LORD promised a New Covenant with a spiritual, divine dynamic by which those who know Him would participate in the blessing of salvation. The fulfillment of the New Covenant was to individuals AND to the nation of Israel (v.36; cf. Rom. 11:16-27). This covenant was announced by Christ (Luke 22:20) and has begun for the believers in the Church Age (1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:7-13, 9:15, 10:14-17, 12:24, 13:20). It will be ultimately realized and fulfilled completely with the nation of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom (Jer. 30-33).

Jer. 45:5. Jeremiah 45 is a short chapter regarding Baruch's life, who was a scribe for Jeremiah. The Lord had given Jeremiah a message for Baruch after he had copied Jeremiah's prophecies in 605 B.C. (Ch. 36). Baruch had complained about the sorrow, pain, inner turmoil, and restlessness that he had experienced because he carried out God's will (v. 3). He had copied Jeremiah's prophecies and had suffered from his association with Jeremiah. Baruch was an educated man whose brother was a high official under King Zedekiah (51:59). His grandfather had been the ruler of Jerusalem during Josiah's reign (cf. 32:12; 2 Chron. 34:8). Therefore, he may have entertained hopes of attaining a position of distinction in the nation and living a life of comfort and ease. But that did not happen. The Lord tells him not to seek great things for himself; which is an indication that Baruch had pride in his life – and that his motive for service was wrong. Seeking to serve the Lord in a significant position of ministry is not wrong in itself, provided one's motive is to glorify God. It is seeking position for one's own glory that is wrong. The Lord does promise to bless Baruch by preserving his life wherever he went because of his faithful service. What is our motivation in service?

Ezek. 33:11. Ezekiel was telling the Israelites a message from the Lord about judgments for their sin. Now they wondered how they could survive God's judgments (v.10). The Lord affirmed again that He took no pleasure in putting people to death for their sins (cf. 18:23, 32). He much preferred for them to turn from their sin and live (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). He also appealed again to the people to do just that: to repent of their wicked ways and live (cf. 18:30-31). Warren Wiersbe wrote this: "We must correctly distinguish regret, remorse, and true repentance. Regret is an activity of the mind; whenever we remember what we've done, we ask ourselves, 'Why did I do that?' Remorse includes both the heart and the mind, and we feel disgust and pain, but we don't change our ways. But true repentance includes the mind, the heart, and the will. We change our mind about our sins and agree with what God says about them; we abhor ourselves because of what we have done; and we deliberately turn from our sin and turn to the Lord for His mercy. When Peter remembered his sin of denying Christ, he repented and sought pardon; when Judas remembered his sin of betraying Christ, he experienced only remorse and he went out and hanged himself.

Ezek. 36:26. The Lord will restore Israel and when He restores Israel, He will give the Israelites a new heart and spirit and would remove the hardness of their heart ('heart of stone') and give them soft hearts ('a heart of flesh' - i.e., regenerate them; cf. 11:19; 18:31; 2 Cor. 3:3-6). The heart stands for the whole person—mind, will, and emotions (cf. 2:4; 3:7)—and the spirit describes the motivation that drives thought and conduct. This is a prayer we should have today.

Dan. 12:2. The context of the Jewish people is maintained here in v. 2. The angel tells Daniel that "many" will awake and not "all"? The angel's message to Daniel stresses the fact that those Jews who die because of Antichrist's persecutions will experience resurrection at the end of this period (i.e., the Tribulation; cf. Rev. 20:4-6). He referred to the hope of those Jews in particular. Furthermore, this wording clarifies that not all will arise then. Some will experience resurrection at other times in history (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:13-17; Rev. 20:4-6). This resurrection is a physical resurrection since he specified that they will arise from "the dust of the ground" or in other words, they shall arise from the grave. *This is the first mention in the Old Testament of a twofold resurrection. For this reason, and because this verse identifies the time of the physical resurrection of saved Jews (who lived outside the Church Age, cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-16), this is an extremely important verse. Other Old Testament verses that teach the doctrines of resurrection and eternal life include Job 19:26; Psalms 16:11; 17:15; 73:23-24; and Isaiah 25:8 and 26:19. The term "everlasting" is used here. The Hebrew word used here, "olam," means everlasting – endless life. This term is used of God Himself. So, this passage indicates that all men have eternal life, but the residence of that life will be either with God or in hell with Satan. The corresponding Greek word 'aion' exactly parallels the Hebrew 'olam' in connotation and semantic development.*

Hosea 2:1,8. The Lord is merciful (v. 1). He indicates that He has shown mercy to the nation of Israel. But in verse 8, Israel has failed to acknowledge that it was the LORD who had provided for her and had given her all she needed, and even luxuries, as she was pursuing pagan gods (cf. Deut. 7:13; 11:14; 26:10). The Israelites used the silver and gold that the Lord had bestowed on them to make idols of Baal, which they credited with their agricultural blessings. Do we often use what God has blessed us with to pursue earthly things?

Hosea 6:4-10. The Lord is speaking here in this passage. He has asked rhetorically what He should do with Ephraim and Judah (v.4). The questions express frustration, helplessness, and despair more than inquiry. The loyal love (Heb. *hesed*, cf. 2:19; 4:1) of these elect nations, expressed in their declaration to be obedient to the Lord's covenant, was as short-lived as the morning fog or as dew. The Lord had sent

messages of condemnation through His prophets that had the effect of mowing His people down (v. 5). But the Lord's preference is that His people love Him faithfully more than that they offer Him other types of sacrifices (v.6). He wanted the Israelites to acknowledge (know) Him rather than bringing burnt offerings to their altars (cf. 2:20; 4:1, 6). Sacrifices were meaningless, even offensive, unless offered out of a heart of love that demonstrated obedience to God's Word (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8; Matt. 9:13; 12:7). Like Adam and since Adam, all people, including God's people, dealt treacherously with Him by trying to seize the sovereignty from God—because they doubted His love for them (v.7). This was evident in Gilead where the violence against one's neighbors demonstrated lack of love for the Lord and lack of respect for His covenant (v. 8). Even the priests were acting with perverse behavior when they should have been closest to God (v. 9).

The Hebrew word translated "crime," (*zimmah*) refers to the vilest sexual sins elsewhere (e.g., Lev. 18:17; 19:29; Judg. 20:5-6; Job 31:9-11). Such behavior by priests, who should have been serving the people by leading them to the Lord, was vile to Him. The Lord had observed these horrible things. The Israelites as a whole had practiced harlotry by going after pagan gods and had thus made themselves unclean. Religious apostasy involved sexual immorality, so both forms of harlotry are in view here. What the Lord desired is a relationship based on obedience and a love for Him. What does our relationship with the Lord look like?

Hosea 7:14-16. The Lord is speaking here to Israel. He observed that when the people cried out, it was not in prayer to Him but out of self-pity over their miserable condition. These tears did not impress Him. They assembled (or gashed themselves, maybe both) to obtain food and drink from their idols. Crying out, wailing, and slashing oneself were all aspects of the self-destructive Canaanite worship style that the Israelites adopted (cf. 1 Kings 18:28). They turned away from the Lord, the only One who could provide their needs, like stubborn children. It was the Lord who had taught His people how to be strong (v. 15). He had also made them strong militarily (cf. Ezek. 30:24-25). Yet they had used what He had given them to sin against Him (cf. Gen. 50:20). They treated Him as their enemy. They had looked around to other nations for help, but they had not turned their hearts and eyes to heaven to seek the Lord's help (v. 16). They had become like a warped bow in Lord's hands. Rather than shooting His enemies, they shot their own leaders and killed them (e.g., Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah). Warren Wiersbe wrote: "As we review these images, we might take inventory of our own devotion to the Lord. How lasting is it? How deep is it? How strong is it? How serious is it? How dependable is it?"

Hosea 12:6. Hosea writes that, like Jacob, the Israelites should return to their covenant God. They should practice loyal love and justice in dealing with one another, rather than being like the old Jacob. And they should commit to waiting in faith for God to act for them, rather than seizing control of the situation, as Jacob so often had done. Do we act like Jacob?

Hosea 13:12. God will not forget Israel's sins. Its iniquities were rolled up (Heb. *sarar*) in a bundle, like a scroll, and stored up (Heb. *sapan*) like a treasure. They stand as hard evidence that condemned the nation. God is omniscient. Man's sin is well-documented and safely preserved until the day of reckoning for those who reject Him.

Joel 2:12-14, 17-19. Joel is writing a call to repentance. Here are two appeals. The first is an appeal for private repentance (vv. 12-14); and the second is for a public repentance (vv. 15-17). Speaking for the Lord, Joel urged his hearers even now, even though judgment was threatened, to repent (vv. 12-13a). However, he clarified that their repentance needed to be wholehearted, not just external. Fasting, weeping, and mourning would give evidence of the people's sincerity, but they had to rend their hearts, not merely their garments. They needed to return to the Lord. If they did, they could count on Him being

gracious, compassionate, patient, loyal to them, and willing to withhold punishment (vv. 13b-14). Even though the Lord is sovereign, their genuine repentance might move Him from cursing them to blessing them (cf. Mal. 3:7). Robert Chisholm wrote: "Some dismiss biblical references to God 'relenting' from judgment as anthropomorphic, arguing that an unchangeable God would never change his mind once he has announced his intentions. While it is true that God will not deviate from an announced course of action once, He has issued a formal, unconditional decree (see Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 110:4), he is often depicted as 'changing his mind' in contexts where he has given only a warning or made a conditional statement about what he will do. Since Joel 2:13 lists God's capacity to 'change' his mind' as one of his fundamental attributes (see also Jon. 4:2), one cannot dismiss this characteristic as anthropomorphic (meaning having human characteristics)" Joel went beyond calling for personal heartfelt repentance, to urging the people to assemble for a corporate expression of their sincere contrition. In verses 15-17, Joel urged the blowing of the shophar to call a public assembly and a fast. God's people needed to gather together and re-consecrate themselves to Him as a special and holy people. Joel states that the priests should take the lead in this public expression of repentance. They should weep and pray for God to have mercy on His people, because they were His special inheritance, for the glory of His name. In verses 18-27, Joel next revealed the Lord's response and comforting words in view of the people's private and public repentance. It is unclear whether he meant that the Lord had responded or would respond. The problem is the Hebrew perfect verbs. Based on what is to occur, it is best to understand this to be what God promised to do *if* the people responded to Joel's call to repentance. Sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., God told the Israelites that they had passed the point of no return and that captivity was inevitable (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12). Since repentance was still possible for the Israelites when Joel wrote, this prophecy evidently does not deal with that time. However, this is a great challenge to each of us – a call to repentance from willful sin.

Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13. Amos writes an oracle – a message of judgment – against Israel's neighbors in chapter 1. Amos uses an expression that becomes one of his trademark phrases, "for three transgressions (Heb. *pesa'im*, rebellions, i.e., against the universal Sovereign; cf. Gen. 9:5-17) and for four" (cf. vv. 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). "Three transgressions" represents fullness and "four" means to overflow. This phrase conveys the meaning 'for numerous transgressions' (cf. Job 5:19; 33:29; Ps. 62:11-12; Prov. 6:16; 30:15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 29-31; Eccles. 11:2; Mic. 5:5-6). Our expression "Three strikes and you're out!" conveys the same idea. In the oracle against Israel, Amos cited seven sins (one in 2:6, two in 2:7, two in 2:8, and two in 2:12).

Amos 4:6-11. Amos now writes about Israel's refusal to repent in verses 6-11 in spite of what the LORD was doing to get the attention of the nation. In verse 6, the LORD brings famine throughout the land to warn His people about their disobedience and His displeasure, but this judgment did not move them to repent (cf. 1 Kings 8:37-39). In verse 7, He sent drought when the people needed "rain" the most, "three months" before their "harvest." In addition, He had let rain fall on one town but not another so they had to go from one town to another for water to live on (v. 8). In verse 9 The LORD sent plant diseases and insects to blight their "gardens," "vineyards," and fruit "trees." Yet the Israelites did not repent. In verse 10, He brought various plagues and wars upon the Israelites; so much so that the "stench" of dead bodies should have led the people to repent, but it did not. Even the overthrow of some Israelite cities did not move the Israelites to repent (v. 11). Comparing these overthrown cities to "Sodom and Gomorrah" indicates their complete destruction. Even then, the Lord had rescued His people like 'burning' sticks from a fire, like He had done for Lot and his daughters from Sodom (Gen. 19). The people of Israel had turned away from the LORD through these events. Do we do the same? Do we see troubles and challenges as "bad" events in our life without considering that the LORD is trying to get our attention?

Amos 8:7. For the third time in this book, Amos said that the LORD has taken an oath (cf. 4:2; 6:8). This time He swore by "the pride of Jacob." This phrase is a reference to Israel's arrogant attitude. As surely as the nation was filled with pride, so the LORD will not forget her works; the LORD vowed never to forget any of the sinful Israelites' unrighteous deeds. God does not forget. He only chooses "not to remember" when we place our faith in Christ and He forgives us of our sin.

Jonah 3. Jonah now obeys the LORD and goes to Nineveh. He takes a month-long journey to go to Nineveh to deliver the Lord's message. It is important to note that Jonah's message was an announcement of impending judgment, not a call to repentance and belief in the LORD. Jonah's obedience in delivering the Lord's message resulted in the Ninevites humbling themselves and seeking mercy as they repented. Clearly the Ninevites connected the impending judgment with their own conduct. They felt that by abandoning their wickedness they could obtain some mercy from God. God noted the genuineness of the Ninevites' repentance in their actions. The fruits of repentance moved Him to withhold the judgment that He would have sent on them had they persisted in their wicked ways. Repentance is essentially a change in one's thinking and activity. Change in one's behavior indicates that repentance has taken place. Repentance turns God's judgment into His mercy.

Micah 6:9-16. Micah calls the people of Israel to listen. He announces that the LORD would "call to the city" of Jerusalem to listen. Micah tells them that they would be wise to "hear" the LORD and to "fear" Him because of who He is (He is the One who sovereignly chose them). When the LORD speaks it is wise to respond to Him, especially when He is brandishing the 'rod', His instrument of punishment for sin, to serve judgment for sin (i.e., "hear the rod" means to listen to the description of the coming punishment). It has been said: "When the soul bows before God and owns the righteousness of His disciplinary dealings, then he is in the place where restoring grace can meet him. As long as he kicks against the goads, so long must he go on under chastisement (H.A. Ironside)." In verses 10-11, the LORD asks, through Micah, if there were people in "the wicked house" of Judah who had "treasures of wickedness" (i.e., possessions) that they had accumulated through wicked behavior. Were there people who used a "short measure" (a 'short ephah' meaning a false measurement) that was less than a true measure (a true 'ephah', approximately 6 gallons)? Were there people who were using dishonest "scales" and inaccurate "weights" in their commercial transactions? The implication of these questions is that this practice was common in Jerusalem; sellers were cheating those who were buying by giving them less than what they had rightfully purchased for the purpose of accumulating wealth. The LORD hates these practices that take advantage of others (cf. Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16; Prov. 11:1, 16:11, 20:23). In verse 12, the accusation was that the "rich" people of Jerusalem practiced "violence" (lawlessness) to obtain what they wanted. They lied to one another and practiced trickery and deception to obtain their desires. All of these dealings presented evidence of "injustice," which arose from a heart of unkindness toward others and lack of submission to God. In verses 13-15, the LORD promised to make the Israelites sick, downtrodden and desolate because of these sins. They would continue to "eat," but their food would not bring them satisfaction. They would try to keep safe what they had bought, but they would not be able to do so, and what they did lock away would only become the property of invading soldiers. They would "sow" seed, but they would "not reap" a harvest, because the Lord would not bless the land with rain and cause the crops to grow (cf. Deut. 28:30). They would harvest and press their "olive" crops, but there would be so little product that they would not even be able to "anoint" themselves "with oil." Similarly, their "grape" harvests would be so small that they would produce too little "wine" to "drink". Here the LORD, through Micah, was restating the curses to the nation of Israel for their unfaithfulness as identified in Deut. 28:15-68. In closing (v.16) Micah addressed the people of Judah (Southern Kingdom) that were living like their brethren in Israel (Northern Kingdom) who were

following the instructions of the wicked Israelite kings "Omri," "Ahab," and their descendants ("house"). Omri (founder of Samaria) and Ahab are considered the 2 worst kings in the history of Israel because of their idolatry, unjust oppression and wickedness (cf. 1 Kings 16:21—22:40; 18:4). Because of this wickedness, the LORD promised to turn Judah ('the inhabitants of Jerusalem') over to "destruction/desolation/ruin." Even though they were His people, they would become objects of contempt and scorn ("reproach" / "derision") by other nations. This description of God's judgment for sin should be carefully heeded today as believers. God desires that we, as His children, 'do justly, love mercy and walk humbly' (Micah 6:8) today just as in the day of Micah. If we are not doing this, God will chasten His own, just as He did to His Chosen people (Heb. 12: 5-11).

Zeph. 3:5. Zephaniah contrasts the sin of the leaders to the LORD. The LORD was righteous. He would do no injustice only righteous justice. His righteous justice was performed and on display every day, as faithful as the rising of the sun. Yet the civil and religious leaders of Jerusalem knew "no shame" in the wickedness that they consistently practiced. Sin regularly practiced always results in no shame for the sin being committed. Most of the time, the one practicing the sin has rationalized and approved it as being an activity that is normal.

Zech. 1:2-4. Zechariah begins by telling the Israelites that the LORD had been "very angry" with the Jews' forefathers. The phrase "very angry" literally means "angry with anger", "to break out in long-controlled indignation," which indicates the LORD's extreme displeasure with the Israelites. "Therefore" Zechariah was to preach repentance to the Jews as the "LORD of hosts" authoritative messenger. The title "the LORD of hosts" describes the LORD as the sovereign LORD and MASTER of the entire universe; the sovereign One who was leading all the stars, angels, armies and people in the universe. The threefold repetition of the "LORD of hosts" stresses the divine imperative of this call to repentance. They were to repent! *Repentance is the LORD's desire for all men, not just the Jews (II Pet. 3:9)*. If the Jews turned back to the LORD (enabled by His grace), He would return to bless them (cf. Isa. 55:6-7; Jer. 3:12; Hos. 7:10; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 5:4, 6; Mal. 3:7). They were to "return to "the LORD of hosts" through a personal relationship and allegiance to Him – a whole-hearted genuine turning to Him, not simply a return to duty by a formal obedience to His law. Zechariah warned the Israelites not to be like their pre-Exile forefathers who were disobedient and obstinate; they had refused to respond to the preaching of earlier prophets who urged them to repent (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, et al.) prior to their Exile. Charles L. Feinberg correctly wrote this challenge; *"It's one thing to ask God to bless us but quite another to be the kind of people He can bless!"*

Zech. 7:8-12. Zechariah receives a message from the LORD that commands His people to "dispense/exercise true justice," to exercise/show mercy/kindness and compassion" toward each other, and "not" to "oppress" the weak and vulnerable among them (widow, orphan, stranger, poor), and "not" to plot or think "evil" against each other. *This exhortation applies to us today (James 1:27, 3:17, 5:9)*. This command had been heard by the Jews before through "former prophets" but "they refused to heed/pay attention" to the LORD. They had stubbornly "shrugged their shoulders" ('turned away from') at the LORD and "stopped their ears" so they would not hear Him. They hardened "their hearts" (minds and wills) like "flint" (Heb. *shamir*, diamond), so they could not hear the Law, or the Holy Spirit's messages from the prophets that the LORD had sent to them. Their willful sin of disobedience to the LORD's commands resulted in their judgment ("great wrath") from the LORD. *True spiritual reality is demonstrated in one's life by a determined obedience to the commands of the LORD.*

Zech. 8:14-17. Zechariah writes in his seventh message that the LORD promises that the nation of Israel will be restored to faith and obedience to minister to the nations during the Millennium. Therefore,

they should not fear (cf. v.13). In view of this promise, the Jews should speak truthfully with each other. They should also practice justice and promote "peace" in their community life. They should stop plotting to take advantage of one another and stop lying under oath—because the LORD hates these things (cf. Prov. 6:16-19; Mal. 2:16; Eph. 4:25). In short, the seventh message is “Do the things God loves and avoid the things God hates.” This message applies to us today.

Mal. 3:7. Malachi begins his third speech with a blanket condemnation of Israel’s disobedience to the conditions and demands of the LORD’s covenant with Israel. From Israel’s early history, the people had been stubborn and often deviated from the path that LORD had prescribed for them to walk in the Mosaic Covenant. They repeatedly disobeyed the Mosaic Covenant conditions and demands. Here Malachi voices the LORD’s appeal to Israel. The LORD calls His people to "return" to Him, with the promise that if they did, He would "return" to them (cf. Deut. 4:30-31; 30:1-10). This command to "return" to the LORD occurs here (3:7) at the beginning of this speech, and a promise that the LORD would "return" to them occurs at the end of the speech (4:6). The response of the people was that they did not know "how" to "return." Israel pretended to be ignorant of their failure to follow the conditions and demands of the Mosaic Covenant. They were quite cynical in their response to the LORD’s appeal – ‘how could they return when it wasn’t them that left the LORD, but rather it was the LORD that had left them.’ The Mosaic Covenant specified how they were to return—by trusting and obeying the LORD—so their question indicated a reluctance to change their ways. "How should we return? / In what way shall we return?" is not a legitimate request for information but a self-serving declaration of innocence. The people, in effect, are saying, 'What need do we have to return since we never turned away to begin with?' Is what we observe with Israel’s response to the LORD’s request, ‘return to me’, similar to how we respond today when we are confronted with our sins? Do we often make excuses and rationalize our behavior? G. Vernon McGee makes this statement concerning Mal. 3:7; *“I would say that this is pretty much the picture of a great many folk in the church today. Ritualism has been substituted for reality. Pageantry had been substituted for power. The aesthetic has been substituted for the spiritual, and form for feeling. Even in the orthodox, conservative, and evangelical circles, they know the vocabulary, but the power of God is gone. They are satisfied with a tasteless morality, they follow a few little shibboleths, and they feel that everything is all right.”* (Note: Shibboleth means a peculiar behavior that distinguishes a set of persons; a belief with little current meaning or truth.)

Mal. 3:13-14. Israel had questioned the LORD (2:17), violated His Law (2:11), disobeyed His Law (2:9), defiled His altar (1:7,12), and despised His name (1:6); now they openly and arrogantly spoke against Him. Yet when the LORD challenged them about their speech they asked for proof: "What have we spoken against You?" In verse 14, the LORD answered their question by using their own words. Israel was saying that serving and obeying the LORD did not benefit them; therefore, it did not pay to serve the LORD. They also said that when they “mourned” over their sins their circumstances did not improve. Israel was saying that they gained no benefit from being faithful to the LORD because they presumed that their outward actions would be blessed by the LORD, even though their hearts were sinful and self-centered. They were hypocritical legalist – performing the acts of religious obedience as vindication of their own righteousness – with no repentance of sin within their heart. Their legalism actually blocked them from repentance (cf. Matt. 5:20-48, 23:1-36). Can that be true of us today?

Mal. 4:1-3. Malachi 4:1-3 directly answers the Israelites question voiced in Malachi 3:14 - “What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?” In verse 1, the LORD, through Malachi, now elaborates on "the day" identified in 3:17. This ‘day’, the Day of the LORD, will be a day of judgment. The Day of the LORD will occur at the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 19:11-21). (Note: There are some who believe that this “Day of the Lord” occurs at the end of Christ’s millennial rule (cf. Rev. 20:11-15), but the context of Mal.

3:1-4:3 supports the “Day of the LORD” occurring at His Second Coming – cf. Matt. 25:31-46). The judgment that occurs on the “Day of the LORD” is compared it to a fiery “furnace,” in which “all the arrogant/proud” and “every evildoer/all who do wickedly” will burn like “chaff/ stubble.” The judgment of fire is like a burning “oven/furnace” – meaning a judgment of high intensity that is under control. The LORD will set the fire and manage it as He punishes the wicked, which is so thorough that the wicked will be entirely consumed, like a shrub thrown into a hot fire is totally burned up - from “root” to “branch.” The totality of the destruction of the wicked pictures the intensity of the judgment, which is an accurate picture of the final punishment of the wicked that occurs at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). In verse 2, the Day of the LORD, which is “fire” to the wicked, will be like ‘sunshine’ to the righteous. The phrase “sun of righteousness” has various interpretations, as this is the only time in the Bible that this phrase is used. Some believe that the “sun of righteousness is a title for Christ as He rules in the Millennium. Others believe that the “sun of righteousness” is a description of the blessing that comes from Christ being the ruler during the Millennium. One commentator (Pieter Verhoef) stated; ““We prefer the point of view according to which *righteousness* must be regarded as the key word, and *sun* to be its nearer definition. On the Day of the Lord righteousness will become apparent just like the shining sun in all its brightness and blessedness [cf. Ps. 37:6; Isa. 58:8].” It seems best to view “the sun of righteousness” as a description of the day of blessing that LORD will bring - the Millennium – when the righteous enter into the Kingdom and the wicked are destroyed. The ones who fear (“revere”) the LORD (Mal. 1:14; 3:5, 16-17) will experience a reign (“sun”) of “righteousness.” Malachi visualized the ‘righteous reign’ of the LORD to be like the “wings” of a bird stretching over the earth. This righteous reign will have a “healing” effect on those who fear the LORD (cf. Ezek. 47:1-12), as well as “healing’ the earth from the destruction that has occurred to the earth during the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 4 – 19). Malachi uses the figurative language of stall-bound calves being loosed into an open, fertile pasture to picture the joy and freedom that the righteous will enjoy that day (i.e. calves cavorting in open pasture after having been cooped up in a stall) (cf. Isa. 65:17-25; Hos. 14:4-7; Amos 9:13-15; Zeph. 3:19-20).

Matt. 5:3-11. This is the beginning of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes deal with four attitudes: 1) toward ourselves (v. 3); 2) toward our sins (vv. 4-6); 3) toward God (vv. 7-9); and 4) toward the world (v. 10). They proceed from the inside out; they start with attitudes and move to actions that are opposed, the normal course of spirituality. The first four beatitudes are directed to those who are *conscious of their need of salvation* and are acting suitably to need rather as possessed of it. The next three beatitudes are directed to those who *have found salvation* and are now conducting themselves accordingly. The Beatitudes represent an announcement of those who will be “happy” because of experiencing the acceptance of God. The term “blessed” means “happy, fortunate, and blissful”; it is not a surface emotion but a state of well-being deep within one’s life. The “blessings” are tied to an association with the kingdom of God as presented by Jesus; note the relationship in the use of “is” and “will be”. There is a tension between what is being offered by Jesus for those who believe in Him and what will be experienced in the future. This tension explains why “the poor” are said to possess the kingdom of God today (Matt. 5:3, Luke 6:20b) while what “will be” represents the future kingdom; which is a reversal of what is currently occurring today. This tension explains the issue of persecution; it is assumed for today because the acceptance of the king being offered by Jesus is meeting strong resistance. Although the kingdom is being offered by Jesus (and is possessed by “the poor” in spirit and those who are “persecuted”), the kingdom will not come until what “is” occurring today is replaced and reversed; what is current suffering and defeat “will become” blessing and reward through God’s grace. The “blessings” presented by Jesus, work from the inside of an individual’s heart out to the external actions of the individual. They start with the attitude of the heart and spirit; then the internal attitude moves the individual to action. Spirituality starts from within and then shows itself in action, often

resulting in a hostile reaction by the world that does not understand it. The “blessings” identify who God will bless and reward....in the kingdom which is yet to come. The “blessings” can be summed up this way – “if you desire to receive God’s blessing, then respond to the announcement of His blessing, identify with it, and seek to reflect these characteristics even though you know many in the world will persecute you as a result”.

- **(v.3) Poor in spirit....kingdom of heaven is theirs:** This represents the opposite of self-sufficiency, works and material wealth to obtain righteousness. The "poor in spirit" acknowledges his or her lack of personal righteousness (cf. John 15:5). It is a deep humility through the recognition of one’s depravity, lostness and hopelessness to obtain righteousness apart from God’s grace.
- **(v.4) Those who mourn....will be comforted:** This is the recognized as sorrow (mourning) over sin; a mourning over sin that produces repentance, which leads to salvation. "Those who mourn" do so because they sense their spiritual bankruptcy. The “comfort” is the confidence of God’s forgiveness and salvation in one’s life. Though we mourn now over sin and its consequences, both in their personal lives and in the world, we will be comforted by the complete removal of sin in the future.
- **(v.5) The gentle....will inherit the earth:** This speaks to self-control; self-control empowered by the Holy Spirit. A "gentle" or "meek" person is not only gentle in his or her dealings with others (11:29; 21:5; James 3:13). Such a person is unpretentious (1 Pet. 3:4, 14-15), self-controlled, and free from malice and vengefulness (cf. Ps. 37:11).
- **(v.6) Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness....will be filled:** This represents the opposite of the self-righteousness of Pharisaical legalism. This is a reference to those who seek God’s righteousness rather than attempting to establish a righteousness of their own making. Unsaved people look for satisfaction in all the wrong places. Real satisfaction comes by pursuing righteousness. What a person seeks will fill them; is it a hunger and thirst for a right relationship with God?
- **(v.7) The merciful....will be shown mercy:** The principle is “what you have received, send it out because it will be returned to you”. A "merciful" person forgives the guilty and has compassion on the needy and the suffering; they have compassion on others because they are sinful, sinful but forgiven. When God’s mercy has been extended to you, you are to extend mercy to others so they can see the mercy of God. The blessing of "the merciful" is that they will "receive mercy" from God because He will deal mercifully with people who have dealt mercifully with their fellowmen
- **(v.8) The pure in heart....will see God:** The pure in heart are those who are inwardly clean from sin through faith in God’s provision of salvation – Christ; they are continually acknowledging their sinful condition to God. They are those who are single-minded in their devotion to God; they are free from hypocrisy.
- **(v.9) The peacemakers....will see God:** The peacemaker shows others how to have inward peace with God. True disciples of Jesus make peace as they herald the gospel that brings people into a peaceful relationship with God and with one another. Those who follow Christ faithfully will demonstrate concern for the peace of humanity by leading people to Him and by fostering peace by being instruments of peace when dealing with others.
- **(v.10) Those persecuted for righteousness....kingdom of heaven is theirs:** Persecution is not something to be sought after, but when persecution occurs against a believer for the sake of Christ, such a persecution carries with it the blessing of God. Persecution is as much a mark of discipleship as peacemaking. The world does not give up its hates and self-centered living easily. This brings opposition on those who are peacemakers. *Righteous* people, those whose conduct is right in God's eyes, those who are Christ-like, become targets of the unrighteous.

Martyn Lloyd Jones suggested four general lessons that the Beatitudes teach:

1. All Christians are to be like this, not just some.
2. All Christians are meant to manifest all of these characteristics, not just some.

3. None of these characteristics refers to one's natural tendencies; they are all produced by the Holy Spirit in the Christian.
4. These characteristics indicate clearly the essential difference between the Christian and the non-Christian [better: the disciple and the non-disciple].

In verses 11-12, the last beatitude is expanded upon and clarified. Jesus clarifies His disciples' calling and ministry in the world to encourage them to endure persecution and to fulfill God's purpose for them. Verse 11 broadens the persecution to include insult and slander. This persecution should cause the disciples to "rejoice" rather than despair because their "reward" for faithfully enduring would be great when the kingdom began – which leads directly into an eternity in heaven (v.12). D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: "In summary, Jesus was saying that our outlook on everything that happens to us should be determined by three things: my realization of who I am, where I am going, and what awaits me when I get there."

Matt. 5:20-22. Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, was instructing those who followed Him to have a deeper holiness in their life than that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees had the tendency to ignore the demand for internal heart holiness and focused only on the external observable demands of and obedience to the law. Beginning with verse 20, many interpreters regard this verse as the key verse in the Sermon on the Mount. "I say to you" is a claim to having authority and it is on the basis of authority from the LORD that Jesus teaches the moral significance of the Law and that the righteousness of the Law actually involves internal obedience and submission to the spirit of the Law, not mere external compliance to the letter of the Law. The view of the "scribes and Pharisees" of the Law led them to obey some portions of the Law and to reject other, which led to selective obedience that produced only superficial righteousness (only external conformity to the revealed will of God). That type of "righteousness," Jesus declared, would not be adequate for admission into the kingdom. Selective obedience does not demonstrate a proper faith attitude to God, the attitude John and Jesus called for when they said, "Repent." The phrase "enter the kingdom" occurs seven other times in the New Testament (7:21; 18:3; 19:23, 24; Mark 9:47; John 3:5; Acts 14:22). The condition for entering—in every case—is faith alone. Jesus proceeded to clarify exactly what the law did require in verses 21-48. He selected six subjects of the Law where he expounded on the meaning of the Law that the LORD originally intended and compared that meaning to the interpretation and meaning the scribes and Pharisees were teaching. In each of these six cases, Jesus first related the popular understanding of the Old Testament, the view advocated by the scribes and Pharisees. In verse 21, Jesus began with the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13) and combined it with Leviticus 19:17. He introduces His teaching with the phrase "You have heard that it was said to those of old (KJV) / You have heard that the ancients were told (NASB)." This was an expression that the rabbis of Jesus' day used when they referred to the teachings of the Old Testament. The Pharisees were teaching that people should not commit murder, because if you did you would die for it. In verse 22, Jesus contrasted His correct interpretation with the false common understanding of this command. His, "But I say to you" (vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) expressed an authority that He had from the LORD. When the LORD gave the sixth commandment, He did not just want people to refrain from murdering one another. He wanted them to refrain from the hatred that leads to murder. Murder is only the external manifestation of the internal problem. The scribes and Pharisees dealt only with the external act. Jesus showed that the LORD's concern ran much deeper. Refraining from murder does not constitute a person's righteous in God's sight. It is the condition of the heart that is important in the LORD's sight. When a person gets angry with another person without cause and calls him "Raca" that is a heart condition that the LORD looks at. "Raca" is the transliteration of the Aramaic *reka*. It means "imbecile," "numbskull," "empty-headed" or "blockhead." The scribes and Pharisees taught that a person who referred to someone as a "Raca" was in danger of being sued for libel before the Sanhedrin. The term "fool" is a similar term to "raca" because it was used

by a person who has unjustified hatred toward someone, even for his brother. In either case, a person who is angry without cause is in danger of divine judgment because his hatred and anger is unjustified (cf. 23:17). Jesus said that person is "guilty" enough (deserving) to suffer eternal judgment, not that he will. Whether he will suffer eternal judgment or not depends on his basic relationship to God. Jesus was teaching that if there was unjustified anger and hatred in a person's life, there was a violation of God's will that could incur severe divine torment (cf. 3:12). It is important to note that the LORD always looks upon the heart to make His judgments (I Sa. 16:7). How is your heart? What is your heart condition when you get angry?

Matt. 5:23-26. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, was teaching about the seriousness of anger (v.22). Specifically, when an individual gets angry with another individual, they are proclaiming that they are morally superior to the individual the causes them their anger. Most times anger is generated by pride and it is sinful. Other times anger is generated when one sees overt sin against Christ and the commands of Christ. This truth was demonstrated by Christ when He got angry with the money changers in the Temple (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; John 2:13-22). In Christ's teaching here the one who caused anger in another person by their own sinful pride is responsible to seek out the offended party, rather than the offended party seeking out the one who created the anger and offense. Why did Jesus teach this? He did so because we are more likely to remember situations where we were angry with someone else then the situations where we offended someone. Christ was teaching that when one was engaging in worship (i.e., O.T. - presenting offerings at the altar in the temple; N.T. - communion); it is more important to lift the load of hate from another brother's heart than to engage in an act of worshipping God. Reconciliation is more important than worship; meaning that forgiveness and reconciliation must come before worship! If you have created an offense to another person (v.25-26), it is your responsibility to seek resolution of the offense for the purpose of reconciliation. Reconciliation between brothers must be accomplished, whether one is "the offended" (Matt. 18:15) or "the offender" (Matt.5:23-26) before we worship the LORD. Therefore, whether you are the "offended" or the "offender," you must be the initiator to go to the other for forgiveness and reconciliation before we worship the LORD (i.e., communion - I Cor. 11:27-32).

Matt. 5:38-48. A true believer has the attitude of "others first." Even when evil and unfairness is being forced upon the believer, we are to extend our favor to them to show them Christ. Retaliation for a 'wrong' is very common because it is an expression of selfish pride; and retaliation tends to be cyclical with escalation. Christ taught here that one was to accept the injustice or offense without taking revenge or retaliation. He provided four illustrations (v.39b-42) to illustrate His teaching. To accept injustice or an offense without retaliating is a statement to others that you trust in God that He will deal with the one who is offensive. To keep an account of wrongs and constantly demanding recognition of personal affronts violates the very spirit and example of Christ. A number of Biblical scholar's state that these verses teach the surrender of personal rights of a believer – something most challenging to be considered and enacted. Christ closes His teaching on this topic with a teaching about love (v.43-48). His teaching on love is directly tied to His teaching on accepting offenses without retaliation. Here we see that God loves His enemies, which is demonstrated by His giving of His Son to be sacrificed for man's sin (c.f. John 3:16). "Enemies," as used here, means any individual who creates anger or an angry response from a believer in Christ. We are to love our enemies, which is hard to do. In v.48, Christ summarizes all of His teachings from v.21 through v.47; we are to be perfect as God is perfect. This is humanly impossible to do but it is the purpose of man to seek to achieve this perfection. We were created to be like God (Gen. 1:26). Because we are a being created in His image, we have the characteristics of God. One of those characteristics is benevolence, goodwill, and the constant seeking of the highest good of every man. A great characteristic of God is His love for the believer and the sinner

alike. No matter what men do to Him, God loves them and seeks to reconcile them to Himself (1 Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9). We are to be examples of this characteristic to all that we encounter, whether the person is a believer in Christ or not. Because of this, we have no foundation to be offended or to offend anyone (c.f. Rom. 12:17-21, 14:19; Heb. 12:14-15).

Matt. 6:1-5. Jesus now shifts His teaching to correcting popular misconceptions about righteous conduct and the proper motivation for one's actions. In verse 1, He introduces a basic principle of the proper motivation of one's heart. The condition and motivation of your heart determines if you are genuine or a hypocrite in your spiritual life. In verse 1, Jesus warned His disciples about the possibility of doing good deeds for the wrong reason, as He began His teaching about righteous behavior. If you publicly do what God approves to obtain human approval, you will not receive a reward from the LORD. The Pharisees considered alms-giving, prayer, and fasting as the three chief acts of spiritual worship and piety. Jesus dealt with each of these aspects of worship. He first warned His disciples not to do the act for man's praise. Then He assured them that if they disregarded His warning, they would get human praise but nothing more. Third, He taught them how to do the act for God alone, secretly (not for public applause). Finally, He assured them that the Father who sees in secret would reward their righteous act openly. In verse 2, Jesus addresses 'alms-giving.' Alms were gifts of money to the needy. The Jews used the same word—*tzedakah*—both for righteousness and almsgiving. Jesus taught that charitable deeds (alms-giving) were to be done without public fanfare. There is historic evidence that during this period, the Jewish priests blew trumpets in the Temple when they collected funds for some special need; but the sounding of the trumpet mentioned by Jesus was probably a reference to a practice of the Pharisees when they would come to a conspicuous place in the city, and blow a small silver trumpet, at which there would gather round him those in need, such as the beggars who were maimed, crippled and blind. Then, with a great show of generosity, the Pharisees would scatter gifts upon them. They were doing this for the praise of men; their giving was 'buying' men's praise. In verses 3 and 4, Jesus teaches that we should not let the "left hand" know what the "right hand" is doing when we do charitable deeds (alms-giving). This is a picture of secrecy (cf. 25:35-40). The way to avoid hypocrisy is to let no other people know when or how much we give. It even involves not keeping a record of what we give so that we may take pride in it. We should not draw attention to ourselves when we give, in the eyes of others and in our own eyes. Hypocrisy does not just involve doing something for show so others can see; it also involves deceiving oneself even if no one else is deceived. In verse 5 Jesus addresses prayer. He warns His followers against ostentatious, self-glorifying worship. The synagogues and streets were public places where the Pharisees could practice their righteousness with an audience thereby calling attention to what they were doing. Jesus was addressing the motive of the heart because it is the motive of the heart that matters most. Jesus was not condemning public prayer, but praying in order to be seen and admired for doing it. What is the motive of your heart? Are you living so people can see what you do? Or are you living in such a way as to be genuine before the LORD?

Matt. 6:14-15. These verses follow the example of prayer that Christ gave during His Sermon on the Mount. He explains in these verses what He meant in verse 12. Though God's forgiveness of sin is not based on one's forgiving others, a believer's forgiveness of others is based on the fact that they have been forgiven (Eph. 4:31-32). What is in view here is not one losing their salvation, if they have truly placed their faith in Christ, but it is about God refusing to bless believers because they refuse to forgive others of offenses against them. Personal fellowship with God is not possible if one refuses to forgive others.

Matt. 6:19-21. Having made several references to treasure in heaven, Jesus now turned to focus on money and wealth. The Pharisees believed and taught that material blessing was a sign that God was

blessing them for their 'righteousness' for their 'obedience to the law.' New Jesus is instructing his followers that they should "stop laying up treasures on earth." Jesus is calling attention to the condition of the heart; what is it focused on, what is its motivation. Money is not intrinsically evil. The wise person works hard and makes financial provision for lean times (Prov. 6:6-8). Believers have a responsibility to provide for their needy relatives (1 Tim. 5:8) and to be generous with others in need (Prov. 13:22; 2 Cor. 12:14). We can enjoy what God has given us (1 Tim. 4:3-4; 6:17). What Jesus is teaching against is selfishness. Misers hoard more than they need (James 5:2-3). Materialists always want more. It is the *love* of money that is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). It is foolish to accumulate excessive material goods because they are perishable. "Moth(s)" eat clothing, a major form of wealth in the ancient Near East. "Rust" refers to the destructive force of rats and mildew, not just the corrosion that eats metal. "Thieves" can take away just about anything in one way or another. The "treasures in heaven" Jesus spoke of were the rewards God will give His faithful followers (5:12, 30, 46; 6:6, 15; cf. 10:42; 18:5; 25:40; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:13-19). They are the product of truly good works. These are secure in heaven, and God will dispense them to the faithful at His appointed time (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18; 1 Pet. 1:4). Also, "treasures in heaven" are people that you invest in that come to know the LORD as Savior. It is relationships in the LORD that will last for eternity. The thing that a person values most highly ("treasure") inevitably occupies the center of their "heart"; the thing that controls the heart is the thing a person devotes their time and money to achieve. On the other hand, if a person values eternal riches most highly, they will pursue obedience to the LORD's commands and His will (cf. Col. 3:1-2; Rev. 14:13). Are we investing in "treasures in heaven" or "treasures of earth?" One is eternal, one is perishable.

Matt. 6:24-33. In verses 19-21 Jesus taught about a believer being caught up in the love of the world and its temporal treasure. In verse 24, He teaches about the inability for a person to serve two masters at the same time. The choice between "two masters" is what is depicted by the choice between two treasures and the choice between two visions. "Mammon" is from the Aramaic word *mamona*, meaning "wealth" or "property;" whose root word "*mn*," in both Hebrew and Aramaic, indicates something in which one places confidence. Here Jesus personified it and sets it against God as a competing object of one's attention. Jesus presented God and "mammon" as two slave owners, masters. Each demands single-minded devotion. To give either anything less is to provide no true service at all. Therefore, there is only one that can be served; and to focus on "mammon" is a deep-seated commitment to idolatry. Who are you serving? In verses 25-34, Jesus teaches about anxiety that occurs in a person because of the world. Jesus taught that anxiety is, first, unnecessary (vv. 25-30), second, unworthy (vv. 31-33), and third, unfruitful (v. 34). "Therefore" draws a conclusion from what has preceded (vv. 19-24). Since God has given us "life" and a "body," He will certainly also provide what we need to maintain them (cf. Luke 12:22-31; Phil. 4:6-7; Heb. 13:5; 1 Pet. 5:7). It is wrong for a believer to fret (worry) about such things. A believer should simply trust and obey God, and focus on fulfilling God's will for their life - following the LORD single-mindedly. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: "You may think you have won this great battle against Satan because you conquered him when he came in at the front door and talked to you about laying up treasures on earth. But before you are aware of it, you will find he has come in through the back door and is causing you to have anxious concern about these things." If we fret constantly about having enough "food" and "clothing," we show that we have not yet learned a very basic lesson that nature teaches us: God provides for His creatures' needs (v. 26). As long as it is God's will for a person to live, He will sustain them. Worry and fretting cannot lengthen life (v. 27). Jesus taught that "lilies of the field" were supported by the LORD even though they had no productive value and only last a short time. Therefore, anxiety about the essentials of life really demonstrates lack of ("little") "faith" in God. Since God provides so bountifully for His own creation, it is not only foolish but pagan to fret about the basic necessities of life (vv. 31-32). Therefore, instead of worrying about and pursuing material things, each believer should pursue the 'kingdom of God and His righteousness, which has much greater eternal

significance (v.33). Seeking God's righteousness means pursuing righteousness in life in submission to God's will (cf. 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1). John R. Stott wrote: "In the end, just as there are only two kinds of piety, the self-centered and the God-centered, so there are only two kinds of ambition: one can be ambitious either for oneself or for God. There is no third alternative." Who is our master? What is our ambition?

Matt. 7:1-5. Christ's teaching here in His Sermon on the Mount deals with the believer's relationship to others and with judgment. Christ first establishes a principle (v. 1); then He justifies this principle theologically (v. 2); and then He provides an illustration (vv. 3-5). Christ begins by teaching believers not to be hypocritical, self-righteous, or extremely critical in judgment of other people. He is stating this because of the high standards He was clarifying (cf. Rom. 14:10-13; James 4:11-12). He did not mean that they should accept everything and everyone uncritically without proper discernment (cf. vv. 5-6, 15-20; John 7:24; 1 Cor. 5:5; Gal. 1:8-9; 6:1; Phil. 3:2; 1 John 4:1). Neither did He mean that parents, church leaders, and civil authorities are wrong if they pass judgment on those under their care. Christ was teaching that if a believer judges others (habitual hypocritical, self-righteous criticism of others), God will judge them—not as unbelievers, but as His children who need to be disciplined. Christ was teaching that believers should not do God's job of passing judgment—on His behalf—when He has not authorized them to do so. As believers, we cannot judge with authority because only God knows all the facts that motivate people to do as they do. The believer who judges another person takes God's position illegally and will have to answer to Him for doing so. The judgment being referenced here is judging based on self-righteous pride; it is not referring to discerning judgment when such judgment is required to exercise a critical examination to make value-judgments. The person who judges others very critically will experience a similarly rigorous examination from God (cf. 18:23-35). We set the standard by which God judges us by the way in which we judge others. In verse 3, the "speck" (Gr. *karphos*) could be a speck of any foreign matter. The "log" or "plank" (Gr. *dokos*) refers to a large piece of wood. Christ uses this illustration to stress the foolishness of criticizing someone else. The action of a believer being judgmental (as defined in v.1-2) reveals a much greater problem in that believer's life – pride and hypocrisy. Imagine a blind eye doctor operating to remove a cataract from his patient's eye. It is impossible for him to do it. The same is true of a believer judging another believer. Such a person is a hypocrite in that by condemning another he really condemns himself (cf. Luke 18:9-14). He does not deceive others as much as he deceives himself. Most of the time other believers recognize and understand that such criticism is unjustifiable and improper, but the one who judges does not. The proper attitude is important in judging oneself and other people (1 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 6:1). Believers who are quick to quote this verse are usually hypocrites whose pride has blinded them. They are neither helpful nor loving. That is what Christ is warning against here (cf. Luke 6:39-42); believers are to be critical of self but not of other believers. These verses are frequently used by people who want to deflect attention away from their own life by assaulting other believers with the claim that they are mean-spirited and arrogant. Those who say 'Judge not' are often among the first to judge. Hypocritical self-righteous judgment is the product of pride in one's life. It is interesting to note in 7:6 that Jesus instructed us not to give our judgments to others who are not going to listen: "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." Not everyone wants to hear what you have to say about their sin. Certainly, there are times for people to become defensive. If someone's actions are being judged unfairly, they have a right to defend themselves. If their motives are being called into question, again they have a right to resist this form of judgment. But too often, when a believer confronts another believer about blatant, willful sin in their life, that person gets angry at those who are confronting them. Most times they will state: "Don't judge me!" We do have an obligation to help people, but after we present our concerns gently and all they want to do is argue, we are then to stop confronting them until they are ready to listen (cf. II Tim. 2:22; Rom. 16:17).

Matt. 7:6. Here Jesus addresses the believer's responsibility on how they were to handle the gospel with those who have made up their heart and mind to hate and reject the truth. Each believer has a responsibility to pass their knowledge of the kingdom on to others so they, too, could prepare for it. This exhortation balances the one He just gave (vv. 1-5) as believers can be naive and fail to be discerning (cf. 5:43-47). Here He encouraged discrimination of character. Pigs ("swine") were unclean animals and "dogs" were wild, despised animals. The 'pigs and dogs' represent people who react to the gospel by rejecting and turning against those who bring it to them (cf. 10:14; 15:14). The point of Jesus' instruction is that believers are not obligated to share the gospel with those who are hard-hearted and have already publicly expressed a hatred for the truth.

Matt. 10:24. Jesus was teaching his disciples that if He suffered, so will those who follow Him. He was reminding them that He was not asking something of them that He Himself was already experiencing. If people will attack the teacher, they will also attack the students. Are we ready to humble ourselves and allow ourselves to be attacked without cause because we are believers in and followers of Jesus?

Matt. 10:28-31. Jesus was instructing the disciples about following Him and the persecution they would be encountering (cf. v.24-27). Here He teaches them about whom to fear; they are to fear God not man. God is the One who can destroy men's body and soul in hell for eternity (cf. Luke 12:5); man can only harm and kill the body. The worst a human adversary can do does not compare with the worst God can do. "Destroy" here does not mean annihilation, but ruination (devastation). The same Greek verb appears in 9:17, and describes ruined wineskins. Knowing that the LORD is the only one who can kill body and soul, Jesus now draws the disciple's attention to the care that God provides to those who believe in Him. Jesus was teaching that God providentially controls the timing and circumstances of all events in the world, even the "fall" of a sparrow; so, God will take care of His own (vv. 29-31). To understand this properly, God knows when the sparrow flies, lands, hops, eats and drinks; He intimately knows its life. Often people think that God cares only for the big things in life and is unconcerned about the details. Jesus taught the opposite. God's concern with details should give us confidence that He controls the larger affairs of life. The mention of the heavenly "Father" (v. 29) stresses His care, which extends to the numbering of our "hairs." This shows the depth of love that the LORD has for you. John Calvin wrote: "Indeed, the principal purpose of Biblical history is to teach that the Lord watches over the ways of the saints with such great diligence that they do not even stumble over a stone [cf. Ps. 91:12]." Do we live our lives in such a way as to rest completely in the LORD knowing that He is in control of all things in our life, even times of great trial?

Matt. 10:38-39. Jesus had taught the disciples that people must love one another (cf. John 13:34-35). Here Jesus is teaching the disciples that they must love Him more. He is teaching the disciples that no human relationship was more important than the one to Him (v.37). The requirement of this love relationship meant dying to self, putting Him first. That is what is meant by taking up "his cross." Taking up "his cross" does not mean tolerating some unpleasant situation in one's life for Jesus' sake, it means dying to everything else but Him. That sets the correct perspective for verse 39. Those who 'find' their lives now will 'lose' their lives later. That is what Jesus illustrated in His parable about the servants in Matthew 25:14-30; the servant who buried the talent so he could do what he wanted ('find') with his life forfeited ('lost') his life (cf. 25:26-30). Conversely, the believer who 'loses' their life by self-denial now, "will find it" in eternity. This is true in a twofold sense. The person who lives for the present loses the real purpose of life. William Barclay wrote: "The Christian may have to sacrifice his personal ambitions, the ease and the comfort that he may have enjoyed, the career that he might have achieved; he may have to lay aside his dreams, to realize that shining things of which he caught a glimpse are not for him.

He will certainly have to sacrifice his will, for no Christian can ever again do what he likes; he must do what Christ likes." How are you living your life? It is a great challenge all believers face.

Matt. 12:7. Jesus and the disciples had been challenged by the Pharisees for working on the Sabbath when they gathered grain with their fingers as they walked through a field to have something to eat. Here Jesus is responding to the Pharisees where is criticizing the Pharisees for failing to understand the Scriptures (cf. v. 3), and He quoted Hosea 6:6 again (cf. 9:13). Previously, Jesus had cited this verse to show the Pharisees that they failed to recognize their own need. Now He used it to show them that they failed to recognize Him. The Jews in Hosea's day relied on mere ritual to satisfy God. The Pharisees were doing the same thing. They had not grasped the real significance of the Law, as their criticism of Jesus' disciples demonstrated. Jesus accused the accusers, and declared the disciples "innocent." As "Son of Man" Jesus was "Lord of the Sabbath." Meaning His authority was greater than the authority that God had granted the Sabbath to have over His people. Jesus had given the Sabbath law, and He had the authority to do anything He wished with the Sabbath. Alfred Edersheim wrote: "We are free while we are doing anything for Christ; God loves mercy, and demands not sacrifice; His sacrifice is the service of Christ, in heart, and life, and work. We are not free to do anything we please; but we are free to do anything needful or helpful, while we are doing any service to Christ."

Matt. 12:33-37. Jesus tells the Pharisees He is talking to about the "unpardonable sin" that one's conduct in life reflects their character (cf. 12:33-37; 7:16-19). To have "good fruit" one must "make the tree good," for example by cultivating, grafting, fertilizing, etc. If one makes a tree rotten by neglect and abuse, for example, one will get "bad fruit." A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree yields bad fruit. Jesus' works were good, so He must be good. One's conduct reflects the state of the heart – the heart condition of a person is clearly observed by the 'fruit' their life is producing. People are responsible for all their actions and words, which will free them or condemn them as they stand before the LORD and give an account of their life. Now Jesus challenges the Pharisees by calling them a "brood of vipers" (cf. 3:7; 23:33). The use of this term identifies the Pharisees as deadly antagonists. The Pharisees internal heart condition was publicly presented by the words they were saying; the mouth reveals what is in the heart (v.35). The Pharisees' slander of Jesus revealed their rejection of Him. Their externally righteous appearance did not excuse them from speaking as they did. Rather, their "words" are what God will use to judge them eventually, which applies to us today. Jesus also taught that people will be judged by their works as well (16:27; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12). The "careless" word is the word spoken without deliberation. One might think it insignificant, except that it reveals character. "Every word" spoken reflects the heart's overflow, and God knows about it. Therefore, words are very important (cf. Eph. 5:3-4, 12; Col. 3:17; James 1:19; 3:1-12). The context (vv. 33-36) clarifies that the justification and condemnation in view deal with God passing judgment on everyone (v.37), because "words" reveal character, so "words" become the instruments by which God judges. This is illustrated by the Pharisees themselves. They were assessing Him when they said He did His works by Satan's power (v. 24). Jesus pointed out that they were really assessing themselves. They thought they were judging Him with their words, but really God would judge them with their words. It is very, very important to carefully examine the words you are saying as it is your words that are showing others and God what the condition of your heart is.

Matt. 12:41-45. Jesus had been challenged by the Pharisees to have Him show them a 'sign' that He was the Son of God. Jesus is responding to the Pharisees in these verses by referring to 'the sign of Jonah' (vv. 39-40), which is a reference to judgment and resurrection. The Pharisees believed, correctly, that judgment followed resurrection. Jesus followed His comments about resurrection in verse 40 with instruction about "judgment" in verse 41. The Pharisees judgment will be greater than that of the

Ninevites, because the Ninevites "repented" at Jonah's preaching where the scribes and Pharisees did not repent at Jesus' preaching. Jesus' point was that the believing Ninevites could testify against the unbelieving Jews before God for "judgment." The "something greater than Jonah" was Jesus' reference to His authority as the Son of God, the Messiah. In verse 42, Jesus references the "Queen of the South" who was the "Queen of Sheba" (1 Kings 10:1-13) that visited Jerusalem because of reports about Solomon's great "wisdom" that had reached her ears. The "something greater than Solomon" was Jesus, who was the embodiment of divine wisdom. The "queen" would join the Ninevites in condemning the Pharisees because they failed to acknowledge Him, the One who had greater wisdom than Solomon's and a greater message than Jonah's. In both of Jesus' comparisons: Gentiles responded, and Jews did not. In verses 43-45, Jesus warns against the peril of being neutral toward Him (v. 30). A demon cast out of a person initially goes through arid "places seeking rest." Once a demon is cast out of a person there is the possibility of demonic repossession (v. 44). The demon can and often does return to the person it had left to see if they are receptive to the demon's presence, because no superior power occupies that person. Consequently, the demon invites "seven other" demons—a full complement ("more wicked than itself")—and they take up residence in the person. Jesus compared the unbelieving Jews of His day to the demon-possessed person (v.45). Because the Jews who did not all believe that He was the Messiah were in a 'neutral' condition, it left them vulnerable to an even worse invasion from Satan; a position that would lead to judgment from God. The Pharisees had plenty of evidence as to who He was. They did not need to see more miracles that proved Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God, the Messiah. Instead of an immediate sign to show them that He was the Messiah, He would give them a different kind of sign, resurrection from the dead, the sign that vindicated His claim that He was the Son of God, the Messiah.

Matt. 13:20-23. Jesus taught using the seed and soil in a parable to describe people's response to the Kingdom message (gospel message). The four soil types represent four kinds of reception people give to the preaching about the kingdom. In verse 19, some people heard Jesus' preaching about the kingdom, but, like hard soil, the truth did not penetrate their hearts. In verses 20-21, some people heard the Kingdom message and their initial response to the message Jesus preached was enthusiastic reception ("joy"). These are people who have an emotional response to the gospel message and appear to make a decision for salvation but it is not real. External, worldly pressures inhibit growth, and because they have not genuinely rooted themselves in the truth, they soon fade and wither (cf. 5:29) bearing no fruit because there is no reality within them. These people are ones who appear to be saved, appear to begin well but fail to continue to follow the Lord faithfully. This response is the foundation of hypocrisy; and there is considerable doubt if they are true believers. In verse 22, some people heard the Kingdom message and make a superficial decision but without true repentance. They were too concerned about this temporal life and their heart would be focused on this world. This was seed that fell among the thorns. They allow the concerns of life to crowd out any reality of their commitment to Jesus. For them this present life and present treasure become the focus of their heart. They are true hypocrites; they are deceitful because they have an appearance of faith but they have no faith. Interestingly, the enemy of genuine faith and commitment to Christ is first the devil (v.19), second the flesh (v.20), and third the world (v.22). In contrast (v.23) is the person who hears the Kingdom message and responds to it. They believe in Jesus and the gospel. Evidence of this genuine acceptance is fruit, spiritual growth and productivity.

Matt. 15:1-14. In this passage the "Pharisees and scribes" had come "from Jerusalem" to question Jesus. They raised a question about the behavior of Jesus' disciples, not His own behavior (v. 2). They objected to Jesus' disciples' disregard for the traditions of the elders, not to their disregard for the Mosaic Law. These traditions were the rabbinic interpretations of Old Testament law that had accumulated over the

centuries. For the Pharisees, these traditions carried almost as much authority, if not more authority, than the law itself. In verses 3-6, Jesus responded by making a basic distinction between God's commandments and the Jews' traditions. He charged the Pharisees with breaking the former to keep the latter by quoting Exodus 20:12 and 21:17 (v. 4). The sin the Pharisees were committing was 'dishonoring one's parents' by claiming they could not financially help their parents because they had dedicated a sum of money to God and were, therefore, unable to help their parents. To withhold from one's parents what one could give to "help" them, because of what was 'traditionally' taught, was greedy hypocrisy. Jesus called the Pharisees "hypocrites" for this practice (v. 7). Their hypocrisy consisted of making a show of commitment to God, while at the same time giving human "tradition" (v. 6) precedence over God's Word. Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 (vv. 8-9) when Isaiah told the Jews that they allowed external acts of worship to destroy genuine worship; they had displaced genuine heart-based worship with ritual-based worship. Jesus now changes the audience that He is talking to. In verses 10-11, Jesus turns His attention to the assembled crowd of people teaching them a lesson while at the same time giving the scribes and Pharisees a direct answer. Jesus addressed the 'tradition' of ceremonial (ritual) defilement when He said that eating certain foods does not make one unclean. This was a radical statement that went beyond even the Mosaic Law. Mark noted that when He said this Jesus declared all food clean (Mark 7:19); thereby cancelling out all of the food laws of the Old Testament. The purpose and point of Jesus' teaching was that to God, "what proceeds" from the heart ("out of the mouth") is more important than "what enters the mouth." Motives and attitudes are more significant than food and drink. In verses 12-14, Jesus privately talked with the disciples about His teaching (cf. Mark 7:17). Jesus' disciples, as all the Jews, held the Pharisees and teachers of the law in high regard. Since Jesus' words had "offended" the Pharisees, the disciples wanted to know why He had said those things to them. First, Jesus compared the unbelieving hypocritical Pharisees and scribes, to plants that God had not planted (cf. 13:24-30, 36-43) that God would uproot; they were worthless as leaders that were to be left alone. The Pharisees considered themselves to be guides of the spiritually blind (cf. Rom. 2:19). But to Jesus they were "blind guides of the blind." They failed to comprehend the real meaning of the Scriptures they took so much pride in understanding. This is the 'clear and present danger' of hypocrisy. To know the truth but to live otherwise, to know the true gospel but live for self. To be a hypocrite is a very dangerous position to be in.

Matt. 15:17-20. Jesus was teaching His disciples after His encounter with the Pharisees (cf. Matt. 15:1-14) where the disciples informed Him that His teaching had offended the Pharisees (cf. Matt. 15:12). Peter had asked Jesus for an explanation of His teaching. Jesus responded to Peter with this explanation. Jesus contrasted tangible food with intangible thoughts. He had listed a number of the Commandments and had proclaimed that the Pharisees were hypocrites and blind teachers (cf. Matt. 15:7, 14). Jesus' teaching was this: what a person is determines what he or she does and says (cf. 12:34-35; Rom. 14:14, 17; 1 Cor. 8:8; Heb. 9:10). True faith results in the heart being changed, which then directs the outward activity. False profession of faith results in no heart change and empty outward actions. The Pharisees and scribes had become so preoccupied with the externals that they failed to deal with what is required and important: a *genuine* relationship with the LORD through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus is more concerned about our heart than He is about the form of worship. Here Jesus clearly rejected the Pharisees and scribes as Israel's authentic interpreters of the Old Testament – the fundamentalist of the day who more concerned about the public image of obeying God's Word than the condition of the heart. The occupation with the outward religious ceremony, instead of inner transformation of the heart, has all too often attended all forms of religion and has plagued the church as well. When the heart is empty, it is judgmental. When the heart is full of sin, it is judgmental. When the heart is not submissive to the Word of God and Christ's commands it is judgmental and produces strife and many other sins (cf. Matt. 15:19).

Matt. 16:24-26. Jesus is talking to His disciples and was explaining what is involved in discipleship. He begins by telling them that discipleship will require self-denial in the most fundamental areas of individuality. Denial of self simply means saying no to self and yes to God; and that is a great challenge. Self-denial, as Jesus taught it, does not involve denying oneself of things (for example; dessert or ice cream or entertainment); it involves denying one's own authority over his or her life (cf. 4:19; John 12:23-26). Denying one's self is equivalent to becoming a slave to a master, to submit your will to the will of the master. This is challenging. To 'take up his cross' is just as challenging. "Taking up a cross / having a cross to bear" is not physical ailments or challenging circumstances in one's life. The Romans customarily compelled someone condemned to crucifixion to carry at least part of his own cross to the site of their own crucifixion, to their own death. This act gave public testimony to his being under and submissive to the rule he had opposed. This was both a punishment and a humiliation. Likewise, Jesus' disciples must publicly declare their submission to the Christ by being obedient to all, not some, of His commands. Humble submission, denying of self, public declaration is challenging. The three verbs in this challenge are significant. The first two, "deny" and "take up," are aorist imperatives indicating a decisive action. The last one, "follow," is a present imperative indicating a continuing action. How are we doing? Verses 25, 26, and 27 all begin with "For," meaning Jesus was arguing logically. Verse 25 restates the thought that Jesus previously expressed in 10:28. The Greek word translated "life" is *psyche*; meaning the whole person (cf. James 1:21; 5:20). Jesus was teaching that living for oneself now will result in a lost life later, whereas denying oneself now for Jesus' sake will result in a full life later. In verse 26, two rhetorical questions show the folly of living for one's self, for all the temporal things this world offers, such living comes at the expense of one's "life/soul." As Jesus used the word "life/soul," He is referring to one's existence; their *entire eternal being* is at stake – heaven or hell. Where is the focus of our life?

Matt. 18:4. Jesus announced His revolutionary words with a solemn introductory formula (cf. 5:18). He said it was necessary that His disciples change and "become" as little "children." Childlikeness was necessary for entrance into the messianic kingdom. Children have many characteristics that distinguish them from adults, but humility is clearly in view here. Young children have little concern about their personal prestige and position in relation to other people. The disciples had abandoned humility when they became concerned about their status in the kingdom (cf. 18:1). They needed to return to their former humble childlike attitude. The disciple who humbled himself as a little child would be the "greatest in the kingdom." Since Jesus was speaking to disciples who believed on Him (16:16), He used the polar expressions "not enter the kingdom" and "greatest in the kingdom" to clarify His point. His point was the importance of humility. Are we allowing pride to destroy humility in our life? It is either one or the other that controls our heart. What is controlling you?

Matt. 18:15-20. Jesus is explaining to his disciples what they should do if a believer has offended another believer. The context of this passage is sin that takes a believer away from walking in fellowship with Christ. If the believer has offended another believer or is living in such a way as to bring the testimony of Christ into disfavor, Christ commanded that individual to physically "go" ("*hupago*" meaning "to lead oneself, to depart, to go away to, get hence") to such a person to speak to them in truth and grace for the purpose of reconciling that one to Christ or to restore fellowship with believers. It is the responsibility of the believer who has observed the sin or who has been offended by the sin of another to "go to" them. They are to meet them face-to-face with humility and sensitivity, to admonish them in private. The text specifically calls out going face-to-face to speak to them, not to use a written word, which usually only exacerbates the issue. If the personal face-to-face meeting does not resolve the issue, then the one who initiated the "going" is to ask someone to come with them to witness the interaction between the two parties, not to intercede on the part of either party. If there is no

resolution of the issue at the second meeting, then the matter is to be brought before the church. If it is brought to the church, the matter is presented by the individual who has sinned and the individual that has confronted the other about their sin. Only after the two principal individuals have spoken will any other individuals speak – and they will speak only to what they have observed and have witnessed. The primary issues being referred to by this passage are issues of sin that relate to: 1) the individual's walk with Christ, or 2) to an individual's belief that is a departure from the truth, or 3) an individual's action that are impacting the unity of the believers within a church body, or the testimony of Christ to the community. It is within the context of the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation of a believer into fellowship that we find the promise that where two or three are gathered together Christ will be with them to hear and answer their prayer (that the offense be forgiven and restoration of the individual to the church would occur).

Matt. 18:21-22. Peter thought he was being very generous to forgive someone for offending him up to 7 times. The rabbi's taught that since God forgave Israel's enemies 3 times (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13) then that was all that was necessary for a person to forgive another person; to go beyond 3 times was presumptuous and unnecessary. Christ responded to tell Peter that he was to forgive 70 times 7; meaning that Peter was to forgive innumerable times, times without end. This was not a conditional forgiveness where the person came to ask for forgiveness, it was to be presented without condition. He went on to give Peter and the disciples an illustration of the forgiveness that they were to give in Matt. 18:23-35. All believers who have placed their faith in Christ have been forgiven by Him of a debt that we cannot pay – the forgiveness of sin that has condemned us to hell. Because that is true, then on what basis can we not forgive others for the inconsequential actions, words, injuries, or other offenses done against us? The closing to the illustration given by Christ on the issue of forgiveness in verses 34- 35 of Matthew 18 are significant and hard...because it indicates that if a person refuses to and will not forgive another person of an offense then they may not be saved. We do not know the heart of an individual only God knows, but Christ may have had this in view while He was teaching others during the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 7:21-23.

Matt. 18:23-35. Jesus, in His conclusion of teaching the disciples about genuine forgiveness, teaches the disciples, through the use of a parable, the foundation for forgiveness that is to be present in the life of the believer. The parable teaches that forgiveness given by a believer must be in direct proportion to the amount forgiven. The parable deals with repeated personal forgiveness and the reason for it. The servant in the parable served a king. The servant had great authority but the king had the greater authority. The servant had incurred a massive debt, a debt so large that he could never repay it. The king demanded payment of the debt but the servant pleaded for time and promised to repay the debt even though that was impossible for him to do. The king was moved by compassion for the servant's situation and forgave the servant's entire debt. This forgiveness was an act of grace of the king. The servant, after having been forgiven of a debt he could have never repaid, went from the presence of the king and proceeded to try to collect a very small (trivial) debt owed to him by a fellow servant. The servant who had been forgiven of an impossible-to-repay debt now would not forgive a small-trivial debt owed to him. The fellow servants observed the behavior of the servant who had been forgiven much and how he treated his fellow servant who owed him very little; and they reported the events to the king. The king called the forgiven servant into his presence and reminded him of the merciful treatment that he had received. Now, instead of forgiving him, the king turned the unforgiving servant over to the "torturers" (Gr. *basanistais*, cf. vv. 6, 8-9). The servant will now experience torture until he repaid his total debt, which he can never do. In other words, his torment will be endless / eternal. Jesus, in v. 35, drew the crucial comparisons in applying the parable to His disciples. He pictured God as forgiving graciously, yet punishing ruthlessly. God cannot forgive those who are devoid of compassion

and mercy because He is so full of these qualities Himself. Jesus did not mean that people can earn God's forgiveness by forgiving one another (cf. 6:12, 14-15). He was teaching that those whom God has forgiven must "forgive"—as God has forgiven them—from the "heart." There are four powerful lessons this parable teaches. One, God's forgiveness of "debts" is through His infinite grace. Two, it is an exhibition of self-will, foolishness and pride in rejecting that grace. Three, an eternal fate of eternal punishment awaits those who do not genuinely forgive. Four, God is "King" and believers are His "servants," therefore if the "King" can forgive His "servants" of all sin (a debt they can never repay), the "servants" must forgive others (a debt they can pay). Forgiveness demonstrates true humility, which is required for genuine salvation.

Matt. 22:37-40. "The Pharisees" have learned that "Jesus had silenced the Sadducees," meaning that the Sadducees would no longer oppose Him publicly. Consequently, the Pharisees decided to renew their attack against Him. In verses 35-36, a Pharisee "lawyer" (an "expert in the law," a teacher of the Old Testament who was particularly learned in both theology and law) subjected Jesus to a test to prove His quality. The Pharisees followed the "oral torah" that consisted of 613 commandments derived from the Mosaic Law; 248 positive and 365 negative. Since no one could possibly keep them all, they divided them into "heavy" (more important) and "light" (less important). The Pharisees taught that the Jews needed to give attention to all the laws but particularly the "heavy" ones. The Pharisee lawyer was asking Jesus which of the "heavy" ones Jesus considered the "heaviest." They were asking Jesus this question to create a trap to discredit Him. Jesus answered them by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and then Leviticus 19:18. The terms "heart," "soul," and "mind" are not distinct entities; they overlap each other and together they engage the whole person. Taken together, as they are here, the meaning is that we should "love ... God" preeminently and without reservation. We know this because Jesus loved His Father with: 1) His whole heart (cf. 4:1-11 – not yielding to Satan); 2) His whole soul (cf. 26:36-46 – His surrender of His life to do God's will); and 3) His whole mind (cf. 20:25 – He was a servant / that did not demand earthly security – cf. 8:20). "And", in v.39, is an explicative that indicates that the "second" greatest command is similar to the first in character and quality; meaning that we are also to "love" our fellow man ("neighbor") unselfishly (cf. 1 John 3:17-18). It is on the basis of these two commands that all the Old Testament Law and the Prophets hangs from or flows out of. All the other laws deal with specific applications of one or the other of these two commands. Without these two commandments the Old Testament lacks unifying summaries. Jesus had now answered three difficult questions. He had dealt with the relationship between religion and government (vv. 15-22); between this life and the next life (vv.23-33); and between God and our neighbors (vv.37-40). These are fundamental relationships that we, as believers, must deal with in our life. Do we ignore Jesus' teachings? Or do we seek to be found obeying His commands? This especially applies as we live our life with others – believers and unbelievers; as we are accountable to the LORD for our obedience to His commands.

Matt. 23:1-36. To set the context of this passage, there are three groups of people present in the temple courtyard. These are: the "disciples" of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees, Israel's spiritual leaders, and the crowds of ordinary Israelites. Jesus now turned from addressing the Pharisees (22:41), and proceeds to directly speak to the multitudes and His disciples. He directly addresses the hypocrisy of the Israel's spiritual leaders. "The scribes" were the official teachers of the Old Testament and the "Pharisees" were a theological party (sect) within Judaism.

Of note, some scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes. When Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees had "seated themselves" on Moses' "chair," He meant they viewed themselves as Moses' legal successors, possessing his authority. Jesus now employs the use of irony (vv. 3-4) to have it natural force: (A) the leaders presumed to take on Moses' teaching authority (v. 2- irony); (B) do what they say (v. 3a - not irony); (B`) do not do what they do (v. 3b - not irony) and (A`) their teaching merely binds

people (v. 4 – irony). In verses 5-7, Jesus identifies the hypocritical practices that the disciples and the people should not follow: wear big "phylacteries," which were small boxes of leather or parchment in which the Jews placed copies of four O. T. texts written on vellum, on their foreheads and or forearms with straps (cf. Ex. 13:9,16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18). In addition, scribes and Pharisees would "lengthen the tassels" they wore on the corners of their garments ones to imply great piety and to attract the admiration (v. 5). They also wanted to sit as close as possible to the law scrolls in the synagogues, known as the "chief seats" (v. 6). And they sought the title "rabbi," which means "my teacher" or "my master." because it set them off as distinctive and superior to others. In verses 8-10, Jesus was telling the disciples and the people not to seek after and love the title "Rabbi," because they had but *one* Teacher, God. They were to regard themselves as on the same level as followers of Christ, not as "rabbis." The term "fathers" (v. 9) referred to their fathers in the faith, the spiritual predecessors of the present generation (cf. 2 Kings 2:12), as the fathers in view were dead. Jesus was the only one worthy of the title of "Teacher." He used a third Greek word for "teacher" here, *kathēgetes*. He did so to connect it with other key words in this passage having to do with authoritative teaching: *ekathisan* ("they sat down," v. 2) and *kathedra* ("seat," v. 2). He is the only "One" who can sit in Moses' seat, and continue to interpret and reveal the will of God correctly and authoritatively (cf. 1:1; 16:16; 22:41-46). What Jesus was condemning was the seeking of and giving honor to men that was greater than what is appropriate since God is our true spiritual Father and Jesus is our real teacher and leader. We need to be watchful of this 'commendation and recognition' of pastors and leaders in the church today. In verses 11-12, Jesus returned to the subject of *humility* that He had stressed with His disciples earlier (cf. 18:4; 20:20-28). Jesus taught His disciples to be servants of others, not lords over them. Jesus now directed His attention toward the scribes and the Pharisees (vv. 13-36). He proceeds to announce a scathing indictment of them in seven parts. He introduced each indictment with the word "woe." Every one of the seven 'woes' states a fact that will be used to establish a verdict and judgment from the Messiah as Judge. In His declaration of "woes" Jesus spoke *of* the scribes and Pharisees, but He spoke *to* the crowds and His disciples. He was very critical of the Pharisees' hypocrisy; they professed to teach the Scriptures accurately but they did not live what they taught.

The first woe 23:13-14. "But" is the word used to introduce the transition from Jesus' teaching in vv. 1-12 to this condemnation. "Woe" can be a mild exclamation of compassion (24:19), a strong expression of condemnation (11:21), or both (18:7; 26:24). In this address condemnation is in view based on what Jesus said. However, we should not interpret this word as connoting vindictiveness or spitefulness; rather it is a judicial announcement of condemnation from Messiah as Judge. The scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites because they professed to teach God's will, but they kept people from entering the kingdom when it was God's will for His people to enter (cf. 18:6-7; 22:41-46). (Note: Most of the best and earliest copies of Matthew omit verse 14. Perhaps scribes inserted it later, since it occurs in the parallel passages (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47).

The second woe 23:15. The scribes and Pharisees were very zealous to get Jews to subscribe to their doctrinal convictions; their chief offense was bringing Jews under their corrupt theology. Jesus criticized them because of what they taught those whom they had 'converted,' the oral traditional interpretations and teachings of the rabbis. Those whom the Pharisees 'converted' to follow the oral traditions were the sons "of hell" (Gehenna) because that is where they would go because they would follow their teachers to hell (cf. 8:12; 13:38). Rather than leading them to heaven, the Pharisees and teachers of the law led them to hell.

The third woe 23:16-22. The third woe is a specific example of what Jesus condemned in the second woe (v. 15). By differentiating between what was binding in their oaths and what was not, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were encouraging evasive oaths that amounted to lying. Jesus' point was that people should tell the truth. Jesus condemned His critics for mishandling the Scriptures that they

claimed to defend and expound. Whenever a Jew took an oath, he connected it in some way with God. All their oaths were therefore binding. Jesus

The fourth woe 23:23-24. Jesus uses irony in this woe. The Mosaic Law required the Israelites to tithe grain, wine, and oil (Deut. 14:22-29). Jesus did not discourage diligent and through observance of the Law. He directed His condemnation to the Pharisees' failure to observe the more important "weightier" commands in the Law. Jesus chose the gnat (Gr. *qalma*) and the camel (Gr. *gamla*) as examples because of the contrast of their sizes and their similar sounding names. It is a characteristic of a hypocrite to be sticklers for details but blind to great principles.

The fifth woe 23:25-26. Jesus uses irony in this woe. Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees with this metaphor. The vessels represent the Pharisees and those they taught. They were to be clean vessels that God could use – internally and externally. But the Pharisees focused on the external ritual that came from observing the dietary and cleansing ordinances of the Law. But they ignored internal cleanliness and purity. Who would want to drink out of a cup that was clean on the outside but filthy dirty on the inside, no one? They put too much importance on ritual and external matters while ignoring the internal matters of a clean heart and mind. This again is the characteristic of a hypocrite.

The sixth woe 23:27-28. Jesus uses irony in this woe. The Jews who lived in Jerusalem whitewashed grave markers and tombs just before Passover to alert Jews coming to Passover of their presence. They did this so a Jew would not unknowingly touch one, become unclean, and therefore be ineligible to participate in the feast. Jesus compared these "whitewashed" monuments ("tombs") to the Pharisees. Both appeared attractive ("beautiful on the outside"), but both also contaminated people who contacted them (i.e., through their teaching, which "inwardly" was "full of hypocrisy and lawlessness"). Jesus' mention of "lawlessness" is significant. The Pharisees prided their detailed observance of the Law (Gr. *nomos*) but it was their failure to understand and apply the Law correctly made them lawless (Gr. *anomia*). *Anomia* is a general word for wickedness in the N.T., so Jesus was telling the Pharisees' that their approach to the Law was *wicked*. Hypocrisy is wickedness in action.

The seventh woe 23:29-36. The seventh woe Jesus declared upon the Pharisees was based on their treatment of Him. By building the "monuments" to "the prophets" and other "righteous" people that their forefathers had martyred, the Pharisees were saying that they would not have killed them if they had been alive then (vv. 29-30). Jesus then called them out, "Therefore / Consequently" by drawing the conclusion that they were "the sons of those who murdered the prophets;" meaning they were the descendants of those who killed the prophets more than they knew, not just physically but also spiritually (v. 31). Jesus made this conclusion on the basis that they were plotting to kill Him, the greatest Prophet (21:38-39, 46). In verse 32, Jesus tells the Pharisees that God will tolerate only so much sin, then He will act in judgment (cf. Gen. 6:3, 7; 15:16; cf. 1 Thess. 2:14-16). Israel had committed many sins and incurred much guilt by their murdering the prophets (v. 32). This meant that when the Pharisees killed Jesus and His disciples the cup of God's wrath would be full, and He would respond in wrath. In verse 33, Jesus condemned the Pharisees to "hell" for their failure to accept Him. Because the Jews had rejected the former prophets, Jesus would send them additional "prophets," "wise men," and teachers ("scribes") (v. 34). These men the Jews would also reject, filling up the measure of their guilt to the full (v. 32). Jesus went on to say in v.35 that the ones responsible for the death of "Abel," the first righteous person murdered (Gen. 4:8), through "Zechariah" (the person Jesus used to represent all the martyrs from Genesis to Malachi) would add the last measure of guilt that would result in the outpouring of God's wrath for all those murders. In closing and with a strong assertion of certainty, Jesus predicted that God's judgment would "fall" (v. 35) on the "generation" of Jews that rejected Him. This is Jesus' formal, culminating rejection of Israel for rejecting Him as her Messiah. The generation of Jews who rejected Him as the Messiah because of the teachings of the Pharisees would not see or enter into the Kingdom, instead they would suffer judgment (v.36); meaning a whole generation of people would suffer because the leaders acted for the people, and the people did not abandon their leaders to

embrace Jesus as their Messiah. Notice, notice that it is only *that* "generation" that Jesus that would be so judged, not the entire Jewish race. God is not finished with Israel (Rom. 11:1). He postponed the kingdom but He did not cancel it.

The Pharisees, in their attempt to legally follow the Law, had replaced the Law with oral traditions that manifested themselves in ritualistic external observances without a change of heart. They claimed to be the closest to God when in reality they were actually the farthest from God. Hypocrisy is the real enemy Jesus addresses as He pronounced the seven "woes" upon the Pharisees. Based upon this scripture, such judgment will occur on hypocrites within the church today (cf. 1 Peter 2:1). What care we should be taking not to be hypocritical – saying one thing and doing another.

Matt. 25:14-30. Jesus is answering the question that the disciples asked him in Matt: 24:3. This parable is a portion of His answer to their question: "what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus instructs the disciple the need to be faithful until His coming. This parable explains what Jesus regards as faithfulness. It centers upon the believer using what God has entrusted him or her with to advance His interests in the world. It involves making a spiritual profit with the deposit God has entrusted each believer with (cf. James 2:14-26). This teaching is about one faithfully working for the Lord while He is gone, before His return. Jesus introduces the parable in v.14. In the parable, the master taking the journey turned over his money to three of his slaves. As the tradition of the day was understood, the disciples understood the slaves could and would share in the profits if they managed well what they had received. In verse 15, the master entrusted his slaves with talents to work with. At the time of Christ, a talent was a unit of exchange. Its value varied as a talent was a measure of weight, between 58 and 80 pounds or it was a coin worth about 6,000 denarii. The earning power of a talent coin was the equivalent of about 16 and a half years wages. By any calculation, the worth of the talents entrusted to the slaves by the master in this parable was great. The master distributed his resources according to his evaluation of the ability of each slave. We should understand the talents in this parable to represent all the gifts that God entrusts to those who place their faith in Christ – from the days of the disciples until Christ's Second Coming. "Immediately," the slaves entrusted with "five" and "two talents" began to put their money to use for their master (vv. 16-18). This shows their faithfulness to their duty to make money for him. One slave, however, was unwilling to work – he was focused on doing what he wanted to do rather than work for the master while he was gone. He buried the money so he could return it without loss to the master upon his return. He also buried the money because there was no risk involved in losing it. This occurs today when people are more concerned about what they want to do then risking loss – they have no concern about being accountable to the LORD when they stand before Him. In verses 19-23, Jesus notes that the master has been gone "a long time," but the time has come that the master arrives and settles the accounts with the slaves. We understand this to be the time between His ascension and His second coming (cf. 24:48; 25:5). This applies to us today because of our anticipation of being with Christ during the Kingdom. The first slave received a verbal commendation from his master, increased responsibility under his master, and joy with his master (v. 21). The second slave received the same verbal commendation as the first slave, and he received increased responsibility and joy commensurate with his God-given capacity (v. 23). The rewards the two slaves received from the master gives us an example of the reception and rewards we will receive for being faithful in our service for Christ. In verses 24-25, the third slave began his accounting by telling his master that he was a "hard" man; meaning the master was cruel and ruthless because he exploited the labor of others to 'reap and gather' what he had no right to claim as his own. This slave felt that his master would not share many of the rewards of his labor with him, but would punish him severely if he failed. He ignored his responsibility to his master and his obligation to discharge his duty because he was more interested in what he could do for himself. He actually blamed the master for his own failure. This is often what hypocrites do; they blame others for their failures. The master gave him a scathing

condemnation; instead of being "good and faithful," he was "wicked" and "lazy" – he was unfaithful (vv.26-27). The master used the slave's own words to condemn him (vv. 24-25). The master told him that he could have at least put his master's money into the hands of bankers to earn some 'interest.' Risk is at the heart of discipleship and faithfulness; something is always occurring to cause us to question. By playing it safe nothing is achieved, which is condemned. The master took back "the talent" he had entrusted to him (v. 28-29). He declared him "worthless" (v. 30) because he had failed to do his master's will with what the master gave him to use. This resulted in the loss of his resources (v.28), rejection by the master ("throw out the worthless slave"), banishment from his presence ("outer darkness"), tears ("weeping"), and "gnashing of teeth" (v.30). Does the unfaithful slave represent a believer or an unbeliever? In view of the punishment he received, he is an unbeliever (cf. 13:12). He was a "slave" of the master in that the master had given him opportunities and resources with which to serve him, which God gives all people. The slave's attitude toward the master shows that he really did not know him. This concludes the section of the Olivet Discourse in which Jesus taught His disciples their responsibilities in view of His coming and the end of the present age (24:32—25:30). He stressed the importance of vigilance with four parables (24:32-44), and the importance of prudence and faithfulness with three parables (24:43—25:30). We as believers in Christ we should cultivate all these qualities because He can come at any moment. Are we faithful? Is your faith demonstrated by your service? Are you looking forward to be accountable before Christ?

Matt. 26:41. Jesus was in Gethsemane with His disciples. He has asked Peter, James and John to go with Him as He prayed. In verse 41, Jesus returned to the disciples only to find them "sleeping." He wakened them and addressed His question, "could you not watch with Me one hour?" to Peter as the disciples' representative (v.40). In this verse Jesus urged them to remain spiritually alert (cf. 24:32-44), and to continue "praying" for strength to withstand the "temptation" that He had told them was coming (vv. 31-35). The contrast between "the flesh" and "the spirit" is not between the sinful human nature and the Holy Spirit (as in Gal. 5:17), but between man's volitional strength and his physical weakness (cf. v. 35). We often want to do the right thing but find that we need supernatural assistance to accomplish it (cf. Rom. 7:15-25).

Matt. 27:3-5. Prior to this event being recorded, Peter has sinned by words under the pressure of the moment (cf. 26:69-75), and for him there was the opportunity for a new start (cf. John 21:15-17). However, Judas has sinned in deed, in a premeditated, settled course of action (cf. Mark 14:43-45) which has now resulted in Christ's death (cf. 27:45-50) and now he wishes he could have undone (cf. 27:3-10). In verse 3, Judas 'felt remorse' because he realized that he had "condemned" an innocent man to death. His remorse (Gr. *metamelomai* - annoyance at the consequences of an act or course of acts, and chagrin at not having known better) resulted in a kind of repentance (Gr. *metanoeo*) that is feeling sorry. Judas was sorry for what he had done, and tried to make amends, but he never believed that Jesus was the Son of God (cf. Acts 1:16-19). Judas' testimony to Jesus' innocence is an important part of Matthew's witness that Jesus was the Messiah (v. 4) and the response of the Sanhedrin proved their guilt (v.4). Judas had betrayed "innocent blood," and they condemned innocent blood. Judas "threw" the 30 "pieces of silver" that he had received for betraying Jesus into the temple. Then he went out "and hanged himself." The chief priests properly refused to receive the silver into the temple "treasury" (cf. Deut. 23:17-18). Here again, the Pharisee priests appear scrupulous about ritual observance of the Law, while at the same time they failed to do what is right by defending the innocence of Jesus. They decided to use the money for a public project; a graveyard for foreigners (Gentiles). The place they bought had evidently been an area of land from which potters obtained their clay, but which had become depleted and had little value. The place of his suicide received the name "Field of Blood" after Judas' death. This is a clear, real-life example of the difference between 'worldly

sorrow' (being sorry) and genuine repentance (II Cor. 7: 10). Take care to genuinely repent for sin, not just be sorry for sin.

Matt. 28:20. Jesus closes His ministry with the disciples by giving them the Great Commission. They were to share the gospel with all peoples and nations (v.19). They were to disciple those who placed their faith in Christ (v. 19). Discipling involves "teaching" followers to observe and do everything ("all") that Jesus "commanded" His disciples (v.20). The focus of discipling is Jesus and His commands, which were recorded in the New Testament that came through Jesus and is therefore also authoritative (Acts 1:1-2). "All" of this teaching remains authoritative forever (24:35). As followers of Christ, we must not just *understand* what Jesus has commanded, we *obey* it. Matthew ends with a factual promise; Jesus will "always" be "with" His own as they carry out His will. "Always" literally means "the whole of every day." Jesus promised to be with us every day forever. The Great Commission explains what Jesus has called believers to do between His departure from the earth and His return to establish His kingdom on earth. How are we, as believers, doing?

Mark 3:1-6. Jesus has been interacting with the Pharisees as they continued to look for ways to trap Him into a position against the Law. This is the last of the five conflict episodes that Mark has recorded (cf. 2:1-11, 13-17, 18-22, 23-28). The following incident demonstrated Jesus' sovereign authority over the Sabbath. This event happened on a different "Sabbath" than the one just described in 2:23-28 (cf. Luke 6:6). As Jesus entered into the synagogue, He encounters a man with a "withered hand," meaning a hand that he was unable to use due to disease, accident or defect (v. 1). The Pharisees watched Jesus very closely in order to find a reason to "accuse Him" (v. 2). Specifically, they were looking for an opportunity to charge Him with a Sabbath violation, which was a capital offense (Exod. 31:14-17). Rather than avoiding a conflict, Jesus created one so He could teach a lesson (v. 3-4). He asked the man with a withered hand to come forward; and asked the Pharisees if it was unlawful to 'do good' and 'save life' on the Sabbath. His questions raised the issue of Sabbath observance from the level of what was legal to the level of what was moral. What is moral is that which is humane. By healing the man "on the Sabbath," Jesus was doing "good," whereas the Pharisees were doing "evil" by trying to trap Him; and they publicly acknowledged that by staying silent. Verse 5 is a fascinating verse. Jesus "looked around" for someone who would respond to His question; He was looking for a proper response from men (the Pharisees) who were students and teachers of His Word. (Imagine Jesus' 'look' – see how Peter reacted to Jesus' 'look' – cf. Luke 22:61) Jesus looked with anger.

This is the only place in the New Testament that stated that Jesus was angry (Gr. *orge*, which describes an abiding, settled habit of mind). This was a case of righteous indignation in the presence of unrepentant evil in a hard heart. This is the only account of this miracle that records Jesus' compassion for the objects of His anger. The tenses of the Greek verbs in verse 5 indicate that Jesus was angry momentarily (aorist tense), but His attitude of compassion was persistent (present tense). In this verse we are shown the way to be angry and not sin; that is to be angry at nothing but sin. However, it is important to note that Jesus was grieved by the hardness of the Pharisees heart. They were His enemies yet He had compassion on them even in His anger. Jesus then asks the man with the withered hand to stretch it out and the hand of the man was restored to full function, just as his other hand. Since Jesus did not use anything but His word to heal the man, His enemies could not charge Him with performing work on the Sabbath. Verse 6 is the climax of the entire set of confrontations that Jesus has had with the Pharisees (2:1—3:6). Faced with the most convincing arguments and actions about Jesus' deity, the Pharisees chose to reject them. Now their anger is complete and they take steps in planning to kill Him. Why - because He constituted a threat to their authority. This is a characteristic action of a hypocrite. Hypocrites desire that bad things happen to those who expose their hypocrisy – they defame those who expose them, sometimes even to the point of desiring to kill them.

Mark 6:26. Herod had great respect for John (cf. 6:20). But Herod had compromised his authority by granting a request to Herodias' daughter at his birthday party (vv.22-23). She asked that John the Baptist be beheaded (v.25). Herod reacts to that request with great sorrow. The only other time Mark used the Greek word *perilupos*, translated "very sorry" or "greatly distressed," was in 14:34 where it describes Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. His pride got him in trouble, as Pilate's did later. Both of these rulers sacrificed a righteous and holy man on the altar of their personal popularity.

Mark 7:1-23. Jesus was in Galilee when a delegation of Pharisees from Jerusalem came to investigate Jesus (cf. 3:22). When they arrived, they found some of Jesus' disciples eating with "unwashed hands," meaning they were eating with hands that had not gone through the accepted purification rituals before eating. In verses 3-4, Mark explains the Pharisaic ritual of 'washing' hands according to the oral "traditions of the elders," which included other things pertaining to the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels and couches. The Pharisees asked Jesus for an explanation of His disciples' conduct because, as their teacher (v. 5). In replying, Jesus did not explain or justify His disciples' conduct. Instead, He addressed the issue of the source of religious authority (vv. 6-13) and the nature of defilement (vv. 14-23). Jesus responded to them by calling them "hypocrites." They professed to honor God with their behavior, but they really did not honor Him in their hearts. Jesus quoted to them Isa. 29:13 because they stressed human "precepts" to the exclusion of principles. In verses 7-8, Jesus differentiated the commands of God from the traditions of men. The "traditions" had established 'dos and don'ts' to protect the Law, but instead of protecting the Law their legalistic requirements distorted and even contradicted the law. This 'legalism' makes 'rules' that the Word of God has not made, but men end up treating them as equally authoritative as God's Word. In verses 9-13, Jesus provides an example of how the Pharisees used 'traditions' to set aside the Law. They professed to honor "Moses," through whom God commanded the Israelites to "honor" their parents and threatened disobedience to this law with death (Exod. 20:12; 21:17). Honoring parents manifests itself in financial support and practical care if necessary. However, 'traditions' permitted people to declare something they owned as *dedicated to God* ("*corban*," a gift devoted to God), which freed them from giving what they owned or owed to someone else, even their parents. In verses 14-23 Jesus continued His response to the Pharisees by focusing on the particular practice that they had objected to (v. 5); the issue of defilement. The question of what constituted defilement was very important. What Jesus had to say was so important that He urged "the crowd" present to "listen" carefully to His words (vv. 14, 16). Verse 15 states the general principle of what does not and what does cause defilement; food does not but thoughts do (cf. Isa. 29:13). Upon stating the principle (v.15) Jesus went into a "house" with His disciples. There they asked Him a question that indicated they had not understood what He meant. What He had said was revolutionary when He said it. They probably could not believe that He really meant what He had said. Jesus answers their question with two basic questions (v. 18-19); Does something coming into man defile him? Does something entering into the body and exiting going to defile him? The answer was clearly no, because Jesus clearly stated to them that what comes out of a man's heart is what defiles the man (v. 20). To drive that point home, Jesus declares to the disciples that all foods are clean because food does not defile the man; the man's heart defiles the man because what defiles a man is his own actions, which are the product of his own heart. The heart, not food, is what defiles a person (v.20-23). He gets very specific with the disciples here so they can understand what he is teaching. A person's defiled heart is expressed in both what a person says and what a person does (cf. Matt. 15:11). A defiled heart generates evil thoughts and intentions; and when united with the act of one's will it generates evil thoughts, words and actions. Jesus lists 12 specific items so the disciples would understand Him. The list of sins proceeds from six actions (plural nouns) to six attitudes (singular nouns; cf. Rom. 1:29-31; Gal. 5:19-23). The actions are: 1) malice – evil thoughts and wickedness, 2) adultery, 3) sexual immorality, 4) murder, 5) theft, and 6) greed. The attitudes are: 1)

wickedness, 2) deceit, 3) lewdness, 3) envy and jealousy, 4) slander / blasphemy, 5) pride / arrogance, and 6) foolishness / folly – moral and spiritual insensitivity. It is interesting that the Greek word (*hyperephania*), translated “arrogance / pride,” is only used once in the N.T and it means “boastfully exalting oneself above others who are viewed with scornful contempt.” The order in the text is true to life. Sin proceeds from the heart (human nature) to the thoughts (human mind) to actions (human deeds).

Mark 8:34-38. Jesus was with His disciples as they journeyed to towns within Caesarea Philippi. He tells them that He would suffer many things, be rejected by the religious leaders, be killed and then resurrect after three days (v. 32). Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him for His message, which Jesus responded to in verse 33. Jesus now proceeds to explain to His disciples that suffering would not only be His destiny but theirs too; and He invited the people who followed them to listen (v.34). He states that there are two requirements of those who follow Him that are bound together: one – to deny yourself (meaning to disown, not just one's sins, but one's self, to turn away from the idolatry of self-centeredness); two – to follow Him faithfully and publicly—even though that would mean shame, suffering, and perhaps physical death (cf. 1:17-18; 2:14; 10:21, 52). In verse 35, Jesus explains the consequences of the people who chose to follow Him versus those who do not. Jesus used the word "life" (Gr. *psyche*) in two ways in this verse. In its first occurrence in each phrase, "life" refers to one's physical life. In the second part of each phrase, "it" means the essential person (the soul/spirit) that continues to exist beyond the grave. The same holds true for the word “lose.” In the first phrase, "lose it" means the loss of *reward* for believers, and the loss of *salvation* for unbelievers. In the second phrase, "loses his life" means loss of physical life—which can include physical suffering, loss of health and or well-being, or literal death. Jesus was instructing the disciples and those listening that if a person wants to retain control of their life now, they will suffer the loss in the future (meaning those who pursue temporal comfort and acceptance of the world will not find eternal life). Conversely, if a person will relinquish control of their life to follow God's will faithfully, they will gain something of greater worth (meaning those who pursue Christ and the gospel will find eternal life). It is foolish to preserve one's comforts now, because by doing so one sacrifices something of much greater value—that God would otherwise give them (vv.36-37). The Greek word “*psyche*” in these verses means the essential person (soul/spirit). The "whole world" includes: earthly possessions, position, pleasure, and power—all that the world can provide. The choice that a person makes is irrevocable. Jesus closes His teaching with a challenge in verse 38. "Whoever" (meaning unbelievers or believers - cf. v. 34) is “ashamed of Me and My words” will suffer loss. For unbelievers it is the loss of their life for eternity. For believers it is the loss of reward (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13). Being ashamed of Jesus and rejecting His claims and calling has serious consequences. In verse 38 is the first explicit reference in Mark to Jesus' return in glory at His Second Coming. Robert Gundry wrote: "... why should you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus? (1) Because you will save your life for eternity even though you lose it now. Here is a savings account with better returns than you ever dreamed of (v 35). (2) Because your life is much more valuable than the whole world; so, do not be gulled into making a foolish deal (v 36). (3) Because once you have lost your life, there is no buying it back, no matter how much you offer. The opportunity to invest in futures is now; do not let it slip by (v 37). (4) Because when the tables are turned on this hostile world, when the glorious Son of man comes with the approval of God his Father and with the holy angels as his army, you will want to be on his side, not on the world's side (v.38).”

Mark 9:24. Jesus was ministering to a crowd when a man came to Him with his son who possessed with a demon. The man asks Jesus to heal his son because the disciples could not (v. 18). The man asks a statement question to Jesus in verse 22; “If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus replied that it was not a question of *if I can*, but of *if you believe I can*. The issue was not how

strongly the father believed Jesus *would* heal his son but rather in whom the father had put his in. This is an important distinction because it is not the *amount* of trust that the person coming for help has, rather than the *object* of that trust. The father voiced his confidence in Jesus, imperfect as it was, and asked Jesus to strengthen his faith. The father declares that he *believes* and yet acknowledges that he has *unbelief*. While that seems to be a contradicting statement, it is often the position we are in, a believer whose faith was weak. The father admitted to Jesus that his faith was mixed with doubt, so he pleaded with Jesus to help him have the faith that Jesus wanted of him. Do we cry out for the LORD to increase our faith?

Mark 9:43-48. Jesus is teaching the disciples about dealing with sin in their lives. Jesus compared the members of the human body to the agents of sinful activities. The language Jesus uses is hyperbolic, but the sins He described are real sins. He did not want His disciples to perform *physical* surgery, but *spiritual* surgery, to excise the sin within themselves. The temptation to sin comes to us through our hands (what we do), our feet (where we go), and our eyes (what we see) primarily. The threefold repetition highlights the importance of the warning (cf. Rom. 6:12-13). We, as believers, should take prompt and decisive action against anything that might lead us away from Jesus. "Hell" translates the Greek word *gehenna*, the transliteration of the Hebrew phrase *ge hinnom* (lit. "Valley of Hinnom"). This valley, just south of Jerusalem, is where apostate Jews formerly offered human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (cf. Jer. 7:31; 19:5-6; 32:35). King Josiah terminated this practice and converted the site into a city dump where rubbish burned constantly (2 Kings 23:10). The fire never went out at Jerusalem's *gehenna*, and the worms that fed on the garbage never died off; therefore, *gehenna* is a picture of the place of eternal punishment.

Mark 11:25-26. Christ addresses the topic of forgiveness with His disciples. He has challenged them to have faith in God (v. 22) when they pray (v.24). He now addresses their heart condition for their prayer – forgiveness. A forgiving heart toward others (believer and unbeliever alike) is essential to effective prayer. If one has anything against someone else, such as a grudge, ill-thoughts, offenses, etc. they are to forgive them. There are no conditions on this forgiveness, it is to be given whether one asks for it or not. This is a requirement for prayer to be heard; this is done so the Father may forgive the sins of the one who is praying. The LORD's forgiveness toward a believer and the believer's forgiveness to others are inseparable. Though God's forgiveness of sin is not based on one's forgiving others, a believer's forgiveness of others is based on the fact that they have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32). One who has accepted the LORD's provision for sin is expected to forgive others, just as He has forgiven them. What is in view here is not one losing their salvation, if they have truly placed their faith in Christ, but it is about God refusing to bless believers because they refuse to forgive others of offenses against them. Successful prayer requires both faith and forgiveness (Matt. 6:14-15). Personal fellowship with God is not possible if one refuses to forgive others. If a person does not forgive others, he forfeits God's favor. Consideration must be given here to the implication of not forgiving someone who has offended you - it is significant – what are the consequences of not forgiving? We know that it causes prayer not to be heard by God in our daily life, but does it apply to eternal life? Matt. 7:21-23 and 18:23-25 may shed light on this, and it is important to study all of scripture to correctly understand these verses.

Luke 3:8-9. In this passage, Luke writes about the message of John the Baptist. John called his hearers to change their minds about their relationship to God, and to demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance with righteous conduct (vv. 7-14). John the Baptist sensed that the reason people were coming to him was for their safety (v.7). He was skeptical of the motivation of those who were seeking him, as he addressed them "Brood of vipers!" He challenged them not to believe that they should not believe that Abraham's righteousness was applied to them so they were, by right of birth, going to

heaven (v. 8). John challenged them to seek genuine repentance and start bearing “the fruits of repentance.” Righteous behavior would prove true repentance. This passage is significant for it separates repentance from what it produces, and also expresses a link between repentance and fruit. One leads to the other. Genuine repentance is a change of perspective that transforms a person's thinking and approach to life resulting in righteous behavior.

Luke 6:31-38. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, states as a command that “what you want done to you, you are to do to other men.” This is the duty of a believer and it is expressed best in loving our enemies, but it applies to all people, especially to fellow believers. We, as believers, are to be willing and ready to sacrifice ourselves and what we have for the welfare of others. Jesus supported that command by teaching about the general concept of loving (v.32), then moved to the concrete expression of love of doing good (v.33), then to the specific example of lending (v.34). His point was that believers should not only love their enemies, but also love and express their love to their friends—more than other people do. The seven actions that Jesus commanded believers to do in verses 27-31: *(1) Love your enemies; (2) do good to those who hate you; (3) bless those who curse you; and (4) pray for those who mistreat you. Furthermore, (5) do not retaliate when others attack you; (6) give freely to those who ask of you; and (7) treat others the way you would want them to treat you;* is the expression of the love for others that is to be the characteristic of a believer. This is the type of love that God shows us as believers and enables the disciple to demonstrate (v. 35). As believers, we are to do these things with no thought of receiving back. That is how God gives, and it is therefore how His children (‘believers’) should give. Believers publicly demonstrate their relationship with Jesus by their behavior. Believers are to behave like Christ behaved. Mercy toward all people should typify the believer’s attitudes and actions—despite the ingratitude, wickedness, and antagonism of other people – believer or unbeliever (v.36). Examples of mercy are found in verses 37 and 38. The first two examples are negative and the second two are positive. A judgmental attitude is not merciful. However, some judging is necessary, so Jesus clarified that He specifically meant “condemning other people.” Judgment and condemnation are God's functions, not man's. Rather, a merciful person pardons (forgives) others. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was addressing interpersonal behavior, not the judicial system. Giving to others is also merciful behavior. What a person sows, he or she will reap, for evil or for good (cf. Gal. 6:7). Believers will discover that they will receive back the same treatment that they have given out. If you want to see what you are showing to others, all you have to do is look at what you are receiving from others. This is an unescapable truth; and many times, pride in our life will rationalize this truth and in so doing we will deceive ourselves that this is not true in our life.

Luke 6:39-45. In this passage Jesus addresses the character that impacts choices and conduct. He teaches the disciples by using five parables. In verse 39, Jesus compares His disciples to blind guides. If a disciple is “blind” (unrighteous), he will not be able to help other “blind” non-disciples find their way (to become righteous); which will result in both the disciple and non-disciple stumbling. The disciples could become blind guides if they did not follow Jesus' instructions. Jesus then compares a disciple of His to a teacher (v. 40). He noted that a pupil does not have more knowledge than his teacher; which usually means that the pupil will reflect and model the teacher’s knowledge and/or actions. Therefore, the people whom the disciples would instruct in the truth that Jesus had taught them would not normally advance any further than the disciples. Therefore, it was imperative that the disciples pay careful attention to Jesus' teachings apply them. In verses 41-42, Jesus taught the disciples that it would be easy for them to criticize those he was instructing and fail to realize his own faults. This is not only dangerous; it is hypocritical to try to help a learner overcome his deficiencies without first dealing with one's own failings. If that was the case, his sin would be greater than his learner's ignorance. William Barclay wrote: “That simply means that we have no right to criticize at all, because there is so much bad in the best of

us and so much good in the worst of us that it ill becomes any of us to find fault with the rest of us.” It is important that we apply the truths Jesus teaches to our own lives *before* we try to teach them to other people. If we don’t, then we are judgmental. In verses 43-44, Jesus taught the disciples that the character of their heart produces fruit that all can see. A person of bad character cannot produce good conduct (cf. Matt. 12:33-35). As a pupil follows the example of his teacher (v. 40), so "fruit" from a tree follows the nature of that tree. The people whom the disciples teach will reflect the life of the disciple. Conduct follows character as surely as fruit follows root, for "good" and for "bad" (cf. James 3:12). In verse 45, Jesus highlights the ‘conduct follows character’ principle for out of the heart are the issues of life (cf. Prov. 4:23). The man's treasury is his heart. What makes the heart good is knowing Christ and following His commands. The "good man" has chosen to follow Jesus faithfully as His disciple, but the "evil man" has decided to pursue worldly wealth and happiness. A person's speech expresses what “fills his heart.” What is your conduct showing? What is the condition of your heart and the character of your person?

Luke 7:36-50. This incident appears only in Luke. Jesus had accepted an invitation to eat at a Simon, a Pharisee's house (v. 36). It should be noted that scripture does not indicate that Simon offered Jesus services or means to wipe His feet, which was the custom of the day to be offered to someone who was invited to one's house. After He arrived at Simon's house and was eating, a 'sinful woman' arrives and sets at His feet (v. 37). Social custom allowed needy people to visit such meals and to partake of some of the leftovers. The woman was a member of the social class called 'sinners,' people whom the Pharisees regarded as treating the law loosely. The woman carried with her a liquid perfume was in an expensive "alabaster vial." She stood behind Jesus' feet weeping (v.38). Jesus was probably "reclining" on a divan to eat, with His head and arms close to the table, and His feet stretched out away from it, as was customary at important meals. She knelt down and began to wash His feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair; and kissed His feet and anointed them with oil. Scripture does not tell us why she was weeping, why she was washing Jesus' feet with her hair and why she anointed Jesus' feet with oil. Kissing the feet was a common mark of deep reverence that rabbis often received. By constantly "kissing" Jesus' "feet," the woman was expressing her affection, respect, and submission (cf. 1 Sam. 10:1). By letting her hair down, she was doing something that was extremely looked down upon in public at that time for various reasons. And her anointing His feet with oil was also looked down upon because normally people anointed a person's head, not the feet. In verse 39, Simon spoke to himself (thought to himself) that Jesus could not be a prophet, since if He were He would not permit a sinful woman to do what this woman was doing. Jesus then addressed him Simon by telling him that he had something to say to him (v.40). Simon had no reason to expect Jesus' words to him to have anything to do with what he had been thinking; but he learned that Jesus knew exactly what was in his heart (cf. 5:22). Jesus proceeded to tell His host a parable about "two debtors" (vv. 41-42). Both men owed considerable debts to a creditor; but one's debt was 10 times greater than the others. The creditor forgave both of them their debts. Jesus asked Simon 'which of them will love' the creditor more? Jesus regarded "love" as being the evidence of the debtor's expression of gratitude. The answer to Jesus' question may have been obvious to Simon, though he seems to have known very little about forgiveness and love (v.43). He replied with reluctance, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more,' allowing the possibility that the answer might not be as obvious as it appeared to be. Jesus told him that he was right. Now Jesus turns His focus to Simon and the woman (vv. 44-46). Jesus made the woman the focus of His parable by contrasting her with Simon. The woman was guilty of sins of commission, but Simon was guilty of sins of omission. All the things that Simon had failed to do for Jesus, were common courtesies that hosts frequently extended their guests. The woman, however, had gone far beyond courtesy, and had made unusual sacrifices for Jesus out of love. In verse 47, Jesus draws a conclusion from what He had just said. The woman's great love showed that she had appreciated great forgiveness. Her love was the result of,

not the reason for, her forgiveness. Because Simon trivialized his sin by making little of it, he did not understand what God's forgiveness meant. In verse 48, Jesus confirms to the woman what had already taken place by assuring her that 'your sins have been forgiven and stand forgiven.' She had obtained God's forgiveness sometime before she entered Simon's house. Jesus was not now imparting forgiveness to her for the first time, but was commenting on her "forgiven" condition. The sinful woman's acts of love sprang from her sense of gratitude for having received forgiveness. Some of the people present mistakenly assumed that Jesus was forgiving the woman's sins (v. 49). Jesus concludes the incident by giving the woman a further word of encouragement and clarification (v. 50). It was her "faith," not her love that had resulted in her salvation, of which her forgiveness was a part. Consequently, she could depart "in peace" about her condition, even though others might continue to regard her as a "sinner." This woman was able to "go" into a lasting condition of "peace" because of her "faith" (cf. Rom. 5:1). Just as the woman, we have been forgiven much when we accept Christ as our personal Savior. We stand as a hypocritical Pharisee if we cannot forgive someone of an offense, because we have been forgiven much. Jesus' parable of the two debtors and His comments to Simon and the woman teach a number of lessons: (a) Salvation is the result of God's gracious work received by faith. (b) God graciously forgives the debt of sin that no one can repay. (c) Peace with God is possible because of the forgiveness of sins. (d) The more one understands forgiveness, the more love he will have for Christ. (e) Humble service stems from a heart of gratitude for God's grace.

Luke 9:23-25. Jesus has just fed the 5,000 and Peter has declared that Jesus is "The Christ of God: (v.20). Now Jesus talks to the disciples about the consequences for those who choose to follow Him. In verse 23, Jesus tells them that if they 'come after' Him (become His disciple) they must deny themselves and willingly obey His commandments, serve one another and suffer, perhaps even die, for Him. Denying self is more fundamental than denying things. It involves forsaking one's personal ambitions and desires in order to fulfill the will of God. It means living for His sake rather than our own. Carrying one's own "cross" means to bear the reproach and burden associated with one's chosen way of life. To do this "daily" meant enduring these things as a disciple of Jesus, day after day, having no prospect of release in this life. Taking up the cross daily will create consequences, which will involve loss (vv. 24-25) and shame (v. 26) for them. In verses 24-26, the reality of taking up the cross daily is defined. The first contrast is to give up what the world can provide to gain what God can provide. It involves sacrificing the temporal things of this world with the faith that God will abundantly reward any sacrifice that you have made to follow Him. It means to give up your own earthly ambitions and desires in order to gain something later. The second contrast is to give up temporal glory now in order to gain glory in the future. Not long before this the disciples had been actively engaged in telling the nation about the Messiah and His kingdom program (cf. 9:1-6). No doubt many thought the disciples were throwing their lives away. They had given up their sources of income and were in danger because they associated with Jesus. Here Jesus is assuring His disciples that they were doing the right thing. They had chosen the proper path, for what is gained in Christ far outweighs all that is lost for Christ. Are we thinking that way in our choices?

Luke 10:25-37. Jesus was asked a question by Pharisee who specialized in and was an expert of the Law; "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Note: The incident is a different one than the one recorded in Mark 12:28-34.) This Pharisee was noted as a 'lawyer' meaning one who was a recognized expert in the Mosaic Law; and he had spoken up to test Jesus. The Greek word translated "test does not necessarily imply hostility but can imply he was curious about how Jesus would answer the question. His question assumes that people had to do something to obtain or inherit eternal life. Rather than answering the lawyer's question outright, Jesus directed him to the authority they both accepted, the Old Testament, and answered his question with a question (v. 26). Moreover, by asking this counter-question, Jesus put Himself in the position of evaluating the lawyer's answer, rather than having the lawyer evaluate His

answer. In verse 27, the lawyer gave virtually the same answer that Jesus Himself gave to the same question on another occasion (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31). Jesus affirmed that the lawyer had answered correctly. However, He proceeded to caution the lawyer that he needed wholehearted compliance with the Law to gain eternal life, which is impossible (v. 28). Jesus quoted the Law to drive this point home (Lev. 18:5). The lawyer, in v. 29, realized that the only way he could possibly fulfill the Law's demand was to limit its demand; so, he tried to "justify" himself (i.e., to declare himself righteous) by limiting (redefining) the demand of the Law by asking the question, "Who is my neighbor?" His question set up a distinction between neighbors and non-neighbors. The word "neighbor" (Gr. *plesion*) means one who is near (cf. Acts 7:27); and the Jews interpreted 'neighbor' in a limited sense to mean 'a fellow Jew or someone in the same religious community.' They specifically excluded Samaritans and Gentiles from being a 'neighbor.' Jesus answered this question by telling a parable about a good Samaritan (vv. 30-35). Jesus told this parable to correct the lawyer's false understanding of who his neighbor was, and to clarify his duty to his neighbor with the goal of showing the lawyer how far short he fell of keeping the law. Jesus tells of a 'man' (no race or occupation but the hearers would have assumed the man was a Jew) that was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho (real cities with a road between them). The road between the two cities is a 17-mile desert road that descended about 3,300 feet, which was treacherous, winding, and known for robberies. Clothing was a valuable commodity in Jesus' society, and this fact probably explains why the bandits took the man's clothes and beat him badly in order to take the man's clothes. In verse 31, Jesus described the "priest" as happening "by chance" to take the journey that brought him into contact with the beaten man along the roadside. Jesus stated that the priest "passed by on the other side" without stating why the priest 'passed by.' The point Jesus is making is that the priest failed to act in love, even though common courtesy demanded that he stop and render aid. In the eyes of the people of the day, the priest should have shown compassion. In verse 32, Jesus describes a "Levite" who did the same thing as the priest. The "Levite" was probably a less likely person to offer help since his duty involved assisting the priests in the completion of practices involved in worship. By omitting his motives, Jesus focused attention on the Levite's unloving act, which was for whatever reason he also 'passed by the other side.' In verses 33-35, Jesus tells of a "Samaritan," the one who was the least likely of the three to offer help, yet he did so. The "compassion" that the Samaritan felt for the beaten man overcame any racial prejudice he may have felt against Jews. The Samaritan's compassion contrasts with the callousness of the priest and the Levite toward one of their own "neighbors." His compassion led him to take action to help the beaten man. The "oil and wine" were used to treat wounds, but they were not cheap. The Samaritan's compassion ('love') for the beaten man was obvious in his willingness to inconvenience himself to help and in his making generous and costly sacrifices for the other man's good (v. 34). The genuineness of his compassion ('love') is clear when he made provision for the beaten man to be cared for in the future (v. 35). It cost about one twelfth of a denarius to live for a day, so the Samaritan's gift paid for 24 days of care. In verse 36, Jesus applied the teaching of the parable to the lawyer, by asking him "which of the three" passersby behaved as a neighbor. He reversed the lawyer's original question (v. 29), and focused attention where it should have been: on the subject showing love rather than the object receiving it. The priest and the Levite had avoided contamination and ritual uncleanness using legalistic religion as a reason not to help. They had not shown compassion whereas the true neighbor had, the Samaritan. The answer to Jesus' question was simple and obvious. The lawyer seems to have understood the point of the parable, because he did not describe the true "neighbor" as "the Samaritan," but as "the one who showed mercy" (v. 37). Jesus ended the encounter with the Pharisee lawyer by commanding the lawyer to begin to follow the Samaritan's example. This is what he needed to do if he wanted to *earn* eternal life (cf. v. 25). If he treated everyone with whom he had any dealings with compassion and mercy, he would be 'loving his neighbor' in the sense that God commanded (v. 27; Lev. 19:18). Jesus showed that the real test of love is action, not just profession (cf. James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17-18). He also presented the lawyer with a

humanly impossible obligation to 'love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself.' God's demands are impossible to keep perfectly, so one must cast himself on God's mercy if he hopes to obtain eternal life.

Luke 10:42. Jesus was at Mary and Martha's home. Martha was working and serving (v.40). Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet (v. 39). In verse 40, Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to come and help her. Jesus showed concern for Martha's anxiety but He did not do what she asked. The "many things" that "bothered" Martha were her excessive "preparations" for the meal (cf. 12:29). She had allowed her duties as hostess to become too burdensome (cf. 8:14; 12:22, 26). Apparently, she wished to honor Jesus with an elaborate meal, but a simpler one that would have allowed her some time to listen to Jesus would have been better. The 'things' for Martha were the 'things' involved in entertaining. The one indispensable 'thing' was listening to Jesus' teachings. Jesus told Martha that the "one thing" that Mary had "chosen" was more important than the "many things" Martha had chosen to do (v.42). Few things are as damaging to the Christian life then trying to work for Christ without taking time to commune with Christ. This passage is a warning to believers who tend to be too active in ministry and neglect the Word of God. We, as believers, must make time to listen to and learn from Jesus. How are you doing? Do we desire the 'better thing', close fellowship with Christ?

Luke 12:1-5. Jesus had just addressed the Pharisees (cf. 11:45-54) and the hostility between the Pharisees and Jesus was very intense. Jesus had a very large following (Gr. *myriadon*, lit. ten thousand, but used here hyperbolically as a superlative, cf. Acts 19:19; 21:20). Jesus proceeded warn His disciples against the 'leaven' of the Pharisees. "Leaven" or yeast has a pervasive effect and therefore is a good example and illustration of the influence of "hypocrisy." Leaven, just as hypocrisy, starts small but expands and affects everything it touches. "Leaven" in Scripture is generally an *evil* which corrupts and spreads wherever it goes and whatever it touches. Here, Jesus is talking about the Pharisees fundamental misunderstanding of God's will and purpose, which made them incapable of discerning the authentic meaning of the Word of God; which in turn made them hypocrites. In verse 2-3, Jesus teaches a principle: 'what is now unknown because of hypocrisy will one day become known.' Jesus knew that God knows all secret things and there is a day coming for accountability. Verse 3 more of a positive encouragement rather than an ominous threat. Jesus is teaching that the good news witness, which the disciples might try to hide because of the threat of persecution, would come out and be declared openly. In follow up to that in verse 4, Jesus begins with an unusual address "My friends." This word expressed confidence in the disciples, and approval of them as those entrusted with His gospel message, doing His will. It contrasts with the rejection they faced in the world. Jesus spoke those words to be an encouragement to the disciples to represent Him boldly, in spite of opposition, even though it might result in death. Jesus said in verse that rather than fearing their persecutors, the disciples should "fear" God more. God has the power to affect eternal, not just temporal, destiny. Jesus was not implying here that the disciples would end up in eternal "hell" if they proved unfaithful; He was citing God's punitive power in order to deter them from hypocrisy. Do we take care not to live hypocritically?

Luke 12:15-21. Jesus is teaching before a crowd. He hears a question from the crowd for Him to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him (v.13). Jesus did not answer his question (v. 14). Instead, Jesus warned the man and the crowd, including His disciples, against "every form of greed" (v.15). 'Greed' has been defined as "the desire to have more, to acquire without reference to one's own specific needs or the situation of others." Greed is wrong because it exalts possessions and temporal material things to a place of importance that is greater than the place they actually occupy in life. The man who asked Jesus the question had implied by his request that his life would be better if he had more possessions. Jesus told the parable of the rich fool to illustrate His point (v. 16-20). He presented

the "rich man" as an intelligent farmer. The farmer did only what was reasonable in view of a large harvest. Jesus was not faulting him for his plans. The farmer's folly lay in what he failed to consider, not in the plans that he made (v. 19). His words to himself indicate that he thought his life consisted in the abundance of his possessions alone, but there was more to life than he realized; life after death. In response to the rich farmer, God said something different to the man than he had said to himself - "Fool!" (v. 20). This contrast shows the error of the rich farmer's thinking. In the Old Testament, a "fool" is essentially someone who disbelieves or disregards God (e.g., Ps. 14:1; cf. Luke 11:40). That is precisely what this man had done regarding the meaning of life. He had thought that he would be comfortable for many years to come (v. 19), but God demanded his life *that very* "night" (cf. James 4:13-16). This loss of life contrasts with his accumulation of possessions. Now he had nothing left, and his possessions would pass to his heirs (cf. Eccles. 2:18-19). This fact could not have escaped the notice of the man who posed the question about his inheritance (v. 13). Even if he got part of his brother's inheritance, he might not keep it long. In verse 21, Jesus made the application of the point of the parable. A person who only enriches "himself," and does not lay up treasure in heaven ("toward God"), is a fool (cf. Matt. 6:19; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; James 1:10). In this teaching, Jesus taught His disciples and the multitude to beware of a foolish attitude toward material possessions. The wrong attitude is that the richness of life depends on the richness of earthly wealth. Believers need to be aware of this point, because the desire to increase wealth can draw them away from following Jesus faithfully. Material possessions cannot provide the quality of life that intimacy with God can. Believers should live with what God has revealed about life beyond the grave—specifically with reward or loss of reward clearly in view—rather than living for the present. How are you doing?

Luke 12:48. Jesus has been teaching the disciples about faithfulness (vv. 41-48). In verse 48 He clarifies the standard by which He would judge these servants. The extent of their knowledge of their master's will would affect their punishment (cf. Num. 15:30; Deut. 17:12; Ps. 19:13). In other words, for the unfaithful servant, the degree of punishment is commensurate with the extent to which his unfaithful behavior was willful in rebelling against the will of the master. Privilege increases responsibility (cf. 11:29-32; Rom. 2:12-13; James 3:1). This fact should not discourage disciples from discovering God's will, but should motivate them to maintain their faithfulness as they increase in knowledge. All of God's servants have a responsibility to know their Master's "will" as fully as they can—since they are His servants—and to *do it*. Are we willfully rebelling against the LORD's commands?

Luke 13:3-5. Many of the Jews in Jesus' day believed that tragedy or accident was the direct result of some personal sin (cf. John 9:1-3). An incident has occurred where Jews from Galilee were killed by Pilate as they were offering sacrifices (v.1). The Jews who heard of their murder as they sacrificed concluded that the Galileans who had perished must have been great 'sinners.' They based this view on a faulty theory of divine retribution (cf. Job 4:7; 8:20; 22:4-5). Jesus repudiated this theory and viewed the death of the Galileans as the consequence of sin generally. Jesus stressed the error of their view by placing the word "no" (Gr. *ouchi*) first in the sentence for emphasis (v. 4). He then drew a conclusion. *Everyone* needs to "repent" because everyone is a sinner, all sin brings judgment, and "all" who do not repent "will perish." Jesus reinforced His point by citing another recent tragedy where a wall fell and killed eighteen men. He asked those listening if they thought they were 'worse sinners' than other men in Jerusalem. The Greek word *opheiletai* ("culprits" or "more guilty") means debtors, which the Jews used this term as a synonym for sinners (cf. Matt. 6:12; 18:24). Jesus asserted that people who experience calamities are *not necessarily worse sinners* ("culprits") than people who do not. More important, "all" people "will" face God's judgment "unless" they "repent." Repentance is critical in your life. How is your heart? Have you repented of your sin and accepted Christ as Savior? It is a life-or-death decision.

Luke 14:7-11. Jesus was at the house of a Pharisee, at the Pharisee's invitation, to have a meal (dinner / feast) along with other Pharisees and guests. Jesus next gave the assembled guests a lesson on the importance of humility to address and correct the pride of the Pharisees. In Christ's day people reclined on low couches for important meals resting on their left sides. Where a person was placed around the table indicated his status. In the typical **U**-shape arrangement, the closer that one was to the host, who reclined at the center or bottom of the **U**, the higher was his status ("place of honor"). Jesus' fellow guests had tried to get the "places of honor" closest to their host to showcase their own importance (v. 7). Jesus used a wedding feast in His parable. His teaching focused on being invited and on being humble. In verses 8-10, Jesus was teaching His listeners that they should not seek prominence for themselves when they are the invited guest; seeking a prominent place for oneself at a banquet could lead to personal embarrassment. An invited guest should be humble and take the lowest position at the wedding feast. It is possible that Jesus may have taken the lowest position at the table at the Pharisee's house. The reason one should humble himself is that someone else has invited him. He is a guest, not the host. Jesus further stressed this dependent relationship by using passive verbs. The implication was that those who so humbled themselves—*now*—with Jesus, would experience exaltation by God in the kingdom when it began (v. 11). This was not only to avoid direct reference to God, out of respect, but to present God as the exalted Host. A person's position in the kingdom depends on God, not on his own self-seeking. Verse 11 expresses the principle involved (cf. 13:30; 18:14; Matt. 23:12). Self-exaltation leads to humiliation, whereas humility results in exaltation (cf. Prov. 25:6-7). The principle operates in the present and in the future. It operates in social situations and in kingdom situations. This parable was a lesson for the Pharisees especially, but also for Jesus' disciples and everyone else present, on the importance of humility. Participants in the kingdom, and honored guests in the kingdom, would be those who humbled themselves by following Jesus. Humility is the key to a successful relationship and walk with Christ.

Luke 14:15-24. Jesus continued to use the meal in the Pharisee's house to teach about the messianic banquet and the kingdom to come. He had taught the importance of humbling oneself to participate (vv. 7-11), and had justified that requirement (vv. 12-14). Now He invited His hearers to humble themselves so they could participate and He warned those who rejected His invitation of their fate. In verse 15, a guest at the meal makes a comment blessing those who will eat in the Kingdom. The guest who voiced this comment appears to have understood that Jesus had been talking about the kingdom. The guest seems to have assumed that they would be one of the "blessed." Jesus used the comment as an opportunity to clarify who would participate by using another parable to teach those who were listening (v. 16-24). In the parable, the host corresponds to God and the servant represents Jesus. The people invited were the Jews. But those who were invited choose not to participate. They tried to excuse themselves by giving acceptable reasons for not attending the banquet. In each of the excuses the person was dealing with a personal preoccupation, giving the invitation no priority consideration. One refused and gave reason that he had recently become the owner of some real estate (pride in being a landowner). Another person refused and gave reason that he had a new possession ("five yoke of oxen") that he had to inspect (love of possessions). A third man refused and gave reason that he had recently been married (love of pleasure). Here the reasons for refusing the invitation were commerce (business), possessions and natural affection (pleasure). In verses 21-22, the host legitimately "became angry," in view of his gracious invitation and sacrificial preparations. Rejection constituted a personal insult because the etiquette and custom of the day required that the feast could not begin until all places were filled. Therefore, he decided to open the banquet to anyone who would come, not just the people who considered themselves the privileged few who were the most obvious choices (cf. Rom. 9:4-5). These rejecters corresponded to the religious leaders of Jesus' day; they all had wealth and temporal priorities.

The other people the host invited corresponded to those in Jesus' day whom the self-righteous Jews regarded as unworthy: publicans, sinners and the Gentiles (cf. vv. 2-4, 13). Even though many of the needy responded to the servant's invitation there was still plenty of room at the banquet table. The servant's commission became urgent ("compel them"), because the feast waited for guests. In verses 23-24, the host then sent his servant farther out into the countryside to find guests wherever he could. Those taking refuge against the "hedges," fences, and walls would have been people who were especially destitute and needy. Compelling did not involve forcing them against their wills, but urging them to come. These *invitees* represent mankind who lived far from the site of the banquet (i.e., Jerusalem). They are the spiritually needy, Jews and Gentiles alike, both in Jesus' day and in the ages that followed—before the banquet begins at the commencement of the Millennium (cf. 13:28-30). None of those who received initial invitations, and declined the host's gracious offer, would enjoy the banquet (cf. 13:34-35). Jesus' correction of the original comment (v. 15) affirmed that those who would eat at the feast in the kingdom would be the objects of God's special favor and therefore happy (blessed). Those who would eat at the feast would be those who responded to God's gracious invitation that He extended through His Servant Jesus. Those who were invited but choose not to come because they, through pride, were focused on temporal money, possessions and pleasure would find themselves outside the kingdom spending eternity in hell.

Luke 15:10-32. Jesus was addressing the scribes and Pharisees here and was teaching through the use of a parable. This parable repeated the point of the previous two that there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents. However, it also stresses the fact that God willingly goes to great lengths to seek out and to find the lost. This attitude contrasts with that of the Pharisees and lawyers (v. 2). This third parable in the series again repeats the point of the former two that God gladly receives repentant sinners, but it stresses relationship information; the joy of the father contrasts with the grumbling of the elder brother when the second son / brother returns home. The parable begins in vv. 11-12, a father "had two sons," a "younger" one and an "older" one (v. 25). The "younger" son's inheritance would normally have been one-third of his father's estate, since the older son would have received a double portion (Deut. 21:17). Normally the inheritance did not pass to the heirs until the death of the father. To request it prematurely was tantamount to expressing a wish that the father would die. The father's willingness to accommodate his younger son's request shows that he was gracious and generous, and it illustrates God's willingness to permit each person to go his or her own way. The implication is that the younger son was an older teenager, since men usually married about then, and this young man was unmarried. The elder brother did not take full possession of his share of the property when the division was made. Rather, in accord with Jewish custom, the father made provision for the transfer of ownership of the estate to take effect at the time of his death. So, the elder son, though holding title to the estate, had continued to work on the estate under the authority of his father. In verses 13-16, the younger son turned his inherited assets into cash, and then departed to 'live it up.' But he ended up wasting and losing his entire inheritance; a result of his own choices, his own doing and his own willfulness. Feeding pigs was unclean work for a Jew, and a job that any self-respecting Jew would only do out of total desperation (Lev. 11:7). However, he was willing to do this because his need had become so great. He had sunk so low that no one showed him any compassion. It was at this low point of total desperation that "he came to himself;" an expression that indicates repentance (v. 17-19). He changed his mind and his attitude, and decided to make a change in his behavior. He viewed his actions as sin against his father *and against God* (cf. Ps. 51:4). His thoughts regarding his proposal to his father, as well as his planned speech, show the genuineness of his humility and repentance. He was willing to serve his father as a day laborer ("hired" hand), since his father had a reputation for paying his servants generously (v. 17). In verse 20, we find the father looking down the road daily in hope of seeing his son returning. The father's "compassion" reflects some knowledge of his son's plight. The father ran to meet

his son, even though it was undignified for an older man to run in Jesus' culture.

Embracing and *kissing* his son *continually* also expressed the father's forgiving, loving acceptance (cf. Gen. 45:14-15; 33:4; 2 Sam. 14:33; Acts 20:37). This attitude also contrasts with the elder brother's attitude and the Pharisees' attitude. The father initiated the restoration of fellowship before the son could finish his confession. This shows the father's eagerness to forgive. In verses 21-24, the father cut his son's confession short, because he knew what was in his heart (cf. 1 John 4:18). With tender affection he spared his son his humiliating admission. Rather than simply accepting his son back and making him a servant, the father bestowed the symbols of honor ("the best robe"), authority ("a ring"), and freedom ("sandals") on him (cf. Gen. 41:42; Esth. 3:10; 8:8). Sandals and a ring were marks of a free man, whereas slaves went barefooted. Then he prepared a banquet for him. Warren Wiersbe wrote: "Everything the younger son had hoped to find in the far country, he discovered back home: clothes, jewelry, friends, joyful celebration, love, and assurance for the future. What made the difference? Instead of saying, 'Father, *give* me!' he said, 'Father, *make* me!' He was willing to be a servant!" Repentance is always possible for those who want to return to God. In verses 25-32, we find the reaction of the older brother. Jesus pictured the older brother, symbolic of the Pharisees and scribes, as working hard for the father. The Jews, as well as the Jewish religious leaders, equally enjoyed the privileged status of an older brother in the human family, because God had chosen them for special blessing (Exod. 19:5-6). The older brother was outside the banquet, having missed it apparently because of his preoccupation with work and his distant relationship with his father. For him, and for the Pharisees, all was based on merit and reward. He viewed himself more as the father's servant than as his son. The older son's anger, at the father's forgiveness and acceptance of his brother, contrasts with the father's loving compassion demonstrated by his coming out and entreating him. Similarly, the Pharisees grumbled because God received sinners and welcomed them into His kingdom (v. 2). Nevertheless, God reached out to them through Jesus, just like the father reached out to his older son. The same tenderness marked the father's dealings with the elder brother as marked his dealings with the younger brother. In verse 29, the elder son addressed the father disrespectfully; and then challenged the father with the things that he had done for his father, and then blamed him for not giving him more. Clearly, he felt that the father's response should have reflected justice rather than grace. He had not stayed home because he loved his father, but because his working in his father's fields was a way to get what he wanted. He was counting on a reward commensurate with his work (cf. Matt. 20:12). This does not reflect a loving relationship. He wanted to have his father's property in order that he may enjoy himself *apart from him*. The older son refused to acknowledge his brother *as his brother*, since he had so dishonored his father. By calling him his father's son ("this son of yours"), he was implying that the father shared his younger son's guilt (v. 30). Everyone in this chapter experienced joy except this elder brother because the proud and the self-righteous person always feel that they are not treated as well as they deserve. In verses 31-32, the father responded to the older son's hostility with tenderness and reason. The Greek word *teknon*, translated "child" or "son," is a term of tender affection. The father pointed out his older son's privileged position, as always benefiting from his father's company. The parable closes with the father's implied invitation to the older son to enter the banquet. That invitation was still open to the Pharisees when Jesus told the parable. They were the ones who were rejecting God's salvation that He was extending to them through Jesus. The Jews were God's children only in the sense that God had adopted them into a special relationship with Himself (Exod. 19:5-6). They still had to believe on Jesus to obtain eternal life (cf. Gen. 15:6). This parable is an excellent lesson on God's love for man (cf. John 3:16), man's pride and willfulness resulting in rejection of God, and God's love and compassion that is extended to men who humble themselves and repent. How is your heart?

Luke 16:10-12. Here Jesus is teaching the disciples the principles of using money and means here on earth to advance the kingdom (cf. 16:1-9). The believer's faithfulness and trustworthiness to the LORD is

demonstrated here on earth that will be recognized in eternity. Trustworthiness does not depend on the amount for which one is responsible, but on character (cf. 1 Tim. 3:5). Faithfulness in the use of money now, demonstrates a trustworthy character that God will reward with responsibility for greater riches in the kingdom later. However, Jesus did not say "He who is faithful in a very little thing *will be* faithful also in much" but "He who is faithful in a very little thing *is* faithful also in much." A person of character will be faithful in both the little things and the big things. Unfaithfulness does not just demonstrate untrustworthiness but unrighteousness. By using the word "mammon," Jesus includes all the worldly things in which people trust, not just money. These would include one's time and talents, in addition to his or her treasure. If disciples squander what God has entrusted to their care on the earth, "who will" give ("entrust to") them their own things to manage in heaven, such as authority over others in the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 9:17)? The rhetorical question answers itself. God will not. Even though a believer has both God and "mammon" (earthly resources), it is impossible to be a "servant" to them both. They both demand total allegiance (cf. Matt. 6:24). Love for "God" will result in "mammon" taking second place in life. Conversely, if one puts "mammon" first, God can have only second place (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10). This fact should serve as a warning against unfaithfulness to God and against enslavement by "mammon." Believers can 'serve' God and "mammon," but they cannot be the *servant*, in the truest sense of that word, of *both* God and "mammon." A believer can only be the *servant* of one. Who are you serving?

Luke 16:13-15. The Pharisees taught that devotion to God and money was compatible (v.14). They taught that money was a sign of God's blessing; therefore, if you were rich, it was God blessing your activity, if you were poor, God was punishing you for sin in your life. Christ was teaching that it is impossible to "serve" them both. They both demand total allegiance (cf. Matt. 6:24). Love for God will result in money taking second place in life. Conversely, love for money will result in God taking second place (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10). A believer can only have one Master; therefore, it is not possible to serve both God and money. Christ rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (v. 14-15). Pride is the foundation of hypocrisy. It was pride that caused the Pharisees to rationalize their greed for money by claiming that money was a sign of God's blessing on them. This hypocrisy was clearly evident by their public attention-grabbing display of giving (cf. Matt. 6:2-4), but God was their real Judge, and He knew their greedy "hearts" (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 7:10). The pursuit of money is detestable to God because it is idolatry. It robs people of their future, and it insults God—who alone is worthy of our supreme devotion. Jesus illustrated this point with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that follows (vv. 19-31). Pride creates hypocrisy and rationalization.

Luke 17:1-4. Christ is instructing the disciples that offenses will happen because no believer is perfect (17:1). However, that does not excuse personal responsibility when a believer causes another believer to stumble into sin or apostasy; believers are not to be the cause of the offense (17: 2). Christ instructs the disciples to "take heed" on the issue of offenses. The use of the phrase "take heed" means "the issue at hand is very difficult for one to deal with;" therefore great care should be exercised when dealing with it. They were to 'rebuke' them – meaning they are to deal directly with the one who was sinning (Matt. 18:15-20). If he repents of his sin or offense, then they are to be forgiven. Here it appears that the forgiveness is conditional because it states that if a person repents you are to forgive them. The focus of this verse is not on the fact that a person who has sinned comes to you and repents for their offense against you (even though this is a very good thing). The emphasis of this verse is our response to those who have offended us; we are to offer forgiveness that is lavish, enthusiastic, eager, freely offered and unconstrained – and not to be remembered. This offering of forgiveness may occur multiple times – over and over. But, these verses are very clear because they implicitly forbid the remembering and reviewing of the offense in any fashion. Luke 15:11-32 is an example of the principles outlined here.

Luke 18:1-5. Jesus continued His instruction to the disciples about His return encouraging them to continue praying until His second coming. In verse 1, Jesus encouraged them to continue "to pray" and "not to lose heart" (grow discouraged) at "all times" or "always" (not continuously, but in all circumstances). In verses 2-3, Jesus pictured a judge who did not 'fear God' nor 'regard man,' who had a widow who kept coming into his court and asking him for "protection" from those who opposed her, not for their punishment. In verses 4-5, the judge granted the widow's petition solely because of her persistence. The phrase "wear me out / weary me" translates an idiom that can more literally be rendered "hit in the face" or "strike under the eye." Consequently, the judge apparently feared that by refusing to respond to the widow, his reputation would suffer so he granted her request for selfish reasons. Jesus was contrasting the judge with God. His point was that since persistence is effective with unjust judges, how much more effective it will be with the righteous Judge. How is your prayer life?

Luke 18: 9-17. Jesus continues His instruction on prayer with this parable teaching about the spirit in which men should pray. Jesus uses the Law of Contrast in this parable to teach this lesson. In verse 9, Jesus sets the stage for the parable that follows. Jesus begins by identifying the characteristic of the Pharisees: self-righteousness. The only alternative to believing in Jesus is trusting in one's own righteousness for acceptance with God. This always results in elevating oneself, at the expense of others, and looking down on others. In verse 10, Jesus identifies two men who were praying, the Pharisee and the tax collector; they were at opposite ends of the social and spiritual scales in Judaism. The former was the epitome of righteousness, and the latter of unrighteousness. Standing was a normal posture for prayer among the Jews of Jesus' day. The Pharisee was praying to himself as he addressed "God" with a review of his own self-righteousness (vv. 11-12). He used the behavior of others as his standard and took pride in his supposed superior status and superior works he performed; his words were not 'thankful' but rather arrogant. In verse 13, Jesus introduces the contrast to the Pharisee, the tax collector. The tax gatherer's 'distance' from the Pharisee symbolized the difference between the two men. His unwillingness to even "lift his eyes," much less his hands, "to heaven" in prayer pictures his feeling of unworthiness. "Beating his breast" (chest) expressed his contrition. He did not boast of his own righteousness, but pled with God for mercy, acknowledging his sin (cf. Ps. 51). He used "God" as the standard of righteousness, and confessed that he fell short. He knew that his only hope was God's mercy. The Pharisee felt no need and voiced no petition, whereas the publican felt nothing but need and voiced only petition. Jesus declared the tax collector "justified" (i.e., *declared* righteous, a judicial act, not *made* righteous; cf. Rom. 3:24-25) after the pardon of his sins by the LORD (v. 14). Justification depends on God's grace, not on human works or merit. God declared the tax collector righteous because he looked to God for the gift of righteousness, rather than claiming to be righteous on his own merit as the Pharisee did. Jesus repeated the principle that God humbles those who exalt themselves, but He exalts those who humble themselves (cf. 13:30; 14:11). In the context, Jesus meant that to be righteous in God's sight, one must humbly acknowledge his lack of personal righteousness, rather than pridefully pretending to have righteousness that he does not have. Jesus then demonstrated the humility needed to repent and be reconciled to God. Jesus used children in order to illustrate the type of humility that is necessary for someone to receive salvation; humility is necessary to receive God's grace. People were bringing children to Jesus so He could bless them. The disciples were discouraging the people from doing this because they thought Jesus had more important things to do. Jesus, however, corrected the disciples, "rebuking them," and encouraged the parents to continue bringing their children to Him (vv. 16-17). Jesus used the children to illustrate the humility necessary to enter the kingdom. Children were humble in the sense of being totally dependent and unable to provide for themselves. They receive rather than provide, and in those qualities, they are good examples of humility. Without this sense of being unable to provide for oneself, and a willingness to receive from another, no adult can "enter" the kingdom. Do we have the proper humility before the LORD in our life and our spiritual walk?

Luke 19:1-27. Luke provides us with a story of a sinful, needy man (Zacchaeus) and Jesus offering him salvation. Zacchaeus (an abbreviated form of Zechariah – meaning "the righteous one") displayed the traits of the tax collector in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14). Zacchaeus accepted Jesus' offer, and responded appropriately with joy and the fruits of repentance. Jesus was passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem (v.1). In verse 2, we learn about Zacchaeus' occupation and wealth. "Zacchaeus" ("the just, pure one") was a "chief tax collector," which made him the object of special hatred in Jericho. The wealth that he had accumulated through his occupation of collecting taxes for Rome and his manner of collection, extortion, made him a hated man. Zacchaeus was a rich man and a tax collector, which is not the typical person to respond to Jesus' message. Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus was understandable since one of Jesus' disciples had been a tax collector along with the miracles Jesus did and His teachings created curiosity (vv. 3-4). Luke's reference to Zacchaeus' "stature" may be a dual reference to his height (short) and his age (young). For Zacchaeus, to mingle with the crowd would have been a courageous thing to do because many men would not miss an opportunity to push, nudge, or kick, him. The "sycamore" tree refers to a species of fig tree that was a very delicate evergreen, easily destroyed by cold (cf. Ps. 78:47). Jesus initiated a relationship with Zacchaeus (vv. 5-6). Since He called him by name, He evidently knew about him, though Zacchaeus had not seen Jesus before. Jesus not only wanted to talk with him but to "stay" in his "house." "Today" and "hurry/haste" shows the urgency of Jesus' request. Verse 5 records an instance of divine sovereignty and verse 6 of human responsibility. The crowd reacts to this exchange negatively as eating at someone's home was looked upon and understood as sharing in the homeowner's sin (v. 7). Zacchaeus responds to Jesus' invitation by standing and addressing Jesus as "Lord," implying respect and recognizing Jesus' deity. He then declares his plan to "give half" of his wealth to the poor and to reimburse anyone whom he had cheated "four times," which speaks to the genuineness of his repentance and faith in Jesus (v. 8). Jesus assessed Zacchaeus' promises as an evidence of saving faith (v.9). "Salvation" had "come to" his "house," because Zacchaeus had exercised saving faith, and had thereby proved to be a genuine descendant "of Abraham"—the spiritual father of all believers. Now he could enter the kingdom, not because he was a Jew physically but because he was a believer in Jesus. Luke records that Jesus then addressed the crowd with a parable about the time of the coming kingdom, something the people thought would occur immediately (v. 10) because His triumphal entry was about to take place (vv.28-38). In this parable (vv. 11-27) to the people, who were observing His meal with the tax collector, Jesus taught several important lessons. He repeated His coming rejection and future return, and He clarified the time when the kingdom would appear. He also explained the duty of His disciples during His absence from the earth. The parable also prepared the people for the postponement (delay) of the kingdom. Most of the people who believed on Him expected it to arrive when Jesus reached Jerusalem. The connection between Jesus being "near Jerusalem," and "the kingdom" appearing "immediately," implies that the believers in the crowd expected Jesus to begin the kingdom when He arrived there (v.11). They believed the Kingdom was literal as a setting up of the throne of David literally and materially in Jerusalem; they did not believe that the kingdom had already come with the ministry of Jesus in some spiritual sense. The "nobleman" represents Jesus (v.12). The "distant country" He went to stands for heaven, and the place He would "return" to is the earth. Jesus went to heaven to receive the kingdom from His Father; and some time would elapse between His going and His returning, which means Jesus was announcing a postponement (delay) of the kingdom. Before departing, the king entrusted "ten" of his servants with equal responsibility for advancing his interests while he was absent (v.13). A "mina" was a Greek coin worth 100 drachmas, or slightly more than three months wages. Each servant received "one mina, which many believe represents the one life that each has to invest for the nobleman. The citizens of the nobleman's land hated the noblemen and those who worked for him (v. 14). In verse 15, the nobleman returns; Jesus was speaking of His second coming here (v. 15). He will return having

received authority to reign on earth from His Father (cf. Dan. 7:13-14). After His return, and before He begins to reign, He will call His servants to give an accounting of their stewardship (vv. 15-23). Two of the ten servants gave an accounting and they received a reward for their service (vv. 16-19). In verse 20, a third servant reported that he had not earned anything with the master's deposit. This servant represents someone who does nothing of eternal value with his life. The servant explained that his fear of the master was responsible for his lack of return on the mina he was given (v.21). But the servant was lying because he did not fear his master. If he had feared him, he would have obeyed him. He did what he wanted to do with his time because he did not want to invest his time in working for the master. He thought it would be good enough if he kept the mina in safe keeping so he could return it to his master. The master said he would judge the servant on the basis of his own words (vv. 21-23). The master condemned this servant, calling him "wicked/worthless" because he had produced nothing of value for the master. Those 'who stood by' may have been the other servants or another group of people, which the master asked to take the 'mina' that he had saved from him (v. 24). If the mina each servant received represents his life potential, this servant would lose that. The master said to give the mina to the servant who had 10 minas (v.24). This arrangement appeared unjust to those who stood by (vv. 25-26), but the master was operating on the principle that faithfulness with little indicates faithfulness in much. Therefore, it was to his advantage to give the unfaithful servant's mina to the most faithful servant, because he would make the best use of it (v. 26). In verse 27, the master now deals with a different group of people, his enemies. These were the "enemies" who opposed his rule over them (v. 14), not his servants. Those who oppose him will not receive a reward but rather will lose their lives. The teaching of the parable is quite clear. Jesus was not going to begin His reign as Messiah immediately. He was going away and would return later to reign. During His absence His servants, believing disciples, need to invest what God has given them for His glory. He will reward them in proportion to what they have produced for Him. This parable teaches that everyone is accountable to God; and everyone will receive what he or she deserves from the King. We are all accountable to God for how we conduct our journey through his world. One day he will render judgment. Are we ready and prepared to stand before Christ as King and give an account of our life?

Luke 23:34. Christ specifically prayed to the Father to forgive those who were killing Him. In contrast to the hate and rejection expressed in crucifixion, Jesus manifested love and forgiveness for the soldiers who crucified Him. He prayed for them, basing His petition for mercy on their ignorance, even though at the same time they were stealing and gambling for His garments in fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 22:18). Luke's inclusion of Jesus' prayer for His executioners harmonizes with his emphasis on Jesus offering grace and forgiveness to sinners (cf. 7:40-43; 19:10). If Jesus had had any sins of His own to confess, this would have been the time to do so. He did not, so He prayed for others who were sinners instead. Stephen followed Jesus' good example here when he later died at the hands of his persecutors (Acts 7:60). The forgiveness offered by Christ was not asked for; it was freely given only to be rejected by the ones the forgiveness was being offered to. Christ sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay the penalty for sin of all mankind – from Adam until the last person to be born. By His sacrifice and it being accepted by God the Father, forgiveness was provided for all mankind but it is not accepted by all of mankind. Many will reject the forgiveness offered. But Christ initiated forgiveness by offering it to all.

Luke 24:46-48. Jesus is talking to the disciples after His resurrection. He opened their minds to understanding (v. 45) explaining how He had fulfilled scripture (v. 44). He explained how His sufferings and resurrection had fulfilled biblical prophecy (v.46). He explained that the message of 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins' should go to everyone, "all the nations" or Gentiles, "beginning from Jerusalem" (v. 47). Evangelism is the distinct message of Luke, in his gospel and in his writing of Acts. The disciples were "witnesses" to the fact that Messiah, Jesus, had come as predicted (v. 48). And when Jesus arose

from the dead, He gave His disciples another mandate to evangelize the world, which is our responsibility, as believers, today. How are we doing?

John 1:14. John's return to the "Word" (cf. v.1) introduces new revelation about Jesus, His incarnation (v. 14). The "Word," who existed co-equal with God before anything else came into being, "became flesh;" a human being. This is the most concise statement of the Incarnation in the Bible. He did not just appear to be a man; He became a man while maintaining His full deity, meaning He did not cease to be God (cf. Phil. 2:5-9). As a man, Jesus literally lived ('dwelt') among His disciples. The Greek word *eskenosen*, translated "dwelt" or "lived," is related to *skene*, meaning "tabernacle." Therefore, just as God's presence dwelt among the Israelites in the tabernacle, He is now living among them in the person of Jesus temporarily (cf. Exod. 25:8-9; 33:7, 11; 40:34). The "glory" that John and the other disciples observed as eyewitnesses refers to the god-like characteristics of Jesus (cf. Exod. 33:22; Deut. 5:22; Isa. 60:1; 1 John 1:1-2). God's character and qualities were expressed through Jesus, as a human son resembles his human father, except that the likeness in Jesus' case was exact (Phil. 2:6). John, for the other disciples ("we"), wrote that they "beheld" Jesus' "glory." The Greek word translated "beheld," always means "beheld with actual physical sight." The disciples saw Jesus' glory most fully at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). Jesus' relationship to the Father was unique, and so was His similarity to the Father. "Only begotten" does not mean that there was a time when Jesus was not and then the Father brought Him into being; it means "unique and only one of its kind" in relationship to God. "Grace ('gracious goodness') and truth ('integrity)" characterized the glory of God that Jesus manifested (cf. Exod. 34:6). Jesus was the greatest possible expression of God's grace to humankind; and He was also the best way to communicate truth accurately to human understanding. John equated the Word and Jesus in verse 1, but verse 14 is the last reference to the "Word" in this Gospel. From now on, John referred to the "Word" by His historical name, Jesus, and to the personal terms "Father" and "Son."

John 2:13-17. John records the first cleansing of the temple by Jesus here. Matthew, Mark and Luke record Jesus' second cleansing of the temple after His triumphal entry (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-16; Luke 19:45-46). Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (v. 13). He celebrated the Passover because He was a Jew who obeyed the Mosaic Law (Deut. 16:1-8). While in Jerusalem Jesus encountered people the buying and selling in the temple courtyard (v.14). Priests and merchants were selling sacrificial animals and exchanging various types of silver and copper money (e.g., Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman) in the Court of the Gentiles for temple Tyrian coinage to the Jews who were in the temple to celebrate the Passover. The priests accepted only Tyrian coins because of the purity of their silver. The priests had transformed this temple area from a place of quiet prayer into a noisy bazaar. It was virtually impossible for Gentiles to worship there, the only courtyard accessible to them, with all the business going on. Jesus responded to this situation actively and orally. He claimed that God was His Father ("My Father's house"), and that He acted for God in what He did (v. 16). John cited that the reason for Jesus' actions was His concern for the misuse of the temple. He did not mention the corruption that may have been going on as the priests bought and sold and changed money; i.e. it is historical record that the High-Priest presided over the business of buying and selling of sacrificial animals as well as the money exchange, with their sons as treasurers and their sons-in-law as assistant-treasurers. Jesus' expulsion of the temple merchants constituted a major threat to the financial arrangements for the sacrificial system the Pharisees had put in place. By claiming God as His "Father," Jesus was citing authority for His action, not claiming equality with the Father, which He did another time (5:18). To those present, the issue was clearly Jesus' authority, not His identity (v. 18). Though Jesus' action was violent, it evidently did not constitute a threat to the peace in the temple area. Roman soldiers from the adjoining Antonia Fortress would have intervened quickly if it had (cf. Acts

21:31-32). Jesus was forceful but not cruel. There is no indication that He injured anyone with His fairly harmless scourge of cords made of ropes. The Old Testament predicted that Messiah would come and purify the Levites (Mal. 3:1-3; cf. Zech. 14:21), which will be fulfilled in the millennium, not by His actions during His ministry. John quotes a portion of Psa. 69:9 in verse 17. The impression that Jesus' acts had on His disciples was one of "zeal for" the proper use of the temple and ultimately for God's glory. When Jesus cleansed the temple, He 'declared war' on the hypocritical religious leaders and this ultimately led to His death. Christ's hatred of sin is real and it continues to this day. Do we view sin the same way as Christ?

John 3:16-17. This best-known verse in the whole Bible expresses the gospel message more clearly and winsomely than any other. Almost every word in it is significant. Jesus' mission in the Incarnation (vv. 13, 17) and the Cross (vv. 14-15) resulted from God's "love" for His special creation, human beings. God's love for us is "intense," as He gave His best to His special creation, His unique and beloved Son. This love of God is amazing, not so much because the world is so *big*, as because it is so *bad* (cf. 1:9); and it is for all humankind in the world, not just for the elect. God gave what was most dear to Him to mankind; "His only begotten (or unique) Son." He was always with the Father throughout eternity past, and is one in essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. God's Son's mission to die on behalf of sinful men is bound up in the supreme love that God the Father has for His special creation that rebelled against Him. He does not take pleasure in pouring His wrath out on the lost, but He rejoices when people turn from their wicked ways to Him (Ezek. 18:23). The fact that God allows sinners to perish does not contradict His love. He has provided a way by which they need "not perish"—because He loves mankind. His ultimate purpose is the salvation of those who believe in His Son. The consequences of belief in His Son are: 1) new birth (vv. 3, 5), 2) eternal life (life with unlimited time; vv. 15-16), and 3) salvation (v. 17). The alternative is: 1) perishing (v. 16, cf. 10:28), 2) losing one's life (12:25), and 3) destruction (17:12). John further clarified God's purpose in sending His Son by explaining what it was not (v. 17). It was not "to judge" or condemn (Gr. *krino*) humankind. Judging, as John spoke of it here, is the opposite of saving (cf. v. 18: 5:24). God could have condemned human beings without sending His Son, but that was not God's purpose in the Incarnation. Rather, it was to provide *salvation* for everyone through His death on the cross. Salvation by faith alone, what a gift!

John 4:7-26. Jesus was traveling through Samaria (v.4). In Samaria, He came to a well near a town called Sychar and sat down (vv.5-6). There at the well He encountered a Samaritan woman (v.7). Jesus took the initiative to speak to the woman. It was unusual for "a woman" to come "to draw water" alone and to come in the heat of the day. Perhaps this woman's reputation led her to shun the company of other women and to seek solitude. Jesus asked the woman for "a drink," both because she was drawing water and in order to initiate conversation with her. The woman was shocked at Jesus' request being that He was a Jew (v. 9). The Jews typically regarded the Samaritans as perpetually unclean apostates; the Pharisees actually prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in the resurrection. The normal prejudices of the day prohibited public conversation between men and women, between Jews and Samaritans, and especially between strangers. Jesus ignored the woman's reply to His request (v. 10). She had drawn attention, both to the drink of water that Jesus was requesting and to the identity of Jesus as a Jew. Jesus used both subjects in His reply to her. Jesus implied that God had a greater gift for her, and that He had the authority to give it to her. The word that Jesus used for "gift" occurs only here in the Gospels. It stressed the freeness of God's gift. Jesus' reply, "If you had known ... who *it is*" indicates that she did not recognize Him as the Messiah. Here He indicates that it is God who gives the "living water." The "living water" that Jesus referenced has two meanings. Literally it refers to flowing water in contrast to stagnant water. Metaphorically it refers to the cleansing and refreshing grace that the Holy Spirit brings as a result of a proper relationship with God (7:38-39; cf. Isa. 1:16-18; Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 14:8;

John 3:5). The woman responded by trying to find out *how* Jesus could give her "*that* living water," and *who* He was (vv. 11-12). She said "*that* living water" probably to avoid the embarrassment of asking *what* "living water" was. Also, she could not see how He could be "greater than" the patriarch ("our father") "Jacob." In verses 13-14, Jesus responds by explaining that He was not really speaking about literal water, but a spiritual source of refreshment and fulfillment that satisfied completely. Jesus described this water as "welling (springing) up" within the individual. Clearly, He was referring to the "Holy Spirit" who provides eternal life (cf. 7:38-39). The woman did not pretend to understand what Jesus was talking about, but she did want to avoid the tiresome work involved in drawing water from Jacob's well (v. 15). Since Jesus had offered it, she asked Him to "give" her whatever it was that He had (cf. 3:4; 6:34). So far, the woman thought only of her physical need for water and rest. Jesus now took the conversation in a different direction, to help her realize that she had greater needs than these that He could meet (cf. 2:24-25). Jesus' instruction to "call" her "husband" was proper, because if He was really going to give her something valuable, her husband needed to be present (v. 16). This was necessary to avoid any misunderstanding about the reason for the gift—especially in view of Samaritan/Jewish tensions. The woman wanted Jesus' gift, so she admitted that she had "no husband" (vv.17-18). She probably hoped that He would now give this 'living water' to her at that time. Instead, Jesus commended her twice for telling the truth about her present marital status, but He also unmasked her past. He told her about her marital relationships; five former husbands and currently living with a sixth man. She was not living by the moral code of her religion. At that point she did not walk away but woman continued talking with Jesus (v. 19). She believed He could not have known these things without special insight (cf. v. 29; Luke 7:39), so she called Him 'a prophet.' She then took the opportunity to change the conversation (v. 20); she addressed the age-old Samaritan/Jewish debate. Part of the old controversy involved the proper place of worship. In Deuteronomy 12:5, God had said that His people were to seek the place that He would choose among their tribes where He would dwell among them. The Jews believed God did this when He commanded David to build the temple in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:13; 1 Kings 11:13; 14:21; 2 Chron. 6:6; 12:13). The Samaritans, who acknowledged only the authority of the Pentateuch, believed that Mount Gerizim near Shechem was the place that God had appointed. They based this belief on the fact that God had told the Israelites to worship Him on Mt. Gerizim after they entered the Promised Land (Deut. 11:29-30; 27:2-7, 12). It was there that God first revealed Himself to Abraham, and where Abraham first built an altar after entering the Promised Land (Gen. 12:6-7). The Samaritans also believed that Abraham had met Melchizedek on Mt. Gerizim (Gen. 14:17), and had later offered Isaac there (Gen. 22:2, 9). Jesus did not engage her in this discussion, but told her that the real issue was not *where* God's people had worshipped Him in the past, but *how* they would worship Him in the future (v.21). Jesus urged her to "believe" Him. Jesus continued in v.22 by telling her that the Samaritans ("you" meaning the Samaritans - plural "you" in Gr.) that they worshipped a God whom they did "not" really "know." The reason for this statement was their rejection of most of His revelation in the Old Testament and the addition of pagan concepts to their religious beliefs came from their Gentile forefathers. There was more and truer information about God that she and her fellow Samaritans needed to learn than they presently knew. By contrast, the Jews accepted all of God's revelation in the Old Testament and therefore knew the God whom they worshipped. Additionally, they were the people through whom that revelation had come. God intended His revelation to result in salvation for humankind (cf. 3:17). In that sense, "salvation" had come "from the Jews" (cf. Rom. 3:2; 9:4-5). Now Jesus changes the focus of the conversation. He tells her that the "hour is coming" when the old way of worship would end. That "hour" (for a new form of worship) was already present ("and now is 'here'") in the sense that since Messiah had come, worship would change to a new way. "True worshippers" are not those who will worship in the future, contrasted with those who have worshipped in the past. The distinction is not between Jews and Samaritans, either. "True worshippers" are those from either time or group that "worship" God "in spirit and truth." What does it mean to worship "in

spirit and truth"? It is, first, worship that is spiritual in every respect: in its source, mediator, object, subject, basis, and method. It rises from the "spirit" of the worshipper, not just his or her mouth; it is heartfelt. In addition, *truly spiritual* worship proceeds from a person who has spiritual life because of the new birth that the Holy Spirit has affected. It passes from believers to God through the spiritual mediator Jesus Christ. Its object is spiritual: "God" who "is spirit." Its subject is spiritual matters. This worship can include physical matters, such as singing and studying, but it comprehends the spiritual realm as well as the physical. Its basis is the spiritual work that Jesus Christ did in His incarnation and atonement. Its method is spiritual as contrasted with physical; it does not consist of merely physical actions, but involves the interaction of the human spirit with the divine spirit. For example, many people today associate worship primarily with going to church, as the Jews did with going to Jerusalem. Jesus clarified that "true" worship transcends any particular time or place. We can and should worship God 24 hours a day as we set aside (sanctify) every activity as an expression of our love and service for the Lord; that is *truly spiritual* worship. "Truth" in this context contrasts with the hypocrisy that characterized so much of Jewish and Samaritan worship, which is still present in worship today. Worship "in truth" is sincere, God-centered worship, rather than just going through motions, or worshipping for what we can get out of it. Worship is an offering to the Lord. It is also worship that is in harmony with the truth that God has revealed in His Word. In verse 24, Jesus states "God is spirit." The context of the passage is that God is "spirit" as opposed to "flesh." He is invisible, divine, and essentially unknowable, but He has chosen to reveal Himself in Jesus, the 'Word' (1:1-18). Since He is a *spiritual* rather than a corporeal being, those who worship Him must do so in a *spiritual* rather than a material way. A spiritual (new) birth (3:5) is prerequisite for true spiritual worship. Jesus' explanation must have made some sense to this woman, who lived life on a very physical level (v. 25). Nevertheless, she did not pretend to comprehend all this spiritual talk because she stated that the "Messiah" was "coming," and when He arrived, He would reveal divine mysteries and clarify ("declare," explain) "all" these matters. The Samaritans anticipated Messiah's arrival, but they viewed Him primarily as a teacher (Deut. 18:15-19). Here John translated the meaning of "Messiah" ("He who is called Christ") for his Gentile readers (cf. 1:38, 41). Because the woman was prepared to welcome Messiah, Jesus then identified Himself to her as *the Messiah* whom she hoped for (v. 26). Interestingly, Jesus did *not* reveal Himself to the Jews as *the Messiah* because of their identification of Messiah was of one who was a military deliverer. If He had done so, He may well have ignited a revolution. Jesus' self-revelation here climaxes John's account of this conversation. This is the only time that Jesus clearly identified Himself as the Messiah before His trial. Jesus did not judge the Samaritan woman. He did not exhibit any prejudice. He initiated and engaged a sinful woman despite all of the cultural pressure and legalism of the day. And we should be following His example as we live and work among people today.

John 5:22, 27. Jesus is the 'Word' and the 'Word' is God. It is also a fact God is the Father and Jesus is the Son of God. The Father discloses everything He does to the Son, and the Son does whatever the Father does. The Son's will is so identical to the Father's that His choices reflect the Father's will. The roles of the Father and the Son are parallel in verse 21, but there is a distinction between them in this verse. The Father and the Son both give life, but the Father has committed "all judgment to the Son" (cf. Acts 17:31). Judgment here includes discriminating (balanced and just review) judgment not just the judgment of announcing final condemnation (sentencing). This verse (v.21) clarifies the roles of the Father and the Son as God has given the Son (of God) "authority" to judge (vv. 21-22). In verse 27, Jesus revealed an additional reason for this authority to judge, because He is the "Son of Man" (Dan. 7:13-14). He is the Anointed One whom God has sent, but He is also fully human; the only perfect Man who can represent mankind before God. Jesus can judge humanity because He belongs to it and understands it (cf. Heb. 2:17).

John 7:24 – Jesus was talking with the people in the Temple during the Feast of the Tabernacles / Booths where He had encountered criticism for His healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda. The scribes and Pharisees had a problem because the Jesus had healed the paralytic on the Sabbath, which to them was against the Mosaic Law. Their criticism against Jesus came from their lack of true understanding of Scripture. In v.24 Jesus warns those who are listening to Him against judging "according to appearance" or superficially (cf. Deut. 16:18-19; Isa. 11:3-4; Zech. 7:9). Their superficial "judgment" about what was legitimate activity for the Sabbath, had resulted in superficial judgment about Jesus' work and person. He told them to stop doing that. They needed to "judge" on the basis of "righteous" criteria: what was truly right. Jesus was demanding that the people exercise moral and scriptural discernment based on His doctrinal teachings, not the superficial teachings of men.

John 8:1-12. *NOTE: This passage most likely was not a part of John's original writing. It is not included in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts; and it interrupts the sequence of v.52 with 8:12ff. However, most agree that it has historical veracity and should be included in the text of John's writings.* It is written in verse 1 that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, in contrast to most people in the temple courtyard who went home. Early the next morning Jesus came again to the temple to teach (v.2). There, in the temple, "the scribes and the Pharisees" brought a woman to Jesus whom they claimed to have "caught ... in the very act" of committing "adultery" and placed her in the center of the group that Jesus was teaching (v.3). They addressed Him respectfully, though hypocritically, as "Teacher" (v.4). We can only speculate about what had happened to the adulteress' partner in sin, but it seems clear that the scribes and Pharisees planned the circumstance since they caught the couple in the act but only brought the woman to Jesus. The Mosaic Law required that both parties involved in adultery suffer stoning (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). In verses 5-6a, the scribes and Pharisees stated their interpretation of the Mosaic Law (cf. Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24), which was correct. However, the scribes and Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against Him (cf. Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26). Jesus did not challenge the scribes and Pharisees' charge or try to prove it unjust. If Jesus advocated not executing the woman, the lawyers and Pharisees could charge Him with teaching the people to violate the Law. If He recommended executing her, He would contradict His own reputation for being gracious and forgiving (cf. Luke 5:20; 7:47; 19:10) as well as advocating an action contrary to Roman law. In v.6b, along with verse 8, we find the only mention of Jesus writing in the New Testament. The Greek verb *katagrapho*, used here in the past tense ("wrote"), allows for writing words, drawing pictures, or making signs. We do not know what Jesus wrote on the ground. The scribes and Pharisees continued to question Him and when He answered them, He cited passages in the Mosaic Law (v7); which required that in cases of stoning at least two witnesses of the sin, who had not participated in it, should be the first to throw the stones (Lev. 24:14; Deut. 13:9; 17:7). Jesus did not mean that the accusers needed to be sinless, but they had to be innocent of the particular sin of the accused; they needed to be free from the sin of adultery, or at least free of complicity in prearranging this woman's adultery. They had asked Him to pass judgment, and now He was exercising His rightful function as the Judge of humankind. Instead of passing judgment on the woman, He was passing judgment on her judges. Jesus' reply put the issue brought to Him back on His accusers' shoulders. If they proceeded to stone the woman, they were claiming that they had not sinned. If they did not stone her, they would be admitting that they had sinned. Jesus now took the place of the woman's "defense attorney," as well as her "judge" (cf. 1 John 2:1). In verse 8 we read of Jesus' second stooping over and writing on the ground. By writing on the ground "again," Jesus graciously gave the scribes and Pharisees another opportunity to rethink their decision and repent. The actions of the scribes and Pharisees "confessed" their guilt (v.9). Their actions demonstrated the conviction of sin within their hearts. They ended up making a public declaration of their own guilt by leaving; thereby dropping their charge of adultery against the woman even though she was guilty of adultery. When they left, Jesus was left alone,

meaning that the scribes and Pharisees had left leaving Jesus, the woman, and perhaps other onlookers. This left the woman with no accusers. In verses 10 and 11, Jesus addressed the woman respectfully (cf. 2:4; 4:21; 19:26; 20:13). He asked if "no one" who was condemning her remained. He did not ask her if she was guilty, because she was. As the acting judge in her case and with no prosecutors, Jesus dismissed the case. This was His prerogative as her acting judge (and her future Judge). He did issue her a warning. She would have to stand before Him again in the future, but this was not the time that He would pass judgment on her (cf. 3:17). He gave her mercy and time to change her ways, because she would have an opportunity to place her faith in Him. When Jesus said: "Neither do I condemn you" He knew that He would take her condemnation on Himself and die in her place (cf. Rom. 8:1). This incident is further proof that Jesus was far more righteous, and much wiser, than the Jewish religious leaders who sought to kill Him. It is also another demonstration of His patience and grace with sinners. In verse 12, Jesus will testify about Himself declaring that He is the 'light of the world.' Following Jesus' claim to be the 'water of life' (7:37-38), official opposition against Him intensified considerably. The context of verse 12 is at the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles (v. 20, cf. 7:14). Jesus was speaking to the Jews who had assembled there, some of whom were residents of Jerusalem, and others, pilgrims from other parts of Palestine and the world. Jesus here makes the second of His "I am" claims (cf. 6:35). This time He professed to be the "Light of the World" (cf. 1:4). The "water of life" and the "bread of life" metaphors represent what satisfies and sustains life. The "Light of life" metaphor stands for what dispels the darkness of ignorance and death. Jesus was claiming that whoever believes in ("follows") Him will enjoy "the light" that comes from God's presence and produces life. It is particularly the aspect of "light" as "revelation" that constituted the focus of the controversy surrounding Jesus' claim. The Jews considered the Old Testament and their traditions as authoritative revelation, the "true light." Now Jesus challenged that authority by claiming to be the "true (final and full, cf. 1:9) revelation" from God (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). He invited the Jews to "follow" Him as the "true Light." 'Light' is one of the three things which God is said to be. In John 4:24 we are told, 'God is *spirit*.' In 1 John 1:5, 'God is *light*'; and in 1 John 4:8, 'God is *love*.' These expressions relate to the *nature* of God, what He is in Himself. Therefore, when Christ stated 'I am *the light* of the world,' He announced He was God.

John 8:44. Jesus is addressing a crowd who followed Him (v.30). In His address He is challenging those who profess to believe in God. In verse 44, Jesus identifies the "father" of these Jews whom He had spoken about in verses 38 and 41. Sonship is predicated on conduct. A son will manifest his father's characteristics (cf. Eph. 5:1-2). Since the Jews were being hostile toward Jesus and their failure to believe in and obey Him as their Messiah; their parentage was the exact opposite of their claims. Their attitudes and actions pointed to "the devil" as their father for two reasons. First, they wanted to kill Jesus; and Satan was "a murderer from the beginning" (i.e., Adam and Abel). Second, they had abandoned "the truth" for "lies;" and Satan was "a liar and the father of lies" (cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:17). Every human being is a child of the devil; we are born into his family – he is our master. However, we can change families and masters when we accept Christ as our personal Savior. We become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But the 'old' family still lives within us, so we are always manifesting the traits of one spiritual father or the other. We are either both living and walking by the flesh or by the Spirit. Who are you serving?

John 9: 1-3. In verse 1 we read that Jesus was walking and passes by a man who was blind from birth. The time and location is not known. Jesus was probably in Jerusalem based on the events recorded in John 8. Matthew, Mark and Luke record several instances in which blind people received their sight, but this is the only case where the sufferer had been afflicted from birth, being born blind. The Jews regarded blind people as especially worthy of charity and the disciple's question to Jesus reflected that opinion (v.2). The disciples asking the question 'who had sinned' was based on the Old Testament

scripture that taught that sin brings divine punishment (e.g., Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Ezek. 18:4). This cause-and-effect relationship led many of the Jews to conclude that every bad effect had an identifiable sinful cause (cf. Job and his friends). Sin does lie behind all the suffering and evil in the world, but the connection between sin and suffering is not always immediate or observable. Jesus responds to the disciple's question in v.3. Neither of the disciples' options, pre-natal sin or sins of the parents, was the reason for this man's blindness. Jesus clearly states it was not sin that caused the man's blindness, but rather his blindness was for the purpose of allowing God to display His work ("works") in this man's life. Just as it is wrong to conclude that every instance of suffering springs immediately from a particular act of sin; it is also wrong to conclude that God permits every instance of suffering because He intends to miraculously relieve it. Jesus did not give a direct answer to His disciples' question. He was simply saying that "It was neither that this man sinned nor his parents." The question for us is not where suffering has come from, but what we are to do with it. We are not the judge of what has or is occurring in the lives of others. What we are to do is to seek to glorify God in all circumstances.

John 13: 1-17. Jesus and the disciples are preparing for the Passover, and Jesus knows that this is the Passover where He will be the Lamb that is sacrificed. The emphasis in verses 1-3 is on what the Lord *knew*, and in verses 4-5 it is on what He *did* in light of what He *knew*. Jesus' realization that "His hour had come" (cf. 12:23) led Him to prepare His disciples for that hour, and what it would mean for them. The double emphasis on "love" sets the tone for the Last Supper. "The world" in this verse represents the mass of lost humanity, out of which Jesus had called His disciples, and from which He would depart shortly when He returned to heaven. Jesus "loved His own," who believed on Him, and who would remain "in the world." "He loved them to the end", or utmost, the demonstration of which was His sacrificial death on the cross. The "supper" in view was the evening meal (v. 2). It was a Passover meal; and ironically, it was at this Passover meal that Satan and Judas' heart were in one accord because they both desired the death of Jesus. The fact that Jesus washed Judas' feet, *after* Judas had determined "to betray Him," shows the greatness of His love (v. 1). It was after the Passover meal that Jesus washed the disciples' feet (vv. 4, 26). Jesus washed "the disciple's feet" while fully aware of His authority from the Father, His divine origin, and His divine destiny (vv.3-5). John's mention of this awareness stresses Jesus' humility and love still further. Washing feet in such a situation was the role of the servants that had few skills and a low position in the household. Here, Jesus reversed normal roles, and assumed the place of a servant rather than that of a rabbi. Jesus even dressed Himself as a *slave* (cf. Phil. 2:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:5). His humble service would take Him even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Most of the disciples remained silent as Jesus washed their feet, but "Peter" could not refrain from objecting (vv. 6-7). Jesus encouraged Peter to submit to having his feet washed, with the promise that he would understand later why Jesus was washing them (cf. vv. 12-20). Just as the disciples did not understand that Jesus would die, they did not understand, either, the lessons that led up to His death. They would "understand" after He arose—and the Holy Spirit enlightened their minds. This is a lesson we should also learn; we need to let Christ take control of our life and any situation we find ourselves in because later will find that, if we let Christ take control, it is the best way – far better than our own way. Jesus' response to Peter did not satisfy him because he objected to Jesus' act in the strongest terms (v. 8). Jesus replied on the spiritual and symbolic level that if He did wash Peter's feet, he would have no part with Him. If failure to submit to Jesus' washing meant the termination of their relationship, Peter wanted to have all of him washed by Jesus (v.9). Because of Peter's response, Jesus distinguished the two types of spiritual cleansing that believer's experience: salvation (which is never repeated) and daily forgiveness of sins (which is repeated). When a person believes in Jesus as Savior, God removes all the guilt of that person for sins committed in the past, present, and future (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:1) – once for all. Jesus spoke of this legal forgiveness as a total "bath" (v.10). After a person believes in Jesus as Savior, they do sin because of their sin nature and those sins hinder the believer's fellowship with God (cf. Matt.

6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4). Jesus compared this forgiveness to "washing the feet," which become dirty while walking through life. We obtain this cleansing by confessing our sins to God (1 John 1:9; cf. 1 John 2:24; 5:13). The basis for both types of forgiveness is Jesus' work on the cross. The "unclean" disciple was Judas, who had not believed that Jesus was God's Son. Jesus now returned to His role as the disciples' teacher and asked them a question about what He has done to them (v. 12). He begins by repeating the names that the disciples called him; "Teacher" translates the Hebrew "Rabbi" and "Lord," the Aramaic "Mari" (v. 13). Both titles were respectful and acknowledged Jesus' superiority over His disciples. Given His superior position, He had specifically taken a lower role than theirs for their welfare (v.14-15). Similarly, as a believer, we are to follow Christ's example by willingly and happily putting others before ourselves (cf. Phil. 2:1-11). Too many times we, as believers, stand selfishly on our 'dignity' when we should be 'kneeling at and washing' the feet of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ's example clearly defines the "principle of personal relationships" that we are to follow, which is to initiate serving others and to serve others humbly without pride or strife (cf. I Tim. 5:9-10). It was the attitude of *humility* that disciples should have toward one another that was Jesus' point. Jesus reaffirms this principle in v.16, which indicates its importance, in the form of an aphorism (cf. 15:20; Matt. 10:24; Luke 6:40; 22:37). An "aphorism" is a concise definition or statement of a principle. It is known that a slave has a submissive role to that of a master; and that a messenger has a submissive role to those who sent them. Jesus used these contrasting roles to teach the disciples that no one who follows Christ should think it is beneath him or her to serve others—since He, the master and sender, had humbled Himself to serve. The great challenge for us is this: we often know what we should do – but do we do it. Knowing what one ought to do, and actually doing it, are frequently two different things. Jesus promised God's favor (blessing) on those who practice humble service, not on those who simply realize that they should be humble (cf. 8:31; 12:47-48; Heb. 12:14; James 1:22-25). We are to practice the "principle of personal relationships" taught here by Christ as we live among others.

John 13:34-35. Jesus is talking to His disciples prior to His crucifixion. Having announced their inevitable separation, Jesus now began to explain what He expected of His disciples during their absence from Him (v.34). They were to "love one another" as He had "loved" them. The command to "love one another" was not completely new (1 John 2:7-8), but in the Mosaic Law the standard was "as you love yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Now there was a new and higher standard, namely, "as I have loved you." It was also a new (Gr. *kainen*, fresh rather than different) commandment, in that it was part of a new covenant that Jesus would ratify with His blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). Under that new covenant, God promised to enable His people to "love" by transforming their hearts and minds (Jer. 31:29-34; Ezek. 36:24-26). It is only by God's transforming grace that believers can "love one another" as Jesus has "loved" them. It is that supernatural love that would distinguish disciples of Jesus from others (v.35). "Love for one another" would identify them as His disciples. It is this kind of love that bears witness to a disciple's connection with Jesus, and thereby honors Him (cf. 1 John 3:10b-23; 4:7-16). We, as believers, are to manifest, display and practice this love since God dwells within us. However, it is possible to quench and or to grieve the indwelling Spirit, so that we do not manifest much love (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30). Are you manifesting the love of Christ to others, especially to fellow believers? Or are you quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit in your lack of love for others, especially fellow believers?

John 14:6. The disciples were confused about Jesus' destination (v.5). Jesus gives them an enigmatic answer. He had already said plainly, at least three times, that He would die and rise again (cf. Mark 8:31-32; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). Nevertheless, the disciples' focus and understanding of Jesus' ministry did not allow them to interpret His words literally. Jesus responds to Thomas' question by telling the disciples that He is "the way, and the truth, and the life." This is the sixth of Jesus "I am" claims (cf. 6:48; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 15:1). The "way" is slightly more dominant, in view of Thomas' question and its relative

position to the "truth" and the "life." Jesus is "the way" *to God*, because He is "the truth" *from God* and "the life" *from God*. He not only shows people the "way," but he *is* the "way." He is the "truth" because He embodies God's revelation (1:18; 5:19; 8:29); and He is the "life" because He is the source of and imparts eternal life (1:4; 5:26; 11:25; cf. 1 John 5:20). Because Jesus is the means of access to God, who is the source of all 'truth and life,' He Himself is the "truth and the life" for men. Therefore, Jesus said that "no one comes to the Father" (God) but "through" faith in Him. This is an exclusive claim to being the only way to heaven. This is a dogmatic statement! Remember this, it is characteristic of truth to be dogmatic; truth has to be dogmatic. There is a mistaken idea today that you can go to heaven and God your own way. But this is not true. Why, because this is not your world, it is God's. It is not by your rules that you go to heaven; it is by God's rules that you go to heaven. He makes the rules and He says that no man comes to Him except through Christ! Do you recognize this truth? Do you know the way? Are you following the 'rules?'

John 15:12. Jesus had summarized His teaching to the disciples with the command to "love one another, just as" He had "loved" them (cf. 13:34-35; 1 John 3:16). This was especially relevant because of the disciples' earlier arguments about who of them was the greatest, and their unwillingness to wash each other's feet. Jesus was teaching the disciples that they were to continue in abiding with each other by love; because the continued abiding in love is just as necessary as their abiding in Him by faith for their future testimony and witness. Division, strife, and jealousy are fatal to showing the love of Christ to other; it is fatal to the spreading of the gospel. The 'love' that Jesus was teaching the disciples to have for one another is defined in v.13. Love" for a friend (or "friends") reaches its zenith when one willingly sacrifices his or her life for that friend(s). Jesus had spoken of His love for His disciples (v. 12). He would shortly show them how *great* it was by making the supreme sacrifice for them. After that, they would not only have His command to obey, but also His example to follow. Actually, Jesus did more than lay down His life "for His friends"—He even died for His enemies (cf. Matt. 5:43-47; Rom. 5:8-10)! However, in the context of this passage, His statement was true on its own. The most a person can do for a friend is to die for him or her. What is your love like for your fellow believer?

John 15:16. Jesus is talking with His disciples and He once again stressed the initiative in the relationship between Him and His disciples lay with Himself, not them (cf. 1:39, 42-43; 6:70; 10:27). He did this because of their tendency to think too highly of themselves (spiritual pride). It was common for disciples to choose their rabbi at the time of Jesus. But He had chosen them; and He had also "appointed" them to a specific task. They had a job to do as His servants, a mission to fulfill. Part of His purpose for them was that they "bear fruit," and that their fruit would have lasting effects. Jesus was referring to the "fruit" of their outreach since He linked *going* with *bearing fruit*. The disciples were to be asking the Father in prayer, in Jesus' name, for fruit-bearing to happen. Jesus linked prayer and fruit-bearing in a cause-and-effect relationship. Prayer plays an essential role in the believer's fruitfulness (cf. James 4:2). Verse 16 concludes Jesus' teachings on the characteristics of genuine love (vv. 13-16). True love is sacrificial (v.13); it is obedient in Christ (v.14) it knows and communicates truth (v.15); it takes the initiative (v. 15); and it will always bear fruit with abiding results (v.16).

John 16:8-11. Jesus in His discussion with the disciples tells them that He will be sending them a 'Helper,' which is the Holy Spirit (cf. 15:26). Jesus now tells the disciples what the Holy Spirit will do. The Spirit's coming would result in heightened conviction among unbelievers concerning "sin," "righteousness," and "judgment." What did Jesus mean when He said the Spirit would "convict" the world of sin? It is a conviction that shows someone of their as a means of securing repentance; the Holy Spirit is involved in pointing out sin in order to bring about repentance. In verse 9, the Holy Spirit will convict one of sin. Failure to believe on Jesus after He had come is the great damning sin (3:18, 36). If

people believed Jesus, they would believe what He said about their guilt, and they would turn to Him in repentance. In spite of their unbelief, the Spirit graciously convicts unbelievers of their sinfulness—so that they will believe on Jesus. He may convict them of the individual sins they have committed, but a person can clean up his life and still go to hell. *It is the sin of unbelief in Jesus Christ that condemns people to hell.* In verse 10, the Holy Spirit will also convict the world of "righteousness." Normally "righteousness" refers to righteous conduct and standing before God; but here it is a reference to "*self-righteousness*," which Isaiah compared to a filthy menstrual cloth (Isa. 64:6). The Holy Spirit will convict the world of its false "righteousness," and move the unsaved to seek the *true righteousness* that only Jesus Christ provides. In verse 11, the Holy Spirit will convict the world of "judgment" coming upon it for its sins, which culminated in the rejection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will convict Satan because God has already judged Satan; and would soon judge him on earth at the Cross (cf. 12:31-32). The resurrection of Jesus constituted a condemnation of the devil (cf. Col. 2:15). Since the ruler of the world stands condemned, his children can expect the same treatment unless they believe in Jesus (cf. 14:30). Verses 8 through 11 describe the Spirit's ministry to unbelievers, and verse 13 describes His ministry to believers.

John 17:20-23. Jesus' prayer to the Father prior to His crucifixion is recorded in John 17. Here Jesus is praying for future believers that come to believe in Him through the testimony and witness of the disciples (v.20). All believers have come to Jesus Christ, either directly or indirectly, through one or another of the original disciples or apostles. This is witness to the mission that Jesus referred to in verses 18-19. In verse 21, Jesus prayed for the unity of "all" believers. This unity is based on obedience to God's truth and commands; and it is to reflect the unity and union that exists between the Father and the Son. The purpose of this unity is "that the world" might "believe" that the Father "sent" the Son, Jesus. The display of mutual love and unity among believers shows the world that they really do follow His teachings and possess His life. Jesus was praying that "all" true believers would "be one" in their love for one another, their submission to the authority of Scripture, and their commitment to the mission He has given. Disunity among professing Christians obstructs and defeats the gospel message. The solution to disunity is not to impose an artificial institutional unity that ignores the bases of true unity, because that only presents a hypocritical facade of oneness. *How are we doing in genuinely loving one another, living with unity within a local church family?* Jesus explains the nature of the unity that He requested from His Father (v.17). Jesus prays that all believers share God's "glory;" meaning that they should know Him as He has brought the full knowledge of God to them. The revelation of God results in glory for God. When believers understand and believe the revelation of God that Jesus brought, they become partakers of that "glory." This is something that they share in unity with one another, which also is shared between the Father and the Son. Verse 23 advances Jesus' prayer in verse 21. Jesus wanted the "unity" among believers to be so great and so clear that "the world" would believe ("know") His message. The world would also see that God had poured out His love on believers as well as Jesus. Notice that Jesus implied that He would indwell believers as the Father indwelt Him ("I in them and You in Me"). All three members of the Godhead indwell the believer (14:23; Rom. 8:9; Col. 1:27). God's indwelling presence unites believers in the body of Christ and glorifies God. Are you dwelling in unity with fellow believers? Or do you have 'reasons' that you cannot dwell in unity with believers? If you have 'reasons,' you should be carefully examining your heart in light of scripture – especially in light of Christ's prayer.

Acts 1:8. Jesus is giving instructions to the disciples after His resurrection and prior to His ascension. Rather than trying to figure out when the kingdom would come, the disciples were to give their attention to being a worldwide witness. In carrying out that mission, the disciples would receive divine enablement for their worldwide mission, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would empower the disciples as

they executed their mission. What is promised to disciples is the power to speak, to bear oral testimony, and to perform miracles with authority. "*They were now to be witnesses*" and their definitive work was to bear testimony of Jesus Christ; it was to call attention to what they knew of Him and to deliver His message to mankind. The disciples (to be called apostles) and the church (local body of believers in Christ) were to respond obediently to Jesus' commission, act on behalf of Jesus in the extension of His ministry, focus on the proclamation of the kingdom of God in its witness of Jesus and were to be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit that directed and supported Jesus' ministry, following a program whose guidelines for outreach that were set by Jesus Himself. They were to be witness in Jerusalem (local – where the 'center of a true religion' that was false and hypocritical was located); in Judea (regional – where there were mixed religions, Jewish 'true religion' and paganism); and to the "end of the earth" (entire world – where there was no real or vital religion).

Acts 2:37-40. Peter had just finished preaching his first sermon since the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost (cf. 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit used Peter's sermon to bring conviction, as Jesus had predicted (John 16:8-11). Peter had just explained that the Messiah had come, but the Jewish nation had rejected God's anointed King. And now the Messiah, Jesus had gone back to heaven. The Holy Spirit convicted Peter's hearers of the truth of what he said and of their guilt in rejecting Jesus. Now the Jews who had been waiting expectantly for the Messiah to appear asked a question: "What shall we do?" Peter told them what to do; they needed to "repent" (v. 38). Repentance involves a change of mind and heart first; a change of conduct, attitude and direction second; and a change of belief by turning away from false beliefs. If a person just thinks of repentance as turning from sinful practices, an act of reforming oneself, then repentance becomes a good work that a person does. This kind of repentance does not result in salvation. Repentance is not an act separate from trusting Christ; it is part of the process of believing and placing one's faith in Christ. Repentance and faith are both necessary for salvation, but not as separate conditions. This is not just giving mental assent to facts that are true; to assent mentally to the fact that 'Jesus died for me' does not result in salvation. Only faith does that because faith places confidence in Christ, rather than in self and words spoken, for salvation. It is a faith that springs from a divinely wrought conviction of sin which produces a repentance that is sincere and genuine. Peter continued by proclaiming that everyone who repented should be baptized ("let every one of you be baptized"). The "baptism" Peter is referring to is water baptism. The New Testament uses the word "baptism" in two ways: Spirit baptism and water baptism. Baptism in water is the external, public sign by which individuals, who believed the gospel message and had repented of their sins, acknowledged Jesus as Lord of their lives. *(Unfortunately, many denominations use this verse as a 'proof text' to claim that water baptism is essential for salvation, which it does not. This belief encounters its greatest problem with passages that make the forgiveness of sin, and salvation in general, dependent on nothing but trust in Christ (e.g., Acts 16:31; 10:43; 13:38-39; 26:18; Luke 24:47; John 3:16, 36; Rom. 4:1-17; 11:6; Gal. 3:8-9; Eph. 2:8-9). Peter himself later proclaimed that forgiveness of sins is on the basis of faith alone - 5:31; 10:43.)* The "gift of the Holy Spirit" was baptism with the Spirit. The Spirit is the gift. Peter connected reception of the Spirit with repentance. The Holy Spirit immediately baptized those who repented (11:15). Their Spirit baptism was not a later "second blessing." Peter continues in verse 39. The "promise" is the gift of the Holy Spirit (1:5, 8; 2:33). Peter's reference to "your children" reflects the strong influence that Jewish fathers exercised in their homes. When a father became a Christian, his children would normally follow his lead and become Christians too. Those "far off" probably include the Diaspora Jews, future generations of Jews, and the Gentiles. Peter had already expressed his belief that Gentiles could be saved (v. 21; cf. Joel 2:32), a fact taught repeatedly in both the Old and the New Testament. Peter's message of repentance continued in verse 40. The Greek word translated "generation" means "a race of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, and character." Jesus had announced that the actual generation of Jews who had rejected Him would experience God's

judgment on themselves and their nation (Matt. 21:41-44; 22:7; 23:34—24:2). In view of that prediction, it seems that Peter may have had that impending judgment in mind when he issued this call to his hearers. Jesus' promised judgment fell in A.D. 70 when Titus invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and scattered the Jews. J. Dwight Pentecost wrote: "While judgment on the nation was inescapable, individuals could be delivered from it. Peter's answer was, 'Be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven,' that is, they were no longer to participate in the repeated sin of the nation in rejecting Christ. The confession of their faith in Christ and of their identification with him by baptism would demonstrate their separation from the nation. They would be put out of the synagogue and lose all identity in the nation. Thus, by this separation they would individually not undergo the judgment on that generation since they ceased to be a part of it. Baptism did not save them. Only their faith in the One in whose name they were being baptized could do that. But baptism did terminate their identity with the nation so that they could escape its judgment." Have you genuinely repented and place your faith in Christ?

Acts 3:19-26. Peter is preaching in the temple within Solomon's portico; and he has reviewed the death of Christ, as the Messiah, and the role the Jews had in His death. He now addresses a perceived question: "If Jesus was the Messiah, where was the messianic kingdom?" Peter proceeded to explain from Scripture that the Jews needed to accept their Messiah before the messianic kingdom would begin. He again called on his hearers to repent, in view of what he had pointed out (cf. 2:38). The Greek noun translated "repentance" (*metanoia*) here literally means "after mind," as in afterthought, or change of mind. Genuine, true repentance never exists except in conjunction with faith; wherever there is true faith there is also genuine, true repentance. Peter's hearers had thought Jesus was not the Messiah. Now they needed to change their minds and believe He is the Messiah. He also invited them to "return" to a proper relationship to God, which was possible only by accepting Jesus. The result would be forgiveness of their sins. Note that there is no reference to baptism as being essential to either repentance or forgiveness in this verse (cf. 2:38). The phrase "times of refreshing" (v. 19) refers to the blessings connected with the "day of the Lord" in the Millennium. This understanding is supported by verses 20-21. They connect with the second coming of Messiah, the "period" of restoration of all things. They are the subjects of Old Testament prophecy. Zechariah predicted that the Jews would one day accept Messiah whom they had formerly rejected (Zech. 12:10-14; cf. Deut. 30:1-3; Jer. 15:19; 16:15; 24:6; 50:19; Ezek. 16:55; Hos. 11:11; Rom. 11:25-27). Peter urged them to do that now. Some individual Jews did repent, but the nation as a whole did not in response to Peter's exhortation (4:1-4). In verses 22-23, Peter quotes Moses (Deut. 18:15-19; cf. Lev. 23:29), who had prophesied that God would provide prophets through whom He would make His will known to His people, to confirm what he had just stated. Belief in Moses should have led to belief in Jesus, and belief in Jesus would have made Peter's hearers obedient to Moses. Peter, by quoting this prophecy, affirmed that *Jesus was the Messiah*, and then urged his readers to accept Him or face destruction (v. 23). Believers in Peter's day regarded this passage as a messianic prophecy (cf. John 1:21b, 25; 7:40). In verse 24, Peter references "Samuel" and the prophets who followed him as anticipating the Messiah's reign. "Samuel" announced that David would replace Saul (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:28; 28:17; cf. 1 Sam. 16:13); that in announcing David's reign, Samuel was also anticipating Messiah's reign. Prophets after Samuel spoke of David's continuing dynastic rule. In verses 25-26, Peter called those who listened to him as "the sons of the prophets" in that they were the descendants of those people, not prophets themselves. They were "sons ... of the covenant" God made with Abraham because they were Abraham's physical descendants. They were part of Abraham's physical seed through whom God purposed to bring blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4). Their acceptance of God's Messiah was essential to their fulfilling all of God's purposes through them and in them. God desired to bless *all* people, but He purposed to bless humanity by first blessing the *Jews*. It was to bless the Jews *first*, and after that all humanity, that God had called

Jesus forth as a Prophet. "For you first" stresses the primacy of Jewish blessing and the phrase "raised up" refers to God raising up Jesus as a prophet like Moses (cf. v. 22). The gospel went to the Jews before it went to the Gentiles (cf. Matt. 10:5-6; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16) because the establishment of Christ's earthly kingdom depends on Israel's acceptance of her Messiah (Matt. 23:39; Rom. 11:26). Before Christ can reign on the earth, Israel must repent (Zech. 12:10-14). It is God's desire that all men come to repentance. This was Peter's message to the Jews. It is the message we are to be giving to the world. Have you repented of your sin and placed your faith in Christ?

Acts 5:3-4. Luke records the heart and actions of the early church in 4:32-36. Here he records the actions and results of two believers in the early church, Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). In verse 3, Peter speaks to Ananias about the gift that Ananias had brought to him. Rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to fill him (cf. 2:4; 4:8, 31), Ananias had allowed Satan to control his heart. However, Ananias was personally responsible for his action. He could not claim: "The devil made me do it." Peter said, "... you have conceived this deed in your heart." Ananias' sin was lying. He sought to deceive Peter and the other believers in Jerusalem by trying to gain a reputation for greater generosity than he deserved. By deceiving the church, Ananias was also trying to deceive the Holy Spirit who indwelt the church. In attempting to deceive the Holy Spirit, he was trying to deceive God (v.4). His sin was misrepresenting his gift by claiming that it was the total payment that he had received when it was really only "a portion" of it. Ananias' sin was *hypocrisy*, which is a form and practice of lying. Ananias' sin was also covetousness because he had "*kept back part of the price.*" Ananias and Sapphira followed the example of Achan (cf. Josh. 7:10-26) and sinned because of the love of material possessions (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Tim. 4:10). Hypocrisy and lying to the Holy Spirit is a sin that many believers commit frequently today. When believers act hypocritically by pretending a devotion that is not theirs, or a surrender of life they have not really made, they lie to the Holy Spirit. Those that boast of good works they never did, or promise good works they never do, or make the good works they do more or better than they really are; they are guilty of hypocrisy and lying to the Holy Spirit. If God acted today as He did in the early Jerusalem church, I wonder if the undertakers would have much more work than they could do. Acts clearly presents the Holy Spirit as a *Person* who can be lied to (v.3), tested (v. 9), who bears witness (v. 32), is resisted (7:51), gives orders (8:29; 10:19; 13:2), refuses permission (16:7), and speaks (28:25). How careful are you in living your life? Are you genuine or are you living a lie as a hypocrite?

Acts 5:29-32. Peter and the apostles had been arrested and placed in prison (5:17-18) but they were freed from prison by an angel and were in the temple teaching when they were arrested again (5:19-27). They are now standing before the high priest answering questions being presented to them (5:28). In verse 29, Peter, as spokesman for the apostles, did not attempt to defend their civil disobedience. He stated that it was their responsibility to "obey God rather than men," specifically the Sanhedrin (4:19; cf. Luke 12:4-5). Peter reaffirmed that "the God of their (our) fathers" had "raised up Jesus" from the dead, and that the Sanhedrin was responsible for His crucifixion, an extremely brutal and shameful death (v.30). Peter went on to proclaim that "God" had "exalted" Jesus to the place of supreme authority at "His right hand" (v.31). The Sanhedrin had asked Jesus if He was the Christ, and Jesus had replied that they would see Him seated at God's right hand (cf. Luke 22:67-71). Jesus was Israel's national "Prince" (leader, Messiah) and the Jews' individual and collective "Savior" (deliverer). Jesus had the authority to "grant repentance" (a change of mind) about Himself to the nation, and consequently "forgiveness of sins." Jesus' authority to forgive sins had been something Israel's leaders had resisted from the beginning of the Lord's ministry (Luke 5:20-24). The apostles thought of themselves, not just as heralds, but as *eyewitnesses* ("witnesses") of that to which they now testified (v.32). The witness of "the Holy Spirit," to which Peter referred, was the *evidence* that Jesus was the Christ—which the Spirit provided through fulfilled messianic prophecy. Furthermore, God had now "given" the "Holy Spirit" to those who

obeyed God by believing in Jesus (John 6:29). The Holy Spirit was also the greatest gift God had given people who lived under the Old Covenant (cf. Luke 11:13). These leaders needed to "obey" God by believing in Jesus, and then they too would receive this wonderful gift. God has *commanded* everyone to believe in His Son (e.g., 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). Failure to repent and place one's faith in Christ constitutes disobedience and results in judgment.

Acts 7:60. As Christ had done upon the cross, Stephen "called upon" the Lord; "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Luke wanted his readers to connect the two executions – Christ and Stephen - but they were not exactly the same. However, between Stephen and Jesus there was a common experience and a common forgiveness offered; and no one asked for or received what was offered to them (i.e., Saul, v.58). None the less, Stephen had forgiven those who were stoning him; and he, like Christ, had a pure heart free from bitterness that offered forgiveness to anyone who would accept. For Stephen, he 'fell asleep' knowing he had forgiven the men who had killed him. He died in peace, a peace that comes to the man who has done the right thing even when it was rejected.

Acts 8:13,22. There are various interpretations of this verse. One interpretation is that "Simon himself believed," just as the others Luke mentioned in verse 12. A second interpretation is that Simon's belief was motivated by selfish reasons, where he saw it as an 'act' useful to gain the power possessed by Philip. Verses 18-23 appear to support the second interpretation; verse 24 appears to support the first interpretation. In either case, the truth is that no one is genuinely saved without genuine repentance. In verse 20, Peter sternly replies to Simon's request for the "power" exhibited by the disciples (cf. vv.14-18) by saying 'Your silver perish with you!' By his request, Simon had revealed that he hoped he could buy God's gifts; but God's gifts are gifts that cannot be purchased because God gives them freely and sovereignly. Peter then told Simon that God would not grant the ability ("authority") he sought ("you have no part or portion"), because his "heart" was "not right with (before) God" (v.21). Simon was under the control of his own pride and self-will rather than the Holy Spirit. Bitterness, bondage, and iniquity still characterized him (v. 23). Peter describes Simon's offer as poison and a chain (v.23), which is the fruit of pride, self-centeredness and self-will. Pride is deceitful – and it brings about judgmental attitudes and bitterness. Be careful.

Acts 9:1-19, 32-35. Acts 9:1-19 is the account of Saul's conversion from a leader in persecuted believers in Christ to becoming a follower of Christ. Since Stephen's martyrdom (cf. 8:3), Saul had been persecuting Jews who had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Saul was on his way to Damascus. Damascus was located about 135 miles to the north-northeast of Jerusalem, about a week's journey. "The Way" was one of the earliest designations of Christianity (cf. 18:24-25; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), and it appears only in Acts. It meant the path characterized by life and salvation. Saul was met by Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus in a blinding vision; what blinded Saul was not the sun, however, but a revelation of Jesus Christ (vv. 17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Saul now saw Jesus; the same Jesus Stephen had seen while Saul witnessed Stephen dying (7:55). Jesus spoke to Saul and asked him "why" he was "persecuting" Him, not His followers, but Himself. Saul responded by addressing Jesus as "Lord!" Jesus' self-revelation totally shocked Saul, who until then had regarded Jesus as a blasphemous pretender to Israel's messianic throne. Saul now discovered that Jesus was God, and He was also present in His followers whom Saul was persecuting. Jesus did not condemn him, but graciously commanded him to enter Damascus and to wait for further directions from Himself. The intense light of meeting Jesus blinded Saul temporarily ("three days"). His companions had to lead him off "into Damascus," where he waited for three days for further instructions: blind, fasting, and praying. While Saul was waiting in Damascus, a resident of Damascus, Ananias received "a vision" of the Lord Jesus (v. 17), to whom he submitted willingly. Jesus gave Ananias specific directions to another man's

house in Damascus where he would find Saul. The Lord sovereignly prepared both Ananias and Saul with revelations of Himself; so that when He brought them together, they would have no doubt about His personal dealings with them (cf. Peter and Cornelius in 10:1-23). The Lord revealed to Ananias His purpose for Saul in order to bolster Ananias' courage to go see the person who so savagely persecuted the believers in Christ. This assurance gave Ananias added encouragement to go to Judas' house in search of Saul. Ananias found Saul and communicated his Christian love for his new Christian brother with a touch ("laying his hands on him") and a loving word of greeting: "Brother." He then explained his double purpose for coming to Saul. It was to restore his "sight," as well as to enable Saul to experience the filling of "the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit filled Saul as he responded to God's Word appropriately. God then restored Saul's sight. The impression given in the text is that the first thing he did ("he got up") was identify with Christ ("and was baptized") and the disciples of Christ by water baptism (cf. 8:12, 38). He did this even before breaking his fast of three days. Then he ate ("took food") and received strength physically. Later in Acts 9 (vv.32-35), we read of Peter coming to the town of Lydda, which was located about 10 miles from the sea on the Mediterranean coastal plain, about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. There Peter healed a lame man named "Aeneas." Peter announced that the healing was Jesus Christ's work (cf. 1:1; 3:6): "Jesus Christ heals you." "Sharon" was the name of the section of maritime plain that stretched from Joppa to Mt. Carmel, while Lydda was near its southeastern edge. The healing of Aeneas resulted in many people hearing the gospel and believing in Jesus ("all who lived at Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord").

Acts 11:4-18. Peter had a vision (10:9-15) from the Lord that resulted in his going to the Gentiles to share the gospel message (10:9-48). In chapter 11, Peter has encountered opposition to his sharing of the gospel with the Gentiles (11:1-3). Luke recorded Peter's retelling of these events to his critics in vv. 4-17. Peter justified his actions in Caesarea (eating with Gentiles) by appealing to what God had done (v. 17a). Note that Peter identified "believing in the Lord Jesus Christ" as the only necessary prerequisite to receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit (v. 17a). Spirit baptism ("the same gift as *He gave* to us") was not an experience subsequent to salvation for Cornelius and his household, but something that happened simultaneously with salvation. Peter's defense of going to the Gentiles to share the gospel message did not rest on what he himself did, but on what *God* did; and God had made no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Peter's explanation was satisfactory to his critics. His Jewish brethren agreed that God was saving Gentiles simply by faith in Jesus Christ, just as He was saving Jews, and that they should no longer regard Gentiles as "unclean" (v.18). They recognized and yielded to God's initiative in this event. As a result, the bonds between Jewish and Gentile Christians became stronger, and the bonds between unbelieving Jews and believing Jews became weaker. It is clear from the events Peter experienced (cf. 10:9-11:17) that God initiated all of Peter's ministry and that 'God had granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.' Repentance is a gift from God to the heart of the unbeliever; just as faith is a gift to the heart of the unbeliever (Eph. 2:8-10). Faith stresses what the object of belief is; faith is directed toward Jesus. Repentance stresses what belief involves; it is a change of mind or of orientation from oneself and his own works to a reliance on Jesus to save him. 'Repentance' can be a summary term for conversion stressing that a change of orientation has taken place when one believes.

Acts 17:29-31. Paul is in Athens addressing the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the Areopagus (17:16-34). He used the altar "To the Unknown God" as a means to introduce the true and living God to the Athenians (17:22-31). Beginning at verse 29, Paul's conclusion was that idolatry is illogical. If man is the "offspring of God," then God cannot be an image or an idol, or comprised of "gold or silver or stone," the earthly materials from which idols are made. However, before Jesus Christ came, God "overlooked the times of ignorance" (i.e., when people had only limited revelation; cf. 3:17; 14:16; Rom. 3:25; 2 Pet. 3:9); meaning God view people's sin and guilt was different before Jesus Christ came to

earth to die as the perfect sacrifice then He does *now*, now that Christ has come (v.30). People before were guilty of failing to respond to former revelation, but now they are more guilty, in view of the greater revelation that Jesus Christ brought at His incarnation (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). God previously took the relative lack of understanding about Himself into consideration as He dealt with people (Rom. 3:25). Now that Christ has come, He will hold people more responsible for their sins. Consequently, people's guilt is greater this side of the Incarnation. Therefore, God demands that "all *people* everywhere should repent." Biblical repentance is a change of mind or attitude concerning God (Acts 20:2)], Christ (Acts 2:38), works (Heb. 6:1) and sin (Acts 8:22). Repentance is necessary and commanded of men because there is a day coming when all of mankind will be judged by Jesus Christ (v.31). And God has guaranteed that this judgment will occur because He has raised Jesus Christ from the dead; Christ's resurrection from the dead is the insurance policy that guarantees that the judgment of mankind will occur. Jesus Christ is God's agent of judgment (cf. 7:13; Ps. 96:13; John 5:22, 27), the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13). Jesus was a man, not an idol or a mythological character such as the Greek gods, and He was appointed by God to be the Agent of judgment. Paul concluded his speech by clarifying His hearers' responsibility; he has presented God as the Creator in His past work, God as the Redeemer in His present work, and God as the Judge in His future work.

Acts 20:32-38. Paul was headed back to Jerusalem. On his way he met with the elders of the church of Ephesus. Paul concluded his address to the elders with a blessing (v.32). Since he was no longer going to be able to build up these men, he committed (or commended) them to God, who would do it, and to the Scriptures ("the word of His grace"), God's tool in this process. God's "grace" is the source of all spiritual growth, and of the ultimate "inheritance" these elders would one day enjoy because they were believing "saints" (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Phil. 1:6; Col. 3:24). Paul exhorts the elders in verses 33-35, reminding them of his example ("in everything I showed you") that they were to follow. They were to lead the church at Ephesus like he had led them. The precise saying of Jesus to which Paul referred in verse 35 is not in Scripture, but it may have come down to Paul by oral or written tradition. Luke records the farewell that Paul had with the Ephesian elders in verses 36-38. Paul knelt in prayer. The kneeling posture here, as elsewhere in Scripture, reflects an attitude of submission to the sovereign Lord. The normal position for praying in that culture was apparently *standing* (cf. Mark 11:25), so *kneeling* implies a particularly solemn occasion. Prayer for God's grace and protection undoubtedly bonded these men together in Christian love; and the elder's reaction to Paul's ministry, his life and his love for them overwhelmed them. In Luke's description of this event there runs one dominant feeling and that is the feeling of affection and love as deep as the heart itself. That is the feeling that should be in any church. When love dies within a church the work of Christ will cease to exist.

Acts 23:5-7. Paul is standing before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, responding to charges against him. When he was standing there, he was struck in the mouth (23:2), to which he responded (23:3). Paul did not know that the person who commanded the soldier to strike him was the high priest. His initial response was one of disrespect to the position of authority (v.3). There may be a number of reasons that Paul did not recognize the high priest, but he did respond back to those who told him it was the high priest that ordered someone to hit Paul in the mouth that he did not know that was the one who had given the order (v.5). Paul's quotation from Exodus 22:28 showed that he was in subjection to God's revealed will, concerning which he was on trial for repudiating. Paul quoted the Old Covenant here for the benefit of the Jews who lived under it. Being subject to governmental authorities is as much of a requirement under the New Covenant as it was under the Old (cf. Rom. 13:1-7). Paul recognized that he could not get a fair trial in a court that did not even observe the law it purported to defend, so he changed his tactics (v.6). He decided to divide the jury and began his defense again ("Men brethren"). This time he took the offensive. The issue of "the (hope and) resurrection of the dead" was fundamental

in Paul's case (cf. 17:32). By raising the old controversy of whether resurrection is possible, Paul divided his accusers. Paul's belief in the resurrection divided the Sanhedrin (vv.7-8); so much so that the Roman commander removed Paul from the scene (v.10).

Acts 24:16. Since Paul believed God would resurrect him, he sought to maintain "a clear (blameless) conscience" while he lived. Conscience is the capacity to feel guilt (cf. II Cor. 1:12).

Acts 24:25. Paul had been brought before Felix as the commander had forwarded Paul to him (23:23-35). Paul was defending himself before Felix as Tertullus had presented the Jews case against Paul (24:1-9). Paul's defense before Felix is recorded in verses 10-21; and now we find Felix and Drusilla coming to visit with him. Paul emphasizes three things in his visits with Felix and Drusilla: 1) sin ("self-control"), 2) "righteousness," and 3) "judgment" (cf. John 16:8-11). Felix and Drusilla were notoriously deficient in all three of these areas. It is not surprising that Felix became uneasy as these subjects terrified him as he was under the conviction of the Holy Spirit for the sin that was in his life. Felix's decision to postpone making a decision about his relationship to God is a common one. Often people put off this most important decision until they cannot make it. This is probably why most people who make decisions for Christ do so when they are young. Older people normally become hardened to the gospel.

Acts 26:18-20. Paul is standing before King Agrippa telling him of his conversion (26:1-18). Paul had gone to Damascus as the one sent from the Sanhedrin; but he returned as the apostle of Jesus Christ. In verse 18, Paul recalls the mission that was given to him by the Lord. "To open their eyes...to turn them from darkness to light...from the power of Satan to God...that they may receive forgiveness" is one of the best summary statements of not only Paul's mission, but also the mission of every believer (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Col. 1:12-14). Paul was not disobedient to that mission and declared to men everywhere he went to repent (v. 19-20). "Repent" means 'to change the attitude of the mind' and do a 180 degree turn around in one's life. Note the distinctions Paul writes about: 1) "repent," 2) "turn to God" (a 180-degree turn), and 3) "do works befitting (appropriate for) repentance." Genuine repentance is publicly demonstrated in a new lifestyle by the three distinctions Paul noted. When people claim to know Christ as personal Savior but there is no notable change in their life, no visible fruits of repentance as Paul described; then there must be a question about their heart condition and their eternal destination.

Rom. 1:18-32. Paul, in his writing to the Roman church, has presented via the gospel message that the 'just shall live by faith' (v. 16-17). There is a universal need for the gospel as every human being needs to trust in Jesus Christ, because everyone lacks the righteousness that God requires before He will accept us. Paul demonstrates that need of the gospel for all people generally in 1:18-32. Verse 18 gives one reason, for man's need of the gospel – the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Men who are ungodly and unrighteous will experience God's "wrath;" God's "wrath" is His divine displeasure with sin that results in condemnation to hell. "Ungodliness" is man's pride, neglect, rebellion and lack of reverence for God. "Unrighteousness" or "wickedness" (NIV) means injustice toward other human beings. Together these two words show humankind's failure to love God and other people as we should, which are our two greatest responsibilities (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-39). Immorality ("unrighteousness, wickedness") proceeds from apostasy in doctrine ("ungodliness"); the order of the words is significant. Verses 19-27 demonstrate man's ungodliness, and verses 28-32 show his wickedness. The "truth" refers to truth that people know about God (cf. v. 25). They suppress this truth by their wickedness. Whenever the truth starts to exert itself, it makes man uncomfortable and uneasy in their moral nature; and in reaction to that conviction, they hold truth down and suppress it. Paul explained "ungodliness" in 1:19-27, and "unrighteousness" in 1:28-32. Some people are more ungodly and unrighteous than others, but all are ungodly and unrighteous. In verses 19-20, Paul

discusses the "natural revelation" of God to man. Verse 19 states the fact of natural revelation, and verse 20 explains the process. Natural revelation describes what everyone knows about God because of what God has revealed concerning Himself in nature. Creation itself bears testimony to God, its Maker, and every human being observes this silent witness (cf. Ps. 19). This is the reason that men work so diligently at trying to prove evolution to be true – because if they could they could prove there is no God. But they cannot, so they place their faith in their own work and actively work at denying God. Natural revelation tells people that there is a God, and it makes man responsible to respond to his Creator in worship and submission. However, it does not give sufficient information for him to experience salvation. That is why everyone needs to hear the gospel. When men reject God, deny God and the truth of who He is it becomes very difficult for them to recognize and receive truth; they follow foolishness and become foolish (vv. 21-22). Mankind today has elevated themselves to God's position (cf. Dan. 2:38; 3:1; 5:23); man is the creator of all problems – and the solver of all problems. Humanism has replaced the worship of God; man's pride has emboldened him to worship himself and all that is temporal - money, material things, sex, fame, power – anything the world offers as success. Man has also turned the worship of God into worship of animals, which is done in many parts of the world as idol worship, and in other parts of the world as worship of the animals themselves as evidenced by the money that is spent on them and the attention they are given (v. 23). Paul's point is that rejection of God rather than acceptance of God is typical of humanity; by *himself*, fallen man does not respond to general revelation. Because man has actively engaged his will in rejecting God, God has given them up to their own fleshly desires (vv.24-25). By His giving them up to their own lusts (moral uncleanness), God permitted men who rejected Him to suffer the consequences of their desires. In so doing, mankind literally "exchanged the truth" of God (v. 25) for a "lie." The "lie" is the replacement of the 'truth of God' with the "lust of their heart;" meaning they worship themselves instead of God. In verses 26-27, Paul describes immorality in its worst state – 'unnatural acts.' "Natural" here means in keeping with how God has designed mankind and "unnatural" refers to behavior that is contrary to how God has made mankind. Because mankind "exchanged" the truth for the lie, God allowed man to degrade himself through his "passions" (vv. 26-27). The result was that man "exchanged the natural" human functions for what is "unnatural." In the Greek text, the words translated "women" (*thelus*; v. 26) and "men" (*arsen*, v. 27) mean "females" and "males." Homosexuality and lesbianism is a perversion because it uses sex for a purpose contrary to those for which God created and intended it (Gen. 1:28; 2:24). John Wilmer correctly wrote: "Contemporary homosexuals insist that these verses mean that it is perverse for a heterosexual male or female to engage in homosexual relations but it is not perverse for a homosexual male or female to do so since homosexuality is such a person's natural preference. This is strained exegesis unsupported by the Bible. The only natural sexual relationship the Bible recognizes is a heterosexual one (Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:4-6) within marriage." Matthew Henry wrote a very strong indictment of man when he said: "A man cannot be delivered up to a greater slavery than to be given up to his own lusts." Paul closes this passage with a description of mankind that reject God and who follow after their own lusts (vv.28-32). As mankind *disapproved* of the idea of retaining and acknowledging God in their thinking, so God gave them over to a *disapproved* mind (v. 28). People who have refused to acknowledge God end up with minds that are 'disqualified' from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God. The result is that they do things that are 'not proper/fitting' because they have a mind that is reprobate, worthless, useless, is unable to fulfill its natural functions as designed by God. Such a mind confuses right and wrong and fails to acknowledge or even distinguish what is pleasing to Him from what is displeasing – because they have rejected God. "Unrighteousness" (v. 29; wickedness, NIV) is whatever is contrary to what is right or just. "Wickedness" (v. 29; evil, NIV) is what is vile and sinister. "Greed/covetousness" (v. 29) is the drive to obtain more. "Malice" (depravity, NIV) describes resident moral evil. "Insolent (v. 30) identifies one who behaves with humiliating and unconscionable arrogance to those who are not powerful enough to retaliate. "Arrogant" focuses on

one's thoughts, and "boastful" on one's words. The final step in man's degradation is his promotion and celebration of wickedness (v. 32). It is bad to practice these things, but it is even worse to encourage others to practice them. When reaches this stage of degradation, not only is the voice of conscience gone but the mind has become completely callous to the moral degradation and ruin of others; and they take pleasure in their sinfulness.

Rom. 2:1-4. Paul continues his exhortation from Romans 1 here. In Romans 2, Paul set forth the principles by which God will judge everyone (vv. 1-16). By so doing, he warns the self-righteous, the religious moralist, because these are principles by which God *judges*, not principles by which He *saves*. Paul is addressing those people who might think they were free from God's wrath because they had not "practiced" the things to which Paul had just referred (1:29-32). The apostle now warned them that they had indeed "practiced" the same things (v. 1). Evil desires constitute sin as well as evil actions. The first principle by which God judges is that He judges righteously (v. 2). He judges on the basis of what really exists, not what merely appears to be. For example, someone might assume that since his immoral thoughts are not observable, he is free of guilt. But God looks at the heart. Consequently, those who have practiced the same sins as those listed previously, though perhaps not in the same way, should not think they will escape judgment (v. 3). Rather than acting like judges of the outwardly immoral, these people should view themselves as sinners subject to God's judgment. They should not misinterpret God's not judging them quickly to be an indication that they are blameless. J. Vernon McGee wrote this about this passage: "God is saying that by the same token that you have the right to judge other people by your standards, He has the right to judge you by His standards." This is the only occurrence of the Greek word *metanoia*, translated "repentance," in Romans. Here Paul writes that the riches of God's goodness, forbearance, longsuffering and goodness lead to repentance. Repentance is a gift of God because it is His riches that have led to it!

Rom. 3:10-18. Paul was writing to a primarily Gentile congregation, so he *concluded* (rather than began) his argument with an appeal to Scripture. The collection of passages Paul used, both affirmed the universality of sin (vv. 10-12; cf. Psa. 14:1-3; 53:1-3), and showed its pervasive inroads into all areas of individual and corporate life (vv. 13-18; cf. Isa. 59:7-8; Psa. 36:1, 10:7). In verses 10-12, a statement of the universality of sin opens and closes the passage. Sin has affected human intellect, emotions, and volition: all aspects of human personality. Note the repetition of "none," as well as "all" and "not even one"—all universal terms. The statement that "there is none who seeks after God" (v. 11) means that no one seeks God without God prompting him or her to do so (cf. John 6:44-46). No one seeks after God for His own sake. People can and should seek God (Acts 17:26-27) and they are responsible for not doing so. In verses 13-18, Paul described the words (vv. 13-14), acts (vv. 15-17), and attitudes (v. 18) of man as tainted by sin. Verse 14 refers to someone who desires the worst for someone and publicly expresses that hostility because their heart is judgmental, unforgiving and bitter. Verses 16 -17 describe the life of one who is bitter and caustic – they see no success only trouble. Verse 18 concludes the quotations by giving the root problem – 'man does not fear God.' This passage is one of the most forceful in Scripture that deals with the total depravity of man. Total depravity does not mean that every person is as bad as he or she could be. It means that sin has affected every part of his or her being, and consequently there is nothing anyone can do to commend himself or herself to a holy God. William Newell wrote: "It is no kindness, but a terrible wrong, to hide from a criminal the sentence that must surely overtake him unless pardoned; for a physician to conceal from a patient a cancer that will destroy him unless quickly removed; for one acquainted with the hidden pitfalls of a path he beholds someone taking, not to warn him of his danger!"

Rom. 3:23. All must come to God by faith in Jesus Christ, because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Each person fails to live up to God's standard ('His glory') with their life; we are all found lacking. "Sin" separates people from fellowship with a holy God. We lack both the character of God and the fellowship of God because of sin.

Rom. 5:1-11. Paul has completed his case that God justifies sinners by faith (Rom. 1-4). Now he explains that salvation by faith binds the believer eternally to Christ (5:1-11). "Therefore" signals that what follows rests on what has preceded – justification is by faith, which is an act of pure grace (v. 1). Because of this justification and grace given by God, "Let us keep on having (and enjoying) peace with God." This is "peace *with* God" (i.e., reconciliation); because it puts an end to the legal strife between the Judge (God) and the accused (sinful man). Those who stand justified need not fear God's wrath, since Jesus Christ has made peace between them and God by His death (cf. Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:14). The justification by faith and the resulting reconciliation with God gives the believer access to God through Christ (v. 2). The idea here is that Jesus Christ enables us to enjoy a continuing relationship with God (cf. Eph. 2:17-18; 3:12). The last part of the verse focuses on that part of our reconciliation that we can look forward to with joyful confidence ("hope") the time when we will experience "glory" when we stand in the Lord's presence. Until that time we will experience sufferings and tribulations that we can "joy" in (v. 3-4). Because we have peace with God and a relationship with Him, with assurance of standing acceptable in His presence, we are able to endure present difficulties with joy. We can "rejoice ('exult') in tribulations" because God has revealed that He uses them to produce steadfast endurance ("perseverance") and "proven character" in those who relate to their sufferings properly (cf. Job 23:10; James 1:2-4; Heb. 12). "Proven character" simply means "proof;" which is the word used to identify the test and results of testing metals to determine their purity. For this reason, believers can 'glory' in tribulations because of what those tribulations produce (cf. James 1:2-4). This "hope will not suffer disappointment because God loves us and enables us to withstand tribulations. God loves us now as He will love us in heaven; God loves us with eternal certainty. He has shown us His love through His "Holy Spirit," whom He has given to indwell every justified sinner in the Church Age (cf. Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:9). The depth of God's love (v. 5) becomes clearer in verses 6-10. Christ died for us "at the right/due time," meaning at the right time from God's perspective (v. 6; cf. 3:26, 8:18, 13:11; Gal. 4:4). Christ died for the "ungodly," who is everyone because all of us neglect God and rebel against Him. Verse 7 prepares for the next one that contrasts with it. Paul used "righteous" here in the general sense of an upright person, not in the theological sense of a person made right with God. People appreciate a "good" person more than an upright person. Goodness carries the idea of one who is not only upright, but loved for it, because he or she reaches out to help others. Paul wrote that Christ died for the: 1) morally helpless (v.5), 2) ungodly (v.6), 3) wicked sinners (v.8), and 4) enemies of God (v.10). God initiated forgiveness to men when He had no reason to other than His love for us. He provided the means of forgiveness to reconcile man to Himself – Christ life and death – the shedding of innocent blood to pay for man's sin. Paul contrasts the worth of the life laid down, Jesus Christ's, and the unworthiness of those who benefit from His sacrifice. God loves man and His provision of His own Son as our Savior demonstrated the depth of His love (John 3:16). Because God initiated forgiveness for sinful, unworthy men, Christ died to provide the means of deliverance from God's wrath against unrighteousness and sin. Jesus Christ's "blood" that was shed on the cross is both the symbol of His death and the literal expression of His life poured out as a sacrifice (cf. 3:25). His blood sacrifice justified us when we were yet sinners (v. 8) – meaning He presented us with forgiveness and reconciliation before we asked for it. Verse 10 begins with "For" (Gr. *gar*), which in this case means "Let me explain more fully." We, as mankind, are not only helpless to save ourselves (v. 6), neglectful of God (v. 6), and wicked (v. 8), but we also set ourselves against God and His purposes. Even though many unsaved people profess to love God, God who knows their hearts sees opposition to Himself in them. Their antagonism toward Him is the proof of it. Jesus

Christ's "death" *reconciled* us to God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:21-22). The Scriptures always speak of man as being "reconciled" *to God*. They never speak of God as reconciled to man. God *reconciles people* to Himself, He *redeems* them from *sin*, and He *propitiates Himself*, all through the death of His Son. Man has offended and departed from God, and needs reconciliation into relationship with Him. It is man who has turned from God, not God who has turned from man. There are two aspects of reconciliation: one for all mankind (2 Cor. 5:19), and another for the believer (2 Cor. 5:20). Jesus Christ's death put mankind in a savable condition, but people still need to experience full reconciliation with God by believing in His Son. This is clear evidence that God (the one offended) initiated and provided the means for forgiveness; and that men (the offender) must ask for forgiveness. And that forgiveness comes by faith (a gift from the one offended to the offender, cf. Eph. 2:8-9). Once man (the offender) places their faith in Christ (the innocent, love in action), they are reconciled to God (the offended); which is the purpose and aim of forgiveness – and the evidence of genuine forgiveness. Jesus Christ's death reconciled us to God with the effect that one day in the future we will stand before Him complete (cf. vv. 5-10). However, we also enter into the benefits of that reconciliation now (cf. vv. 1-4). Justification by faith is our present relationship with God, made possible by Christ's reconciling work on the cross. We were saved by His death in the past, we will be saved by His life in the future, and we are presently enjoying a current saving relationship with God because of His work of reconciliation.

Rom. 5:12-21. Justification by faith not only carries with it many benefits (vv. 1-11), but it also overcomes the effects of man's sin in the Garden (Gen. 3:1-7). In this section (5:12-21) Paul shows that just as Adam's sin has affected all people, so Jesus Christ's obedience has affected all believers. Paul viewed Adam and Christ as federal heads of two groups of people. A federal head is a person who acts as the representative of many others, and whose actions result in consequences that the individuals he represents inevitably experience (i.e., a king, a president, a member of congress, and a parent or ancestor, etc.). Paul looked at what Adam did when he sinned, and what Jesus Christ did at the Cross—and the consequences of their actions for humanity. Verse 12 begins with "Therefore," which is transitional and indicates a relationship between what has gone before and what follows. Paul did not call Adam by name here when he first spoke of them, but referred to him as "one man." Why did Paul and God hold "Adam" responsible for the sinfulness of the race, when it was really Eve who sinned first? They did so because Adam was the person in authority over, and therefore responsible for, Eve (Gen. 2:18-23; 1 Cor. 11:3). Also, Eve was deceived (2 Cor. 11:3), but Adam sinned deliberately (1 Tim. 2:14). It was Adam's sin that corrupted human nature and made each individual ever born a sinner because they now had a corrupted human nature. Paul compared the manner in which death entered the world, through sin, with the manner in which it spread to everyone, also through sin. Death is universal because sin is universal. Paul did not carry through the comparison begun in verse 12 to verse 13. If he had, verse 13 would have read "so righteousness entered the world by one man and life through righteousness." Paul interrupted his statement because he wanted to explain the relationship between sin and the Law, specifically: why there was death before the Law. People died before God gave the Mosaic Law. If there is no law, there can be no transgression of law (cf. 3:20). Since death is the penalty for transgression of law, why did those people die? The answer is they died because they sinned "in" Adam. Adam transgressed God's law in the Garden of Eden, and ever since then, his descendants have transgressed God's moral law (their conscience), not just the Mosaic Law. This accounts for the universality of death. The idea that people should involuntarily suffer punishment because of the sins of another is repugnant to us. Nevertheless, as the head of the human race, Adam's actions resulted in consequences that his descendants had to bear. Likewise, any representative leader's decisions result in consequences his followers must bear. For example, when our president decides to sign into law some piece of legislation, it becomes binding on everyone under his authority. It is just one of the facts of life that we all suffer the consequences of the decisions of those who have preceded us and are over us (cf.

Heb. 7:9-10). It is the punishment for Adam's sin that we bear, not its guilt. We are guilty because we sin, but we die (the punishment for sin) because Adam sinned. Christ bore the punishment of our sins, not our guilt. He died in our place and for us. We are still guilty, but God will not condemn us for being guilty, because He has declared us righteous in Christ (i.e., has justified us). The rest of this chapter develops seven contrasts (one per verse) between Adam's act of sin and Christ's act of salvation. As Adam's act of sin resulted in inevitable death for all his descendants, so Christ's act of obedience resulted in inevitable life for all who believe in Him. In verse 15, the *essences* of Adam's act and Christ's act are contrasted: "the transgression" and "the free gift." To understand the interpretation of "all" and "many" in Rom. 5:15-19, one must understand that the context for a proper interpretation is set in Rom. 5:12; "through one man sin entered into the world thus, death spread to all men." Through Adam all men (the entire human race through procreation) have inherited sin and death; therefore, men are not sinners because they sin, they sin because they are sinners. The offense (the action of disobedience) of one (Adam) causes "many" to die. "Many" is a comparative; it can compare 'many' with 'all'; 'many' with 'few'; or 'many with one'. In the case of Adam – 'many' means the entire human race. The gift of grace (the action of obedience) through one (Christ) abounds to "many" – meaning grace reaches and is available to all but it is not appropriated by all. In the case of Christ – 'many' means those who receive the benefit of His saving act of faith. In Adam's case, a single sin by a single individual was sufficient to bring "condemnation" to the whole human race. In Christ's case, one act of obedience, which the transgressions of many people made necessary, was sufficient to bring "justification" to all those who believe in Him (v. 16). Here the divine *verdicts*, following Adam's act and Christ's act, are in view: condemnation and justification. The consequence of Christ's obedience was mankind (believers "in life") reigning over death (v. 17). Death and life are the contrasting *consequences* of Adam's act and Christ's act. "Therefore," (so then / consequently), by one man's (Adam's) offense (false step), all men (entire human race since Adam) stand condemned before God to receive His judgment. There are three reasons why all human beings, except Christ, are guilty before God. First, God imputed Adam's guilt to each of his descendants; every person who is born after Adam automatically falls under conditions that Adam set in motion (Gen.3:1-7). This is a legal matter and is called "original sin." Second, every person is born with a human nature that has been defiled by sin (Psa. 51:5). This is an inheritance matter and it is called our "sin nature." Third, every person commits acts of sin (Rom. 3:23). This is an individual matter and it is called "personal sin." By one man's (Jesus Christ) righteous act (death on the cross) justification was offered to all men (v.18). In verse 19, by one man's (Adam's) deliberate disobedience, many (entire human race after Adam) were made sinners. By one man's (Christ's) obedience (death on the cross) many will be made righteous (offer and opportunity to believe in Christ will be made to the entire human race; His sacrifice and atonement will be applied to those who accept and receive it by faith). NOTE: The offer to be made righteous is made to all, but God does not declare them to be righteous. Men who place their faith in Christ will be made righteous in the process of sanctification – culminating in glorification when being in God's presence. In verse 20, Paul writes that one of the purposes of the Mosaic Law was to illuminate the sinfulness of people. It did so by identifying and exposing behavior that was contrary to God's will. God did this to prove man's sinfulness to him. However, when God provided Jesus Christ, He provided "grace" (favor) that far exceeded the sin that He exposed when He provided the Law. The contrast in this verse deals with the *significances* of Adam's act and Christ's act. The Law showed the significance of Adam's sin more clearly, and God's provision of Christ showed the significance of God's grace more clearly. Verse 21 is the conclusion of the argument in this section (5:12-21). It brings together the main concepts of sin and death, and righteousness and life. Paul effectively played down Adam and exalted Jesus Christ. Here Paul contrasted the *dominions* of Adam's act and Christ's act: sin reigning in death and grace reigning to eternal life.

Rom. 6:1. Paul had just said that grace super-abounded where sin increased (5:20). The Pharisees believed that Paul, by preaching and teaching justification by faith based on the grace of God, was encouraging people to sin. To some, they thought that believers should not worry about practicing sin, since it results in the manifestation of more of God's grace and His greater glory. To this argument and thought, Paul responds in verse 2; "Certainly not!" It is illogical that those who have "died" in relation "to sin" should continue to "live in" sin. Paul did not say it is impossible to live in sin, or that sin is dead to the Christian (i.e., that it no longer appeals to us). He meant it is unnecessary and undesirable to live in sin, to habitually practice it.

Rom. 6:23. The principle stated here is applicable to all people: believers and unbelievers. It is a statement of two absolutes; it contrasts the masters, sin and God, with the outcomes, death and eternal life. Paul also distinguished the means of the outcomes: "death" is the "wage(s)" earned by those whose work and life is lived in unrepentance and self-will, but "eternal life" is a "gift," "free" to those who rely on and place their faith in the work of Jesus Christ.

Rom. 7:11-25. Paul states that sin was a deceiver; by leading him to expect life by keeping the Law he would be acceptable to God because of his own merit and good works. Sin "deceived" Paul and "killed" (destroyed) him (cf. Gen. 3:13); because the law cannot save – it only leads to death because it identifies sin. Paul's sinful nature urged him to do the very thing the commandment forbade. "Therefore," the Law is holy, just and good (v.12). The Law comes from a holy God and searches out sin. It is "righteous" because it lays just requirements on people, and because it forbids and condemns sin. It is "good" because its purpose is to produce blessing and life (v. 10). In verses 13-25, Paul describes his personal struggle with sin as a believer. The forces of external law and internal sin (i.e., his sinful nature) are in conflict. He finds no deliverance from this conflict except through the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 25). Paul explains the Law's relationship to death; the responsibility for "death" belongs to "sin" not the Law (cf. 6:23). Sin's use of something "good" (the Law) actually brings something 'bad' ("death"); and this shows the *utter sinfulness* of "sin" (cf. Gen. 3:1). Paul states that those who trust in the LORD "know" that the Law is "spiritual" (v.14) because it came from God (cf. vv. 22, 25). In contrast to the Law, Paul was fleshly ("of flesh/carnal") or unspiritual. Man is essentially different from the Law because we have a sinful nature, whereas the Law itself is sinless. Even now, as a believer, Paul stated that he was a slave of sin ("sold into bondage to sin"). Even though we, as a believer, have died to sin through Christ, sin still has a strong attraction for us, since our basic human nature is still sinful, which we retain that nature throughout our life. It is Paul's sinful human nature that influenced him to such an extent that he found himself "doing" (approving) the very things that he despised intellectually (v.15). All believers can identify with Paul in this statement. Paul's new nature, his new nature after salvation, defends the Law (v.16). The Law was not the reason for his dilemma because the Law is good. So, the problem Paul has is his sinful nature (v.17). Paul's problem was traceable to the "sin" that dwelled within him; his sinful nature was the source of his sin, which was still *very much alive*. In verses 14-17, the emphasis is upon the practicing what is hated, the inability to overcome evil in the flesh; while in verses 18-21, the emphasis is upon the failure to do the desired good, the inability, on account of the flesh, to do right. Sin has thoroughly corrupted man's nature, his "flesh" (v.18). He knew what he should do, but he did not always do it. Verses 19-20 restate the thoughts of verses 15 and 17 respectively. Paul repeated these thoughts in order to heighten our appreciation of the frustration that he felt, as well as to emphasize the importance of this principle. Paul states another principle ("law") in v. 21; evil is always present within a person who desires to do "good." Intellectually, Paul argued that he should obey the Mosaic Law (v. 22), but morally, he found himself in rebellion against what he knew was right ("a different law," v. 23). This natural rebelliousness was something he could not rid himself of. Paul used the term "law of the mind" because the mind has the capacity to perceive and make moral judgments.

Paul's conclusion to this: "O wretched man that I am." Our inability to rid ourselves of our sinful nature that urges us to do things that lead to death is expressed by Paul. What Christian has not felt the guilt and pain of doing things that he or she knows are wrong? We will never escape this battle with temptation in this life; and we wonder, like Paul, "Is there anyone who can do anything for me?" And the answer is yes! The solution to this dilemma is not escape from temptation, but victory over it "through Jesus Christ our Lord (v.25a)." We have victory in Christ over sin, which we will fully enjoy when we see Christ. The last part of this verse is another summary. "I myself" contrasts with "Jesus Christ." Paul states again the essence of the struggle that he had just described (13-24) in order to prepare his readers for the grand deliverance that he explains to them in chapter 8.

Rom. 8:1. "Therefore" introduces a conclusion based on everything that Paul wrote from chapter 3 on. He reaffirms justification is by faith alone on the basis of God's overwhelming grace. "No condemnation" is different from freedom from judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). "No condemnation" means that God will never condemn us to an eternity separate from Himself for our sins. No sin a believer can commit, past, present or future, can be held against him; since the penalty for sin was paid by Christ, and His righteousness was imputed to each believer. The reason is not that the believer has been forgiven, which he has, but because he or she is "in Christ Jesus." Jesus Christ, our Savior, has suffered the consequences of our sins ("death") as our Substitute. He will experience no condemnation, and we, as those He represents, will not either. Note the absolute force of this great promise. We are eternally secure!

Rom. 8:5-9. Paul begins to elaborate on the difference between "flesh" and "Spirit." In verse 4, to "walk according to the flesh" means to carry out in one's conduct what the human nature desires. In verse 5, to "live according to the flesh" means to allow the human nature in one's life to dominate one's life. Later on in verse 8, those who "are in the flesh" are men who are an unregenerate natural man devoid of the Holy Spirit. The "Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit. In verse 6, those who have a mind set on following the "flesh" are one's who concentrate on and desires the things of the flesh (cf. Phil. 2:5; Col. 3:2). The end of a "flesh" focused life is "death." However, when one's mind set is on yielding to the Spirit ("spiritually minded"), they will experience "life and peace" with God. The mind set on the flesh (the "carnal mind") is hostile toward God (v.7); because it is set on pleasing 'self,' not God. From the end of verse 7 to the end of verse 8, it seems clear that Paul was thinking of an unsaved person. *What interests a person reveals his or her essential being. What they put as a priority in life reveals their essential being; where their heart is and what it is focused on. Those who dwell in flesh cannot please God because they are living only to and for themselves.* A change occurs in verse 9. Those who have a sinful nature can also have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. We could translate the first "if" as "since" (first class condition in Greek), because here it represents a condition that Paul assumed was true to reality ("since indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you"). Everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ possesses the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Rom. 8:28. Paul clearly changes focus here in verse 28. Paul has been dealing in the first part of the chapter with the human will and its consent to walk by the Spirit. Starting here through the end of the chapter the focus will be all on God's sovereignty. The phrase "all things work together for good to those who love God" can be correctly interpreted as "we know that God causes all things." The differences are not significant. Chapter, even all of Scripture, presents God as sovereign over all the affairs of life. God orders, permits, and allows all the events of life that we experience; this verse does not say that God causes all things in life. God is not the cause of sin and evil. "All things" means just that: everything, "every event of life;" good and bad, adversity and success, pleasure and pain conflict

and peace, etc. God does *bring good out of all things* believers experience in life, even conflict, tragedy and trials. The "good" is what is good from God's perspective, and, in view of verses 18-27, conformity to the Son of God is particularly important (v. 29). "Those who love God" refers to all believers (cf. 1 John 4:19). This is the only place in Romans where Paul wrote of the believer's love for God; everywhere else he referred to God's love for the believer.

Rom. 9:3. Paul expresses his deep love and concern for his own people and their salvation here. "I could wish" introduces a wish that God would not possibly grant (8:35). Nevertheless, it was a sincere wish. Paul had given up many things for the salvation of others (Phil. 3:8) and here he expresses a self-sacrificing love for his brethren where he would exchange his salvation for hell so they could experience salvation. Moses voiced a similar self-sacrificing wish for the Israelites' salvation (Exod. 32:30-35). Do we have such love for the lost?

Rom. 9:16. It is not man's determination or effort ("man who wills or ... runs") that causes God to be merciful, but His own sovereign choice ("depends ... on God who has mercy"). God is under no obligation to show mercy or extend grace to anyone. If we insist on receiving just treatment from God, what we will get is condemnation (3:23).

Rom. 9:19-24. Paul is dealing with God's sovereign will in showing mercy and judgment; on rising up those who believe in Him in their heart and those whom hearts He hardens (9:14-18). In verse 19, Paul poses these questions; "Why does God still blame us? Who has resisted His will?" In verses 20-24 Paul responds to the question. In the first place, it is presumptuous for mankind; the objects of divine judgment, to sit in judgment of their Judge by 'talking back to God.' Man had no control over his birth or his being at birth. Also, men's hearts are naturally, at birth, at odds and warring against God. Therefore, man has no right or basis to complain about their Creator's actions. Verse 21 supplies an illustration that clarifies the inappropriateness of this critical attitude – the pottery and the potter. The potter (God the Creator) has control over the pottery being made; not visa-versa. And the potter makes the pottery for what it will be used for – one for honor and one for dishonor – it is his choice. In verse 22, mankind prepares themselves "for destruction" by pursuing sin. Of note: the verb translated "prepared" in verse 22 is passive; meaning that God prepares *some* people for destruction (i.e., Pharaoh was one of the "objects of wrath"). God can justly destroy a sinner the first time they sin. But He patiently waits and endures the sinner's rebellion rather than giving them what they deserve. And in so doing allows them to incur their just penalty for sin; He leaves them in the sin they have chosen to be in and they will one day pay for their sin. In verse 23-24, those who believe the gospel are those in whom God will display "the riches of His glory," not His wrath. Thomas Griffith wrote: "Men fit themselves for hell; but it is God that fits men for heaven." S. Lewis Johnson wrote: "In verses 22 and 23 we have a strong indication of why God determined that evil should exist in his universe. The greatest good that people can have is the knowledge of God, and the revelation of God would be incomplete if we did not know him in his justice and in his mercy. But we can never know him in these attributes if sin does not exist in the universe. Thus, God has evidently determined that sin should exist in his world in order that the angels and humans can know him in his justice by his judgment of sin, and that people alone should know him in his mercy by virtue of the saving ministry of the Lamb of God."

Rom. 10:3. Paul was writing about the Jews and their zeal for God (v.2); however, their zeal was based on their own righteousness, it was not a zeal for God's righteousness. The Jews were ignorant of "the righteousness" that comes from God as a gift (1:17). They sought to earn righteousness by keeping the Law ("to establish their own"). Instead, they should have humbly received (submitted to) the gift of

righteousness that God gives to those who believe on His Son (cf. Phil. 3:9). Genuine faith is demonstrated by humble submission. Pride is demonstrated by self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Rom. 10:14-17. Paul presents the logical sequence in a lost person's coming to faith in Jesus Christ in reverse order here; a clear presentation of the gospel must precede true saving faith. Faith depends on knowledge of facts. Someone has to proclaim these facts for others to know about them. "A preacher" means someone preaching and proclaiming their faith. Being "sent" (v. 15) suggests that those 'preaching' the gospel operate under orders from a higher authority. This description also implies that that authority has given them their message. God has sent every Christian to proclaim the gospel to the lost (Matt. 28:19-20; John 20:21). If we get active proclaiming the gospel, God will direct us where He wants to use us (Ps. 37:23). Paul's quotation of Isaiah 52:7 (v.15) states that the gospel message is one of "good news" that brings joy to those who accept it. "How beautiful are the feet" is a figurative way of expressing gratitude for the obedience of the messengers who have brought good news. The context of Isaiah's words was the announcement of God's favor in restoring Jerusalem following the Babylonian Captivity. In spite of the "good news" of Israel's restoration, and the promises of Messiah's coming and deliverance, most of the Jews did not believe: "Who has believed our report?" (cf. Isa. 53:1). This applies to us today as many people hear the good news of the gospel but choose not to believe its message. Verse 17 summarizes the thought of verses 14-16. The word "of" Christ could mean the word *from* Him that He has sent us to proclaim (v. 15); or it could refer to the message concerning ("about") Christ (v. 9). Both meanings could have been in Paul's mind. In either case, the gospel is in view. Faith is receiving and believing in the testimony of God that the gospel message is true. Today the church and the believers within the church are given this responsibility – to proclaim the gospel of Christ to others.

Rom. 12:1-2. "Therefore" draws a conclusion from all that Paul had written and presented so far, from chapters 1-11. God has so graciously given believers so much that Paul exhorts them to respond with grateful obedience. This exhortation is based upon mankind's universal condemnation by God (3:20), the justification that God has provided freely (5:1), and the assurance of acceptance that the believing sinner can have (8:1). Because of all this, it is only reasonable to present our lives to God as living sacrifices (12:1). Verse 12 begins with "I beseech you / I urge you" (Gr. *parakaleo*; it meaning lies between commanding and beseeching and is one of the tenderest expressions in the entire Bible). Paul did not want his readers to respond because he had commanded them to do so, but because they wanted to in response to what God had done for them. The phrase "the mercies of God," (NASB) refers to all that Paul revealed in this epistle that God has done for the believer. Mercy denotes the quality in God that led Him to deliver us from our sin and misery. It contrasts with grace. Mercy expresses deliverance from condemnation that we deserve, and grace describes the bestowal of blessings that we do not deserve. Paul called us to sacrifice our entire being to God because He has been merciful to us. Based on the Hebrew language, the body is the representation of the whole person – body, soul and spirit. Paul was urging the presentation of the whole person as a living sacrifice; our whole life needs to be given over to the Lord. In Israel, the whole burnt offering, which represented the entire person of the offeror (Lev. 1), burned up completely on the altar. The offeror could not reclaim it because it belonged to God. Paul implied that this should also characterize the Christian's self-sacrifice. We need to separate from sin to God. This kind of "sacrifice" is "acceptable to God" and pleases Him. "Spiritual service of worship" (NASB) or "reasonable service" (AV) means that the sacrifice should be thoughtful and deliberate; a spiritual worship of our entire being. Verse 1 deals with making the commitment, and verse 2 with maintaining it, it is a lifelong process. Both activities are important. The present tense in the Greek text of verse 2 indicates a continuing responsibility, in contrast to the aorist tense in verse 1 that stresses a decisive act. The "world" (Gr. *aion*) is the spirit of our age that seeks to exclude God from

life (1 John 2:15). The world seeks to "squeeze you into its own mold." The believer should be continually renewing his or her mind, by returning mentally to the decision to dedicate self to God, and by reaffirming that decision. This continual rededication to God will result in the transformation of the Christian into Christ's image (8:29; cf. Mark 9:2-3); and this continual rededication is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking will begin to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think. "Prove" or "test and approve" involves evaluating and choosing to practice what is the will of God instead of what the world recommends (cf. Eph. 5:8-10). We clarify what God's will for us is by rededicating ourselves to God often. Kenneth Wuest's interpretive paraphrase of verse 2 is helpful: "And stop assuming an outward expression that does not come from within you and is not representative of what you are in your inner being, but is patterned after this age; but change your outward expression to one that comes from within and is representative of your inner being, by the renewing of your mind, resulting in your putting to the test what is the will of God, the good and well-pleasing, and complete will, and having found that it meets specification, placing your approval upon it." Romans 12:1-2 are extremely important verses for believers. They express our most important responsibility to God, which is submitting completely to His Lordship over our lives.

Rom. 12:3. Paul begins this verse with a reminder to the readers of his apostolic authority. He did so because what he was about to say required personal application that would affect the conduct of his readers. The Romans had not met Paul personally, so he urged them to receive his teaching humbly. A humble attitude was also important as they evaluated and exercised the individual abilities that God had given each of them (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). Paul had had experiences with believers who were proud because of their spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14-31; 13:4; 4:12, 20). Paul's exhortation is that believers should "not think more highly of themselves than they should, but use "sober (sound) judgment" in evaluating themselves. Humility is required to be a "living sacrifice" and to be continually 'renewing your mind.' Pride is, and always will be, the great enemy of true righteousness. The "measure of faith" does not refer to how much faith one can muster up, but to the amount of faith that God has given each believer. This amount varies from believer to believer. Also, the "faith" can be understood to apply to the gifts and abilities that God has given each believer. The key to the believer's 'sound judgment' and 'faith' is humility. It is through humility that a believer accomplishes the Lord's will. It is through humility that a believer shows forth Christ to others. It is through humility that pride, judgmental attitudes and bitterness are defeated. It is through humility that right judgment, forgiveness and reconciliation are realized.

Rom. 12:9-21. Paul writes this passage to provide a comprehensive and mandatory list of traits that characterize a "Spirit-filled" life. Verses 9-13 deal with the importance of demonstrating love to fellow believers, and verses 14-21 broaden this responsibility to include wider application to non-believers. There is much similarity in this passage with Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7). Paul begins this passage with the appropriate and primary command for the proper foundation of relationships with believers – love. "Love" is of primary importance (cf. Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; 1 Cor. 13). However, it must be sincere ("without hypocrisy"; cf. 1 John 4:19-21). From humility (v.3) love naturally follows. Love is the single most important criterion for a believer's behavior. The believer who is a "living sacrifice" (vv.1-2) should hate ("abhor") "evil" and love ("cling to") "what is good." They should outwardly express their commitment to the Lord's attitudes as well as to His actions in their daily life continually. The believer should express love to individual people as well as to ideals by showing genuine appreciation for fellow believers by putting them first (v. 10). "Giving" recognition and appreciation ("preference ... in honor") to those who deserve it is a concrete way of expressing love. "Devoted/brotherly love" (Gr. *philostorgoi*) suggests a family affection that believers are to have one for another (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2). In verse 11, Paul addresses the natural tendency for believers to slack off in

their "diligence" in "serving the Lord." We are not to 'lag in our diligence in serving the Lord.' Whatever is worth doing for the Lord is valuable enough to be done with enthusiasm and care; with productive energy ('fervent spirit')! Why, because we have hope (v.12). We must never lose sight of our "hope" of future rewards and comforts that God has promised us. This will help us to persevere "in tribulation" (cf. 5:3-4). The NEB translates this phrase "Let hope keep you joyful." "Prayer" is our great resource whenever we feel stress and strain (cf. Phil. 4:6-7). We should not just pray, but we should be "devoted to prayer" (cf. Acts 1:14). It should have high priority in our lives. In verse 13, Paul exhorts that we should never be so self-centered that we fail to reach out to others ("contributing to the needs of the saints" and "practicing hospitality"). "Given to hospitality" literally means "pursuing the love of strangers," not just entertaining friends. We should not just wait until someone comes to us with need, but we need to go out and look for those to whom we can show hospitality and meet a need. Beginning in verse 14, Paul now urges activity that is contrary to nature – love for all. Paul repeats Jesus' instruction here (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27-28); treat your enemies as if they were your friends. The word "persecute" used here means to pursue, to chase after or hunt down. To "bless" involves both wishing God's best on people and praying for them. We are not to 'curse;' to them, about them or to God. We are to share the joys ("rejoice with those who rejoice") and sorrows ("weep with those who weep") of our neighbors, especially fellow believers (1 Cor. 12:26; Phil. 4:14). To 'weep with those that weep' is easier than to 'rejoice with those who rejoice.' Those who rejoice neither need, expect, nor feel grateful for sympathy in the same degree as those who weep. We are to be glad in the blessings of others and we are to be compassionate to the sorrows of others – no matter what our personal situation is. In verse 16 we are instructed to "have equal regard for one another" (NEB); to be impartial. Feelings of superiority are neither realistic nor appropriate for believers who owe all to God's grace: "do not be haughty ... associate with the lowly." We are to live in harmony. We are not to be proud or conceited ('wise in your own opinion'), but willing to associate with people of low position. We are to be humble. We are to respect what is proper and honest (v.17). We should give thought to *how* we do "what is right," so that our witness may be most effective to believers and unbelievers alike (cf. Col. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:7). We are not to 'repay evil with evil.' But Paul recognized there are limits (v.18). Paul did not promote peace *at any price*. In some situations, peace might give way to conflict if, for example, the truth is at stake (cf. Gal. 2:11). Note Paul's two qualifiers regarding living at peace in this verse; 'if possible' and 'depends on you.' It is not always possible to live peacefully with some people, because they make it impossible. However, in all cases, the believer should not be the instigator of trouble under normal circumstances. But, if hostility does erupt, the believer should not retaliate ("not take ... revenge"; cf. v. 17; Prov. 20:22; 24:29; Ps. 94:1; Matt. 5:39; Luke 6:29; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 10:30). Rather, they should trust God to right the wrong: "leave room for the wrath" (cf. 1 Sam. 24—26). Long ago God promised to take care of His people when others wronged them (Deut. 32:35). We have a responsibility to defend the weak and to pursue justice, but we should not retaliate, but trust God, when others attack us personally (cf. David). Instead of showing one's "enemy" unkindness, the believer should do him or her positive good (v. 20; cf. Matt. 5:44). One interpretation of "heap(ing) burning coals on his head" is that it figuratively describes 'doing good' that results in the conviction and shame of the enemy; that this guilt may convict the wrongdoer of their ways in a gentle manner. A better interpretation takes the "burning coals" as a figure of God's judgment that will come on the enemy if he persists in his antagonism. The figure of "coals of fire" in the Old Testament consistently refers to God's anger and judgment (cf. 2 Sam. 22:9, 13; Ps. 11:6; 18:13; 140:9-10; Prov. 25:21-22); meaning that the believer can return good for evil with the assurance that God will eventually punish their enemy. Paul concludes with a summary (v.21). – "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Being "overcome by evil" means giving in to the temptation to pay back evil for evil. When people do wrong, they expect to receive evil from those they have wronged. When they receive kindness instead, their hard hearts often

become softer ("overcome evil with good"). The best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him or her into a friend.

Rom. 13:1-2. Paul has just exhorted and commanded believers that they are not to take vengeance, but allow God to exercise this right in the last judgment (cf. 12:19-21). In 13:1-7, Paul explains the through governing authorities (vv.1-2), God is even now inflicting wrath on evildoers (vv. 3-4). In verse 1, when Paul wrote "every person/soul" he probably had every *believer* in mind, but what he taught about the believer's conduct toward their civil government also applies to the unsaved. The word "subject / subjection" or submission means to placing oneself under the authority of another, and doing or not doing what the authority requires; the word, as used here, describes a soldier's absolute obedience to his officer's authority and command. Submission includes obedience, but it also includes an attitude from which the obedience springs. Submission involves an attitude of compliance and deference that is not necessarily present in obedience. The believer might have to disobey his government (Acts 5:29); but they must still be submissive and bear the consequences of his or her disobedience (cf. Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). "Governing authorities" is a term that embraces all the rulers who govern the citizen. Every ruler exercises their authority because God has allowed them to occupy their position of authority (Luke 4:6). The believer should acknowledge that the government under which he or she lives has received authority "from God" to govern, regardless of whether it governs well or poorly. Refusal to submit to (or opposing) one's government is tantamount to refusing to submit to God (v.2). Those who "resist" God's ordained authority can expect to suffer ("receive") "condemnation" by the government. This is really the indirect judgment of God (cf. Matt. 26:52).

Rom. 13:10-14. Paul had previously written about the importance of love among believers (12:9-10; cf. 1 Cor. 13). Now he urged this attitude toward all people. Paul appeals to the Law (vv.9-10) to show that what he had written in verse 8 was in harmony with what God had commanded earlier. The Mosaic Law specified numerous situations in which the Israelites were to practice love: not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, not to lie and not to covet. The simple principle for these situations is: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is 'the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:19-21). This verse is not a command to love ourselves. It is recognition that we do love ourselves, and commands us to love others just as genuinely and sincerely. In verse 11, "this" refers to the duties urged earlier (12:1-13:10). It is important that we follow God's will daily and carefully, because the final phase of our "salvation" will take place very soon (i.e., glorification, cf. 1 Pet. 1:9). We must get ready to meet the Lord, after which we must give an account of our stewardship to Him (cf. 14:10; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Cor. 15:34). It is possible for us to go through our lives, as believers, lethargic, apathetic, and insensible ("asleep"), but such a condition is not wise in view of what lies ahead of us. Why, because "the night is far spent." "The night" represents our earthly life, plagued with spiritual "darkness" and danger (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-11). Christ's return is the next event in God's plan. When the Lord Jesus calls us to Himself at the Rapture ("the day is near"), a new "day" will begin for us, in which we will walk and live in sinless light. In view of this prospect, we need to prepare for it: by "lay(ing) aside" evil "deeds" ("of darkness") as a garment, and putting on deeds of holiness ("armor of light"). Paul called these new clothes "armor" because we are still at war with sin and the forces of evil (cf. Eph. 6:11). Our behavior, and especially those things Paul called on his readers to do in 13:1-10, should be distinctively Christ-like since we live among unbelievers (v.13). Believers should live a life pleasing to God; our outer behavior should reflect the inner reality of a life saved from eternal hell by God's grace and mercy. The practices he urged us to avoid here were common in Corinth where Paul wrote this epistle. He observed them constantly: wild parties, excessive drinking, lewdness, lust, fighting and envious jealousy. Drunkenness often leads to "sexual" sin ("promiscuity and sensuality"), which in turn frequently results in contention and quarreling. In verse 14 Paul exhorts the believers to continue to sanctify themselves by 'putting on' the Lord Jesus

Christ. In one sense every believer "put(s) on ... Jesus Christ" when he or she trusts Him as Savior (Gal. 3:27). However, in another sense we put Him on when we dedicate ourselves to Him as our Lord (12:1). The first step in putting on the armor of light (v. 12) is committing ourselves to follow Jesus Christ wholeheartedly. However, dedicating is not the only thing that is necessary. There must also be a deliberate turning away from desires to indulge "(lusts of) the flesh" (cf. II Tim. 2:22; I Pet. 2:11). We must continually renew that life with which we have been clothed (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:12).

Rom. 14:1-13. Paul is addressing the diversity of church members and the dissimilarity of the preferences, thoughts and actions of people within the church; things that cause strife and division within a church. Paul first addresses the importance of not judging one another. The issue was those who believed that they should refrain from certain practices that they believed were displeasing to God were in conflict with other believers who believed those practices were allowed and legitimate. The practices in view were certain amoral (non-moral) practices, which some believed were proper and others believed were not permissible. An amoral practice is neither right nor wrong in itself. It does not involve sin, or, therefore, morality. Examples include food, drink, recreation, clothing, personal grooming, birth control, schooling, lifestyles, et al., when no sin is involved. Some believers have difficulty recognizing the existence of amoral activity; to them everything is either right or wrong. However, the Bible teaches that there are many activities that may be right but are unadvisable for any number of reasons. Also, there are actions that are right for some people but not right for others. This passage of Romans is divided into three sections: vv. 1-3, 4-9, and 10-12. At each juncture (vv.3-4, vv.9-10) rhetorical questions are asked: 'Who are you who is judging the servant of another?' (v. 4a) and 'Why are you judging your brother?' (v. 10a). Paul begins with the issue of Christian liberty (v.1). One group understands Christian liberty and its implications. The second group was being challenged by those who understood Christian liberty because their faith was not strong enough to enable them to exercise the full liberty they had in Christ. Paul urged the stronger Christian, who appreciated the extent of his freedom, to accept his weaker brother as an equal. Nevertheless, he was not to accept him *outwardly*, and then condemn him *inwardly* (mentally), much less publicly, for his beliefs. Paul goes on to discuss the issue of eating meat. Eating food is an amoral matter. It is neither morally good nor morally bad; what we eat does not in itself affect our relationship with God (cf. I Tim. 4:3-4). But the one "who eats" should not view himself as superior or look down on his sensitive brother with a condescending attitude ("regard with contempt"). The weaker brother should "not judge" the other brother as unacceptable to God, either, because "God has accepted him." The sensitive brother needs to remember to whom the other brother is responsible, and leave his judgment to God. There are three practical things to do to show love to someone with whom we disagree: Be genuine, be accepting, and be understanding (which requires listening). Paul uses a second illustration, the 'observing of days' to teach the same lesson (v.5). The one who 'observes' should not view himself as superior or look down on his brother; and the more sensitive brother should not judge him for his observation of days. The fundamental principle is that amoral things are in themselves indifferent, but that each person must be fully assured in his own conscience that he is doing right. The most important thing is to seek to *please* "the Lord" in all that we do. In light of this, Paul states a truth that no believer should live to please 'himself' alone, but that all of us should live 'to please the Lord.' The context makes this clear (vv. 6, 8). Actually, the believer's desire to please the Lord will continue beyond the grave, so Paul could also say that we do not die for ourselves ("not one dies for himself"). Our whole existence: this side of the grave and the other, in life and in death ("whether we live or die"), should be lived with a commitment to please the Lord (8:38-39; cf. Phil. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:9). Since Jesus Christ lived, died, and lives again, He is "Lord" of both those who have died ("the dead") and those who are still alive ("the living"). Paul's point was that He is the Judge, and we are not. Both brothers, the critical weaker brother and the scolding stronger brother (v.10), are guilty of the same offense; judging prematurely and with no authority. Jesus

Christ (v. 9) is the God (v. 10) who will "judge" (cf. John 5:22, 27). Everyone will "bow" in judgment before the Son of God (Isa. 45:23; 49:13; cf. Phil. 2:10-11). Christians will do so at the judgment seat of Christ following the Rapture (Luke 14:14; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12). Old Testament saints will do so at the Second Coming (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). Unbelievers will do so at the great white throne judgment at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). Therefore, Paul identified the personal responsibility of every believer to "give an account of himself (or herself) to God." We will not have to answer for our fellow believers or anyone else, but we will have to account for our own deeds. Therefore, it is foolishness, based in pride and with no authority that we judge judgmentally our fellow believers when it comes to amoral practices that we do not agree with. Therefore, we must be careful not to put a stumbling block in front of a believer by improperly judging. The Greek word translated "obstacle" (NASB) or "stumbling block" (NIV; *proskomma*) refers to an object on a path against which someone strikes his foot and consequently stumbles or falls (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9). The stronger brother's liberty might retard the weaker brother's progress as he walks the Christian path ("in a brother's way"). It might set him back temporarily, or even do permanent damage to his sensitive conscience (cf. Matt. 18:6-7; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1-2). The stronger brother's liberty might even constitute a temptation for the weaker brother to sin. It might tempt him to go beyond his stronger brother's behavior, and cast-off restraint in moral, as well as amoral (Gr. *adiaphora*, indifferent), matters. Therefore, any judging that needs to be done should be of ourselves, not our brother. This is specifically true of motives of the heart of another believer and on issues of preference.

Rom. 14:17-19. Paul writes about the believer's conduct in relation to 'Christian liberty' (14:1 – 15:13). Here he is admonishing believers because of their propensity to judge one another in issues of preference (14:1-15). In verse 16, Paul concludes that one can rightfully exercise one's Christian liberty when it does not cause other believers to stumble (v.13) or for unbelievers to view their activity in such a way that it reflects badly on the testimony of Christ. In verse 17, Paul addresses the reality of the kingdom and the behaviors of believers in the kingdom. The "kingdom of God" here refers to the sphere of salvation where God rules in the hearts He has saved as well as the future millennial kingdom. The "eating and drinking" are non-essential outward observances of no consequence in the kingdom even though they are requirements for living today. Therefore, believers should not be judging one another on such outward behavior issues today. The essential inward realities of the kingdom are righteousness, peace and joy, which are essential in the believer's life today as well as in the kingdom. The primary issues in the lives of dedicated believers are not external amoral practices, but the spiritual qualities that "the Holy Spirit" seeks to produce in them – the condition of the heart. These qualities include right conduct or "righteousness" (cf. 6:13, 16, 18), "peace" with God (cf. Phil. 4:7), and "joy" (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). Paul wanted his readers to keep their priorities in perspective, because those who seek after and serves Christ with these qualities will be accepted by God – and approved by man (v. 18). This emphasis wins the approval of other believers as well as unbelievers because they can recognize what is most important in one's life. "Approved by" refers to something that is approved after careful examination; like a jeweler examining a stone to determine its authenticity, quality and value. "Therefore", because of these exhortations (vv. 14-18) believers are to pursue the things that make for peace with and that edify one another as believers (v.19). The "things which make for peace" in the context refer to practices that do not cause others to stumble and attitudes that are non-judgmental. "Peace" is between the strong and the weak believer. Rather than tearing down, we should do things that build one another up (1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Thess. 5:11). For the strong, this might mean foregoing some legitimate amoral practice. For the weak, it could mean refraining from verbal criticism and judgmental thinking.

I Cor. 1:10-13. Paul is addressing the church at Corinth on the need for church unity – unity of doctrine and unity of spirit. The core issue being addressed is pride; the pride that existed in the life of the members of the local church, because their boasting about ‘their’ teachers was actually a boasting about themselves. By exhorting his readers "in the name of their (our) Lord Jesus Christ," Paul was putting what he was about to say on the highest level of authority (v.10). The Corinthians were to regard what he was about to say as coming from the Lord Himself. Paul pleaded with them that they all ‘speak the same thing;’ which means doctrinal unity (truth) as declared by the Scripture (cf. John 17:11, 21-23; Acts 2:46-47). There was already disagreement among members in Corinth, but there was not yet division in the sense of a church split. Paul urged them to unite in their thinking ("that you all agree ... in the same mind"). Paul wanted them to come together in their thinking, to take the same view of things, to have "the same mind" (cf. Phil. 2:2), and to experience unanimity in their judgment of what they needed to do ("be made complete ... in the same judgment"). They were to be unified in truth by their beliefs, convictions, standards and behavior (Acts 4:32, Eph. 4:3); which was not the case as reported by “Chloe’s” servants (v.11). As a church body, they had created ‘divisions’ within the church about the ‘teacher’ they were following or who they thought was the superior teacher. One group professed loyalty to no human leader, but boasted of their allegiance to "Christ" alone. The last group was using "Christ" as the name of a party within the church and had, in a sense, separated Him away from the other members of the church. Such an idea was unthinkable, and by stating it, Paul showed its absurdity (v.13). All the groups had devised their own brand of spiritual elitism, so they could bring ‘honor’ upon themselves as the ‘superior’ spiritually. We see this in believers today in two ways. First, we see churches that are divided within their membership where one group is following one pastor, deacon or family; and a separate group is following another pastor, deacon or family. Second, we see people who claim to be believers who do not fellowship with any church because they cannot find a church that is ‘likeminded’ or meets their spiritual standards. Both groups we see today take this position because of pride in their life. Paul admonished the believers in Corinth on how foolish it was to elevate anyone over Christ, since Christ did what was most important (was "crucified for" them). Note the central importance of Christ and His crucifixion; Paul's followers had not submitted to water baptism in order to identify with Paul, but to identify with Christ. The admonishment given by Paul to the church members at Corinth applies to us today. We are not in control. We are not to follow self and pride. We are not to follow men, but we are to follow Christ. We are to be involved in a church whose doctrine is based on Scriptural truth; and whose people are unified in alignment with that doctrine.

I Cor. 2:9. Paul paraphrases Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17, which summarizes Paul's point well. There are many things we can know only by revelation. The more God reveals, the more clearly we see that He has designed His plans for humanity for our blessing; the way of salvation which God has prepared by the life and death and resurrection and saving power of Christ. There is no method of apprehension open to man (eyes, ears, or understanding) which can give him any idea of the wonderful things that God has made ready for them that love him. This is the primary interpretation of this verse. A secondary application of this is verse does allude to the unknown glories of heaven.

I Cor. 3:10-17. The context of this passage (vv.10-17) is established in verses 5-9. The topic is the building of a local church. The usual explanation of this passage is that it describes the building of the Christian life. We all build on Christ, but some people use good materials while others use poor materials. The kind of material you use determines the kind of reward you will get. While this may be a valid *application* of this passage, it is not the basic *interpretation*. In verse 10, Paul "laid the (a) foundation" of the church in Corinth by founding the church, and others added the walls and continued "building" on that foundation. Paul's special mission from God was to "found" (plant) churches (Rom. 15:20). He readily acknowledged that it was only by God's grace that he could do so as a skillful ("wise")

"master builder." He added a word of warning, that the quality of the materials and workmanship that went into building the church is very important ("how he builds"). But only Christ Himself is the "foundation" of the church (v.11). Basing a church on the work of any other person is improper and unscriptural. Even though the quality of the foundation was the best, the condition of the building also depended on what others built "on" top of "the foundation" (vv. 12-13). In the building of a local church, durable materials ("gold, silver, precious stones") are those activities that sprang from reliance on Christ and Him crucified; such as teaching sound doctrine, humble service to others, discipleship, evangelism, and the refutation of error and sin. These works contributed to the permanent spiritual strengthening of the believers. The combustible materials ("wood, hay, straw") are those activities that arose out of human "wisdom" in all its forms; such as philosophy, managerial techniques, relational 'good feelings,' entertainment, programs without a gospel outreach as a purpose, social work that excludes the gospel message and the use of time and money for simply selfish, temporal purposes. These made no lasting contribution, although they may have served some temporary need. Paul's main point is to encourage building with quality materials that will meet with God's approval and receive eternal reward. God will expose the work ("show it") of each of God's servants on "the day." This is a reference to the day when the believer will stand before God, and give an account of the stewardship of his or her life at the judgment seat of Christ. Then "the fire" of God's judgment "will test the quality of each person's (man's) work" and his workmanship, but not his person. This is the fire of judgment, not the fire of hell. The durability or transience of those works will then become apparent ("evident"). If you, as a believer, have made a *lasting* contribution to the building of the church, you will receive a "reward" (vv. 14-15). If you have not done so, because you have pursued human "wisdom," you will not be rewarded, although you will retain your salvation ("be saved"). Paul likened the unfaithful servant to a man pulled to safety "through the" flames ("fire") of his burning house (v.15). A great deal that is called "Christian work" within a local church is only the energy of the flesh. It is not done for the glory of God at all. What motivates us? How do we feel if others are preferred before us? This is a good way to test ourselves as to whether what we are doing is for the Lord. Love for Him should be our primary motivation as well as service to the Lord out of love for other people, the fear of the Lord, the prospect of having to give an account of our lives to Him at the judgment seat. Note: The testing in view here provides no support for the unbiblical doctrine of purgatory. It is the believer's *works* that God subjects to the fires of testing, not the believer personally. God applies the fire *to determine the quality of the works*, not to purify the believer. In verses 16-17, Paul writes a strong warning against believers working against the church by separating themselves from a local church, by causing divisions within the local church or introducing the world's ways into the church. The local church is a "temple" that God's Spirit indwells. Paul was not speaking here of individual believers being temples of God, though we are (6:19), or of the church universal as the temple of God, though it is (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). Paul is focusing in on and means the collective body of believers that make up the local church, as is clear from his use of the plural "you" in the Greek text and the singular "temple." The local congregation was not just a building (v. 9), but a sanctuary (Gr. *naos*) that God inhabits ("the Spirit of God dwells in you"). If any person tears down ("destroys/defiles") the church ("the temple"), instead of building it up, God will tear down ("destroy/defile") him or her (Acts 9:1-4). God does this by sending temporal discipline in one form or another upon that person (cf. 5:5). It is a very serious thing to destroy or defile a holy temple, and that is what the local church is (cf. Matt. 16:18). Paul is stressing the importance of the local church, the importance of believers to be involved in service to the Lord in the local church, and the need for unity within the local church here in verses 10-17. Paul is teaching us about the nature of the local church (God's temple indwelt by his Spirit) and is warning us about our accountability to the LORD about our actions toward and within the local church. Paul clearly shows us how important the local church is to God himself; and how we are accountable to Him for our actions and attitudes toward the local church.

The application of the truth that Paul has written about the church can and should be applied to each of us as individuals as we labor within a local church. Our lives (our bodies) are to help build the local church – and we will receive rewards for our labor to help build Christ’s local church if we are doing so with a repentant heart. We will suffer loss of rewards if we do not seek to be a part of the local church and help build His church.

I Cor. 4:2-7. Paul is addressing his role as a steward of the gospel and his ministry. The most important quality in a steward is that he is faithful to his master’s trust so that the will of the master is achieved by his work (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-13; 19:11-27; 1 Pet. 4:10). For Paul, this meant remaining faithful to the gospel as he had received it and preached it (cf. 15:1-11). Paul was not concerned about what others thought about his ministry. It mattered little to Paul ("is a very small thing") how well the Corinthians or anyone else thought he was carrying out his stewardship, or how popular or unpopular he was. His personal evaluations of his own performance were irrelevant too. What did matter to him was God's estimation of his service. Paul did not give much time and attention to introspection ("I do not even examine myself"), though he sought to live with a good conscience before God. Rather, he concentrated on doing the job God had put before him, to the best of his ability, since he was accountable (cf. 3:13). As far as Paul knew, he was serving God faithfully ("I am conscious of nothing against myself"). However, he realized that his conscience might not be as sensitive as it should be ("yet I am not by this acquitted"; he was not totally in the clear). Only the LORD had the insight, as well as the authority, to judge ("examine") him. Since the LORD is the only One that has the insight and authority to pass final judgment (Gr. *krino*), it was be unwise and a folly for us to try to make a judgment on another believer ("do not go on passing judgment"). There is no ‘pre-judgment seat judgment’ whereby we stand as the authority to judge another. There are times where we must make judgments from time to time on issues related to sinful behavior, but we should always do so with the knowledge that our understanding is imperfect. The LORD will judge our lives at the judgment seat of Christ. The "things hidden in the darkness" refers to what is impossible for us to see; which is the motives of men's hearts. The LORD will find something in every Christian's life for which to praise him or her at the judgment seat of Christ; therefore, we must leave the matter of ‘judgment’ to the LORD – we are not the one another person must answer to, it is the LORD that all must answer to. This is a reminder that we, as servants of the LORD, must be found serving for the future approval of the LORD rather than for the present praise of people. In vv. 6-7, Paul illustrates the ‘pre-judgment seat judgment’ that the Corinthians were engaged in by highlighting the ministry of him and Apollos. The Corinthians had gone beyond the teaching of Scripture in their judging. The activity they were engaged in (‘comparing and judging teachers’) was the fruit of pride; they had "become arrogant" or "puffed up" (Gr. *physioomai*) because of human pride instead of godly wisdom and love (cf. vv. 18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). The frequent use of this word identifies one of the Corinthians' main problems. Their attitude was wrong because their outlook was wrong. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were not "superior" to anyone else, an attitude that judging others requires. The LORD had given them everything they had, so they should be grateful, not boastful.

I Cor. 6:18-20. Paul is addressing sexual immorality (vv. 13b-20). Sexual immorality is wrong because it involves sinning against one's body, which in the case of believers belongs to the Lord through divine purchase. So believers should "flee" from fornication (*porneian*- v. 18). Fornication ("immorality") is more destructive to the sinner than other sins, because the people who engage in it cannot undo their act. Gluttony and drunkenness hurt the body as well, but they involve excess in things morally neutral. Fornication is an especially serious sin because it involves placing the body, which is the Lord's (vv. 19-20), under the control of another illegitimate partner (cf. 7:4). No other sin has this result. Paul asks a rhetorical question makes a strong, important statement (v.19). Previously Paul taught his readers that

the local church was a temple (3:16); and here he refers to the believer's body as "a temple." The "Holy Spirit" is actually indwelling each of these temples (Rom. 8:9; cf. Matt. 12:6; 18:15-20; 28:16-20; Mark 13:11; John 14:17, 23); which is a gift to us ("whom you have") "from God" (cf. 1 Thess. 4:8). Consequently, we have a moral obligation to the Holy Spirit because He indwells us, therefore we belong to Him. Furthermore, God has purchased (Gr. *agorazo*) every Christian "with a [great] price," the blood of Jesus Christ (v.20). So, we belong to Him for a second reason. In view of His gift (Holy Spirit) and His purchase (shed blood of Christ), we should "glorify God" in our bodies, rather than degrading Him through fornication (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). Even our physical bodies are to be faithful to the Lord with whom we are joined.

I Cor. 10:31-33. Paul is addressing how a believer is to live their life in a world that does not recognize or seek God. We are to do all things to bring glory to God, which is a "law of personal relationships." What is being examined here by Paul are the believer's life practices and behavior; addressing the issue of the pursuit of the satisfaction of one's personal preferences and insistence on one's own rights. God is not glorified if we seek our own preferences and rights. What glorifies God is what puts His preferences, plans, and programs first (cf. Col. 3:17). All of our activity and actions are to bring glory to God. We, as believers, are to "give no offense," which means we are not to put an obstacle in the path of a person, be he "Jew" (cf. 9:20) or "Gentile" (cf. 9:21), so that he might come to faith in Christ. If he is already a believer, it means putting nothing in his way that would hinder his growth in Christ (cf. 9:22). It is not a matter of simply not "hurting someone's feelings," it is a matter of what brings glory to God. We are not to create barriers or obstacles to the gospel message or one's Christian walk to those who interact with us or observe us. A major area of observation is our interpersonal relationships. If we are offended by someone or if we have offended someone, it is imperative that we must seek forgiveness and reconciliation because this brings glory to God.

I Cor. 11:27-32. Here Paul explains that the Lord's Supper is more than a personal, introspective remembering. It has implications for the local church, because in His death, Jesus Christ laid the foundation for a new community of believers who bear His name. Therefore, the Lord's Supper should lead us to reflect on our relationship to one another as fellow believers, as well as to recall Christ's life and death, His sacrifice for us. Paul has set forth the proper way to observe the Lord's Supper in verses 23-26. He now instructs them on their conduct as they participate in the Lord's Supper. He begins by telling them to not partake in the Lord's Supper in "an unworthy manner" (v.27). "An unworthy manner" is any manner that is not consistent with the significance of Christ's death; i.e., as a ritual, with indifference, with an unrepentant heart, with bitterness in the heart, with unforgiveness, with hypocrisy, etc. The divisions that existed in their church (v. 18), plus their selfish behavior (v. 21), constituted the unworthiness of the manner in which the Corinthians were observing the Lord's Supper. They had also lost the point of the memorial, which involves proclaiming salvation through Christ's death portrayed in ritual. The gospel goes out when we observe the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. Being "guilty" of Christ's "body and blood" means being guilty of treating them in an unworthy manner, i.e., guilty of profaning them. Paul was not warning unworthy persons so that they should refrain from attending the Lord's Supper. No believer is worthy to participate, in view of our flawed character, but we can and must participate in a worthy manner. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to examine themselves prior to participating in the Lord's Supper (v. 28). To come to the Lord's Supper clinging to and/or harboring sin in one's life, not only dishonors the Lord's Supper, it also dishonors (even slanders) Christ's body and blood that He sacrificed. The reason for examining oneself is to determine that we are partaking in a worthy manner rather than in an unworthy manner. In the context, the 'worthy manner' involves our heart and being behaving in a loving and unselfish way toward our fellow believers, as well as being appreciative of the significance of the Lord's body and blood. Before we participate and partake in the

Lord's Supper, we must "judge" ourselves (Gr. *diakrino*) before we partake, and then participate in a worthy manner, or else God will *judge* (*krino*) us. We need to "examine" ourselves, or else the Lord will have to *examine and judge* us for failing to participate worthily (v. 31). After we conduct this self-examination, the believer should then proceed to participate. As believers, we may hesitate to participate, after our self-examination, feeling overwhelmed by our personal unworthiness. However, no one is ever worthy to partake. We are only worthy because Christ has made us worthy. We ought to partake *feeling unworthy* to do so. This attitude is part of what it means to partake in a worthy manner. Paul writes that those who participated in the Lord's Supper unworthily, God was judging with sickness ("many ... are weak and sick") and death ("a number sleep") (v.30). The reasons for God's chastisement were the unjudged sin of selfish living (v. 21) and thoughtless and improper participation in the Lord's Supper. If God's people do not judge their own sins themselves, God will judge them (v.31). We should recognize this kind of God's punishment of believers as *discipline*. If we discerned (*diakrino*) ourselves, we would not come under divine judgment (*krino*). When God judges us (*krino*), it is to correct us, so that "we will not be condemned" (*katakrino*) "with the world." Do you take participation in the Lord's Supper seriously?

I Cor. 13:1-8a. Paul writes in the first three verses that love is superior to the spiritual gifts he listed in chapter 12. He has progressed from the lesser to the greater gifts and from the easier to the more difficult abilities. In verse 1, Paul begins with tongues because of the Corinthians' fascination with this gift. Paul used the first person here, because the Corinthians believed that they themselves spoke with the tongues of men and of angels (cf. 14:14-15). Speaking with "the tongues of men and of angels" does not refer to eloquence of speech, as the context makes clear (cf. 12:10, 28, 30). The "tongues of men" refer to languages that humans speak. The "tongues of angels" refer to a more exalted and expressive language(s) with which angels may use to communicate with one another. What Paul is saying, 'You may have a grasp of all the languages, not only those of all men, but of the angels over and above.' Paul's point was this; even if one could speak in an exalted language but they did not have love (i.e., act lovingly), their speech would be hollow and empty like "sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (something that made much noise but no sense). Paul goes on in verse 2 to say that if one has the gift of prophecy but did not have love, they are nothing. "Prophecy" was a higher gift than speaking in tongues, but it was still inferior to "love" (cf. 14:1-5). If one could understand all mysteries and knowledge but did not have love, they are nothing. If one had "faith" great enough "to move (remove) mountains" that faith is not as important as love (12:9). If one gave all that they had to the poor but did not have love, they are nothing (v.3). Even self-sacrifice for less fortunate individuals is not the same as real love. Even if one was martyred ("if I surrender my body") for their beliefs but they did not have love, their sacrifice was valueless in the sight of God, and would bring no divine reward to the one who submitted to it ("profits me nothing"). Paul's personal sufferings for the salvation of others were also worthless without love (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-29; 12:10). Paul was arguing for the necessity and supremacy of love if one was a true, genuine believer. Love gives worth to all other spiritual gifts. Love defines which gifts are the 'best,' which are those that build up the body of Christ. In verses 4-7, Paul points out the qualities of "love" that make it so important, its character or nature. Love may be difficult to define but it is not difficult to discern because it manifests itself. Love suffers long (is patient). Love is kind. Patience and kindness, like love, are aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Love does not envy. Love is not boastful. Love is not prideful. Love is not rude, meaning it does not deal with other people in a way that injures their dignity. Love does not insist on having its own way ("not seek its own"), nor does it put its own interests before the needs of others (cf. Phil. 2:4). Love is not irritable or touchy ("not provoked"), but it absorbs offenses, insults, and inconveniences for the sake of others' welfare. Love does not keep a record of offenses received ("not take into account a wrong") to pay them back; love chooses not to remember. Love forgives, meaning it wipes the record clean and never hold things

against people (Eph. 4:26, 32). Love takes no delight in evil or the misfortunes of others ("does not rejoice in unrighteousness"), but it takes great pleasure in what is right ("rejoices with the truth"). Love does not veil the truth; it is brave enough to face the truth; it has nothing to conceal and so is glad when the truth prevails. Love covers unworthy things, rather than bringing them to the light and magnifying them (cf. 1 Pet. 4:8). Love does not allow faults in others to be publicly talked about and highlighted. Love puts up with everything ("bears all things"). Love is always eager to believe the best ("believes all things," not suspicious or distrustful). This does not mean a believer is to allow themselves to be fooled; but it means that they will prefer being genuine and generous in their conclusions rather than always suspecting another unjustly. Love hopes; love always eagerly anticipates because it always protects and trusts. Love is hopeful that those who have failed will not fail again ("hopes all things"), rather than concluding that failure is inevitable (cf. Matt. 18:22). Love endures; it does not allow itself to become overwhelmed but perseveres steadfastly through difficult trials ("endures all things"). In verses 8-13, Paul instructs us that genuine love is permanent. Genuine love (*agape*) characterizes the believer's existence now and forever. "Love never fails" in the sense of falling away (dropping out) when the physical and temporal things on which affection rests pass away; it outlasts temporal things. Gifts of the Spirit will pass ("be done away" or "cease") because they are temporary provisions, but the fruit of the Spirit will abide. "Prophecies" are messages from God, but when we stand before Him and hear His voice, there will be no more need for prophets to relay His words to us. Likewise, when we stand before God, there will be no need to speak in other languages ("tongues"), since we will all understand God when He speaks. The knowledge that is so important to us now, will be irrelevant then, because when we are in God's presence we will know perfectly (v. 12; cf. 1:5; 8:1; 12:8). The verb Paul used to describe what will happen to "prophecy" and "knowledge" is in the passive voice in Greek, and means "shall be terminated." The verb he used to describe what will happen to "tongues" is in the middle voice and means "automatically cease of themselves." Is there a risk that people will walk all over us? Yes, but God is the keeper of the books and one day each person will stand before God and answer for the things done in their life. Scripture indicates that true repentance will bear and show visible fruit (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8-9).

I Cor. 13:12-13. Paul's conclusion concerning love is found in verses 12-13. He uses an illustration of a mirror to teach about the difference between our present and our future state. Paul's day, craftsmen made mirrors out of metal and Corinth was famous as the producer of some of the finest bronze mirrors at the time of Paul. Paul used the mirror to point out that our present perception of reality is somewhat distorted, but in the future, it will be completely realistic. Today we see indirectly ("in a mirror dimly"), but in the future we shall see *directly*, "face to face." Now we know only partially, but when we stand in His presence, we "will know fully," as fully as God now knows us ("as [we] have been fully known"). I do not mean that we will be omniscient; we will not be. We will be fully aware. Now He knows us directly, but then we will also know Him directly. In verse 13, "Now" resumes Paul's original thought about the supremacy of love. In contrast to what will pass away (knowledge, tongues, and prophecy), "faith," "hope," and "love" will "abide" or endure; all three will abide forever, but love ever will be supreme among the three. Love is the greatest because it will only increase when we see the Lord. Love is a property of God himself. Love is the essential activity of God Himself, therefore, when men love Him or their fellow-man, they are doing (however imperfectly) what God does. The point of this exposition of love is this: We should value and give attention to the cultivation and practice of love, even more than to that of even the so-called "greatest" spiritual gifts (cf. 12:31). The other gifts, as important as they are, are only partial and temporary because love is the greatest of the virtues that will endure forever. Do we love God and others as we should?

II Cor. 1:3. Paul is writing to the Corinthian church. After his salutation, he calls out his adoration, "Blessed be for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," which expresses gratitude, thankfulness and adoration. God is the "Father of mercies" in two senses. First, He is the source of all "mercies" that we enjoy. Second, He is the Father characterized by mercy: the *merciful* Father. And, God is the God of all "comfort," which has the idea of one person standing alongside another to encourage and support his friend. Harry Ironside wrote: "There are two things of which God is said to have the monopoly: He is 'the God of *all* grace' and He is 'the God of *all* comfort.' All grace comes from Him; all lasting comfort comes from Him."

II Cor. 3:16. Only when the light of the glory of God from Jesus Christ shines on a person (i.e., he or she perceives the gospel), can that individual fully understand the gospel message. Before God Himself removes that veil, that person cannot perceive it clearly. This applies to all people, but in the context, Paul was speaking of Jews particularly. Whenever a person comprehends that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4), that one then understands that the dispensation of grace has superseded the dispensation of the law (John 1:17). "Turns to the Lord," means conversion to Jesus Christ.

II Cor. 4:2. We have received mercy and grace from God in salvation, which means we have eternal life in Christ. In view of our inevitable success, we do not need to resort to disgraceful subtleties and subterfuge. Renouncing is repenting. The phrase "hidden things of shame" refers to secret immorality, hypocrisy, lying, cheating and other sins hidden deep in the heart. Paul did not 'tamper with' the truth. He did not need to trick his hearers ("not walking in craftiness"), because the Spirit would enlighten them concerning the "truth," and transform their characters. The Greek word translated "adulterating/deceitfully" in its noun form means "bait" for fish. Paul was not deceitfully manipulating God's Word. Some of the Corinthians believed that because Paul did not require obedience to the Mosaic Law, he was watering down the gospel to make it more acceptable. Paul, in defense of his ministry and the gospel, commended himself. But Paul's self-commendation was distinctive. He commended himself, not by self-vindication at every point, but simply by the open declaration of the truth (in particular, the gospel and its implications). His appeal was not directed to a partisan spirit or the prejudices of men but 'to every man's conscience. His self-defense has a witness, God.

II Cor. 4:5. Even though Paul occasionally needed to commend himself "to every man's conscience" (v. 2; 6:4), he never promoted himself. Instead, he proclaimed ("preached") Jesus Christ, just like a faithful slave announces his master rather than himself. Both Paul and Jesus took the role of a servant and bound themselves to fulfill God's mission for them, which involved serving others. Paul in his preaching presented Jesus as the sovereign God ("as Lord") to whom everyone must submit in faith. To become a believer, an unsaved person must submit to Christ's Lordship, at least to the extent that he or she acknowledges that Jesus is God, and is therefore over him or her in authority. Trusting in the person and work of Christ is submission to His Lordship to that extent. However, when one becomes a believer, and appreciates what God has done for him or her in salvation, yielding every area of one's life to Christ's control becomes a voluntary act of worship (Rom. 12:1).

II Cor. 4:18. Paul had introduced a paradox in verse 17; suffering now will result in glory later. In verse 18, Paul introduces an irony; the physical ("temporal") "things," that "are seen" now, appear to be permanent, but in fact the spiritual ("eternal") "things," that we cannot see ("which are not seen"), are permanent (cf. Heb. 11:1). What we can see now is only temporary. The present, momentary, visible things of life are temporary and fleeting and what is future, eternal, and invisible things are permanent and eternal. By keeping these unseen realities in view, Paul could avoid discouragement when the troubles he saw tempted him to feel discouraged (cf. Col. 3:1-2). The same is true for us today.

II Cor. 5:9-15. Paul has completed his admonition regarding the resurrection of the believer to be with the Lord for eternity. As we look forward to the realization of a future eternity with Christ, our desire should be to please the Lord with our life – here on earth as well as in heaven. The prospect of face-to-face fellowship with Jesus Christ should motivate us to please Him out of love (cf. Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:20; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1). We should be passionate to please the Lord with what we do in this life, because we will give an account of our works when we meet the Lord. When we meet the Lord, He will reward us on the basis of our works. This is not a judgment to determine whether Christians will enter heaven, but a judgment that decides to what extent God rewards those who enter heaven (cf. Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:5; 9:24-27). He will reward us for the worthwhile things we have done and not reward us for the worthless things we have done (cf. Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Cor. 9:24-27). The worthwhile things are those that contribute to the advancement of God's mission and glory in the world. The worthless things are those that make no contribution to the fulfillment of God's mission and glory in the world (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). This is an evaluation of our life with the intent to look at what we have done with the gifts of 'time' and 'choice' that the Lord has given to us; we may 'suffer loss' by losing a reward and forfeiting a praise from the Lord (I Cor. 3:15). We, as believers, should be motivated to live our life for the Lord knowing that one day we will give an account for our life. It is at the judgment seat where the 'terror of the Lord' will be known by each of us. The word 'terror' in this verse is a translation of the Greek word '*phobos*,' referring to 'that which causes fear,' 'terror,' 'apprehension.' This is the same word translated 'fearful' in Heb. 10:31. We are held responsible for our life and ministry – it is our heart motivation that will be examined by the Lord, not external appearances. Paul set an example for us, because all of Paul's ministries to and for the Corinthians had been for God's glory and their welfare. Paul's ministry for the Lord consumed him. What Paul meant by the charge of being "beside" himself ("ourselves"), and its opposite, being "of sound mind," was his ceaseless ministry and service; much of which was the opposite of other people's lives. This led to criticism of his ministry, which Paul responded to, "That is for God to judge" (cf. vv. 9-11). The primary reason Paul could not "live for" himself was because of God's "love" for him. God's love was extended to us through Jesus Christ dying on the cross paying our penalty for sin. Jesus provided the example that we are to follow: He gave (voluntarily sacrificed) His life for others. Jesus' death was "for all;" and the essence of that death was a 'substitute' for us. Paul is not teaching that, irrespective of man's response and attitude, all men would know and experience forgiveness of sins. There is universalism in the scope of redemption, since no man is excluded from God's offer of salvation; but there is a particularity in the application of redemption, since not all men appropriate the benefits afforded by this universally offered salvation. The phrase "so then all died," means that Jesus' death was equivalent to the death of all; in other words, it was the death of all men which was died by Him. This had to be; otherwise, His death would mean nothing to mankind. If Jesus died for all, then all must be of equal fundamental value. Christ's death was the death of all, in the sense that He died the death they should have died; the penalty of their sins was borne by Him; He died in their place. For believers, we "all died" in the sense that we died in Christ; meaning He paid the price for our sin (cf. Rom. 6:23), which is death. Paul understood that such love merited complete devotion to the Lord to do His will, not our own selfish desires. We see, from verses 11 and 14, there are two motives for a believer: the 'fear of the Lord' and the 'love of Christ.' From these two motives we see Jesus Christ as 'Judge' and as 'Savior.' Are we living as Paul did? Do we live knowing that Christ is both our Judge and our Savior?

II Cor. 5:17-19. Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (vv. 14-15) had had another effect besides altering Paul's viewpoint (v. 16). Verse 17 begins with the Greek word, *hōste*: "therefore" or "so." At the time of our salvation, we become "a new person (creation). That means that old sinful habits are to be taken away and new God-glorifying habits are to take their place. We still have the same basic personality, genetic constitution, parents, susceptibility to temptation (1 Cor. 10:14), sinful environment (Gal. 1:4),

etc. These things do not change. What is to change is our perspectives, prejudices, misconceptions, enslavements, etc. (cf. Gal. 2:20). God has added "new things" to our life when we are saved including: new spiritual life, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, the righteousness of Christ, as well as new viewpoints (v. 16). Before we were saved, we did not possess the life-giving Holy Spirit, who now lives within us (Rom. 8:9). Now we have both our sinful human nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit, hence a battle begins. At the time of our salvation, we were reconciled to God. It is God's gracious provision of His Son dying for us that enabled this "reconciliation." He has brought everyone into a *savable* relation to Himself, by sending His Son, who paid the penalty for sin, which separates people from God. The fact that God has reconciled *everyone* does not mean that everyone is justified, however. People still need to respond to the offer of salvation by believing the gospel to receive justification (v. 20). Reconciliation removes a barrier to our salvation, but it does not by itself accomplish our salvation. As believers we share in this ministry of reconciliation; the word of reconciliation is the gospel message. Therefore, given this foundation, we are to be living examples of this work of reconciliation to God Himself by always initiating and seeking reconciliation with fellow believers because it reflects what God has done for us. We are to forgive with a purpose of reconciling, just as God has done for us.

II Cor. 5:20 – 6:1. Paul is writing here that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. This ministry makes us God's "ambassadors" ("for Christ"). An ambassador is at the same time a messenger and a representative. An ambassador, before acting, receives a commission from the power for whom he represents to act on behalf of the one who commissioned him. Ambassadors authoritatively announce messages and request, not demand, acceptance. As ambassadors of Christ, when we announce a message, it is equivalent to the voice of God giving that person a message. However, the stakes involved require an urgent appeal. Our appeal should communicate the urgency of their believing the message. Full reconciliation only takes place when a person trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior (John 3:16). Verse 21 condenses the grounds for Paul's appeal, and expresses it in another paradox. This verse explains the "how" of full reconciliation and takes us to the very heart of the atonement. First, Christ, who knew no sin became sin for us. God treated Jesus as if He were a *sinner*, when He poured out His wrath on Him. On the cross Jesus remained as holy as ever but He was treated as if He were guilty of all the sins ever committed; and He bore the guilt and penalty for all people's sins. The wrath of God was exhausted on Him and the just requirement of God's Law was met for those who placed their faith in Jesus. Jesus' sinlessness is a clear in Scripture (Isa. 53:9; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Second, Jesus Christ became a sin-offering (Lev. 4:24; 5:12), the perfect and final one (Isa. 53:6, 10). Third, Christ became the central location and focus of sin under the judgment of God, the place in time and space where God judged sin. Jesus Christ was the *target* of God's punishment of sinners, God having imputed the sin of all humankind to Him (cf. Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:3). Now God makes us the targets of His righteousness, and imputes *that* to us (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9). The amazing effect from God's imputing His righteousness to believers is that now God sees us as He sees His righteous Son, fully acceptable to Him. As Christ, who knew no sin of his own, was made sin for us, so we, who have no righteousness of our own, are made the righteousness of God in him. Paul, having himself been reconciled to God by the death of Christ, has now been entrusted by God with the task of ministering to others that which he has himself received; reconciliation. Since God appeals to the unsaved through ambassadors of the gospel (5:20), the ambassador is a partner ("working together") with God in His work of bringing people into final reconciliation. In addition to responding to the call to be reconciled to God, they also needed to respond to another call. They needed to make sure that they were responding to God's "grace" as well: "not to receive the grace of God in vain". Paul is urging them to respond to God's grace so God's gracious bestowal would not have been in vain. God gives grace to all people throughout their lives, but He gives more grace at the moment of conversion and from then on. Receiving God's grace "in vain" would mean not allowing it to have its divinely intended result in our

lives (perfecting holiness; 7:1) and making it a ground for continuance in sin (cf. v. 3; 1 Cor. 15:2, 10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16).

II Cor. 6:14. Paul is admonishing believers that it is not right to unequally join together in a common spiritual enterprise, such as marriage or a spiritual work or ministry, with those who are not of the same spiritual nature. Paul was addressing the maintenance of inappropriate relationships with unbelievers in spiritual endeavors. Paul was not saying that believers should break off all association with unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 10:27). He had previously encouraged the saved partner in a mixed marriage to maintain the marriage relationship as long as possible (1 Cor. 7:12-16). Here Paul is commanding that believers form no binding interpersonal relationships with non-Christians that will result in their spiritual defilement (this is an extension of the principle underlying the prohibition against breeding or yoking an ox and a donkey together, c.f. Lev. 19:19; Deut. 2:10). The fulfillment of God's will must be primary for a believer. Relationships with unbelievers do not always pose a threat to our faithfulness to God; and this is not a prohibition against doing business with an unbeliever. If there is a working relationship between a believer and an unbeliever, the believer must maintain his or her relationship with Christ, even if it means forfeiting relationships with unbelievers. There is a conceptual parallel here with what Jesus (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25), Paul (Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2), and Peter (1 Pet. 2:13-17) taught about the believer's relationships with God and the state. We should obey both authorities unless they conflict, in which case we must obey God.

II Cor. 7:9-11. In verse 8, Paul admitted that he had regretted sending the severe "letter" after he had done so. He had subsequently thought that it was too harsh. Fortunately, his readers responded to it as he had hoped they would, though it had "caused" them some pain ("sorrow") at first. Fortunately, it had led the church into genuine "repentance" (v.9). The believers had changed their thinking and their behavior; and it prevented them from loss spiritually. "Godly sorrow" refers to sorrow that is according to the will of God and produced by the Holy Spirit. True repentance cannot occur apart from genuine sorrow. Godly sorrow, which is God's will, results in a change of mind ("repentance"), which leads to "salvation" (also meaning deliverance from a bad situation in the temporal sense), "without" later "regret" (v.10). The improper response is "sorrow of the world" (the world's superficial response of "I'm sorry!"), which does not result in a change of mind (repentance), but leads to "death" (also meaning resentment and bitterness here on earth in the temporal sense). 'Sorrow of the world' is nothing more than the wounded pride of one getting caught in sin and having one's lusts go unfulfilled. Paul identified the attitude change that comes when one responds properly to Godly rebuke with "godly sorrow" that results in genuine repentance. One's proper response will yield "earnestness" (seriousness of purpose) to eagerly and aggressively pursue righteousness. It will create a desire to prove themselves worthy ("what vindication of yourselves") by restoring trust and confidence with other believers. It will create righteous "indignation" against one's sin and the shame it brought upon the Lord's name and His people. It will create a reverence and healthy "fear" because of their concern over their behavior and its effects. It will create a 'longing desire' (vehement desire) of the repentant sinner to restore relationships. It creates a determined "zeal" to make things right and to love deeply. It results in a deep desire to see justice done in the correction of their error ("avenging of wrong/vindication"). The church at Corinth had now put itself in the right, having been in the wrong. Paul acquits them of all responsibility for the offense which was committed. The essence of repentance is an aggressive pursuit of holiness.

II Cor. 8:21. Paul was very conscious of his need to guard ("take precaution") his project ("administration of this generous gift") and the people involved in it, from any charge of financial mismanagement ("that no one will discredit us") (v.20). Doing what was correct was not enough for

Paul. He wanted to make sure that everyone perceived what he did as honest and above board as well. Paul had learned to anticipate the suspicions or accusations of those who viewed his ministry critically, and to take necessary precautions. He sought to apply the wisdom of Proverbs 3:4, which verse 21 virtually restates. This proverb encourages devotion to kindness and truth. "Kindness / mercy / love" refers to faithfulness to obligations that arise from a relationship. "Truth" or "faithfulness" refers to what one can rely on because it is stable.

II Cor. 12:7-10. Paul was humble in his service to the Lord. God had given him a "thorn" in his "flesh." This was a gracious gift from God, though it was unpleasant to Paul. It reminded him of his limitations, and so kept him humble. We do not know what this "thorn" was. Some believe it to be a bodily suffering, some physical illness or infirmity, such as: bad eyesight, a speech impediment, malaria, or epilepsy. Paul regarded his thorn in the flesh as a "messenger" that came from "Satan" to frustrate him (cf. Job 2:1-10). Nevertheless, God had permitted it, and would use it to bring good out of evil (Rom. 8:28). Paul asks the Lord to remove this "thorn" three times, which shows how intensely he wanted God to remove his affliction. But the Lord denied his request. Here is an example of the Lord denying a prayer request because He wanted to give something better (though not more comfortable). What we must learn is that the Lord used it to teach Paul dependence on Himself, and the sufficiency of His "grace." The Lord enabled Paul to do things he could not have done had he been naturally strong (cf. Rom. 8:35-37). This is an important lesson to learn. The greater the degree that we sense our weakness, the more we will be ready to experience God's power (cf. Eph. 3:16; Phil. 4:13). Our success does not depend on our natural abilities, but on God's "power" working in and through us. Human weakness can be a profound blessing if it results in our depending more on God and less on self.

II Cor. 13:5. In II Corinthians, Paul was responding to those who were critical of his ministry and were challenging his apostleship. As he draws his letter to the Corinthians to a close, he called upon the believers in Corinth to "examine" themselves, to make sure every one of them was walking "in the faith." They had been examining him, but he turned the tables and challenged them to examine themselves. He was asking them to examine their works to gain the assurance that they were walking *in obedience to the faith*; did they *demonstrate* that they were in the faith. Paul asked them to "test" themselves. He asked them to examine and test themselves, not because he doubted their salvation, but because he was absolutely sure of their salvation, and that assurance formed an undeniable foundation for his appeal. R.V.G. Tasker wrote: "The logic of Paul's argument is compelling: If the Corinthians wanted proof of whether Paul's ministry was from Christ, they must look at themselves, not him, because Paul had ministered the gospel to them (Acts 18:1-11; 1 Cor. 2:1-5)." Paul believed that "Jesus Christ" was working in each one of them—"unless" they *failed* this "test" ('disqualified')." In that case, there was some doubt whether they were in "Jesus Christ." Paul himself claimed to be walking in the faith ("we ourselves do not fail the test"- v.6).

Gal. 2:20. When a person trusts Christ for salvation, the spiritually participate with Christ in His crucifixion and in His victory over sin and death. As a result of his participation in Christ's death on the cross, Paul explains that the life he now lives is not lived by him but by Christ who dwells in him. This is true of us today. When a person trusts Christ, God identifies him or her *with Christ*, not only in the present and future, but also in the past. The believer did what Christ did. When Christ died, the believer died. When Christ arose from the grave, the believer arose to newness of life. The old self-centered life died when the believer died with Christ. His Spirit-directed life began in each believer when they arose with Christ. Therefore, in this sense, the Christian's life is really the life of Christ ("Christ lives in me").

We also live "by faith" each day ("the life which I now live in the flesh"). Paul's reference to "the flesh" here is literal. It means our physical bodies. "Faith" means trust in Christ. We can trust Him because He "loved" us and "gave Himself up" as a sacrifice for us.

Gal. 5:13-21. Paul has written about the fact that believers in Christ are free from the Law of Moses as a means for salvation and from its external ceremonial regulations. But this freedom was not a license to sin (cf. 2:4). Now he is warning them again against using their liberty as a license to sin (v.13). The "flesh" is the sinful human nature that every person, saved and unsaved, possesses. Christian liberty is not for selfish fulfillment but for serving others. Under grace we are free to fulfill the Law by loving one another. When a believer genuinely loves others, they fulfill all the moral requirements of the Mosaic Law; and this is the ruling principle of Christian liberty. Apparently, the believers who advocated grace and the believers who advocated Law bitterly opposed one another (v.15). Paul cautioned both sides to love one another, or else they would "be consumed by" each other. Paul now encourages the believers to "walk in the Spirit" (v.16). In verses 16-18, the Holy Spirit is doubly contrasted, first, with the flesh, and secondly, with the law. The law does not safeguard oneself against the flesh, it provokes it. To "walk in the Spirit" means we are to live moment by moment in submissive trust in the Holy Spirit rather than in self. We could translate "walk in the Spirit" as "keep on walking in the Spirit." To the extent that we do this, we will not carry out our fleshly desires. The contrary way of living is to walk in such a way as to *fulfil the lust of the flesh*. The *flesh* is the physical part of our being and stands for that which is opposed to our spirit as well as the Holy Spirit. In verse 17 we find two conflicting entities within a believer; God's Holy Spirit and sinful human nature. We will always experience conflict, whether we side with the Spirit against the flesh, or with the flesh against the Spirit. The "things that you please" may be good or evil. It is impossible for us to remain neutral; we either follow one or the other. Note, too, that we cannot blame Satan and his demons for all the conflicts we experience. Our own sinful nature is responsible for many of them. In verse 18, 'if' (better understood as "since"), we are "led by the Spirit," we are "not under the Law." The Holy Spirit does lead every believer (cf. vv. 24-26; Rom. 8:14). The question is, will we follow His leading and walk after the Spirit (v. 16), or will we walk after the flesh? The Holy Spirit leads us to do the moral will of God. He does this through Scripture, by helping us understand the will of God as He has revealed it there. In addition, He motivates us to do what we know to be right, and He provides the power for us to obey God (Phil. 2:13). We can overcome the flesh by siding with the Spirit. Now Paul identifies the works of the flesh in verses 19-21. Behavior normally demonstrates nature. Paul identified five categories of sins here. He seems to have been saying ironically: "Look at the accomplishments of the flesh!" Verse 19 identifies sexual sins: "Immorality," fornication (Gr. *porneia*, all types of forbidden sexual relationships); "Impurity," uncleanness (Gr. *akatharsia*, all moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed); "Sensuality," licentiousness, indecency debauchery, lasciviousness (Gr. *aselgeia*, the open, shameless display of these sins). Verse 20 identifies religious sins: Idolatry" (Gr. *eidololatria*, worship of anything but God and the practices associated with that worship); "Sorcery," witchcraft (Gr. *pharmakeia*, attempts to aid the powers of evil and the practices associated with that). Verses 20-21 identifies societal sins: "Enmities," quarrels, hatred (Gr. *echthrai*, hostilities); "Strife," discord, variance (Gr. *eris*, antagonism); "Jealousy," envy, emulation (Gr. *zelos*, self-centered animosity); "Outbursts of anger," fits of rage, wrath (Gr. *thymoi*, temper eruptions); "Disputes," strife, factions selfishness, selfish ambition (Gr. *eritheiai*, putting others down to get ahead); "Dissensions," divisions, seditions (Gr. *dichostasiai*, disputes over issues or personalities); "Factions," heresies, party spirit (Gr. *haireseis*, divisions over issues or personalities); "Envy[ing]," jealousies (Gr. *phthonoi*, wrong desires to have another's possessions). Verse 21 identifies intemperate sins: Drunkenness," drinking bouts (Gr. *methai*, excessive use of intoxicants); "Carousings," revelings, orgies (Gr. *komoj*, parties involving excessive eating and drinking). Verse 21 identifies other sins as "Things like these" (similar violations of God's moral will). The common

feature of these sins is that they are the fruit of pride and self-centeredness. Paul warns us that people who "practice" such sins "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (i.e., the messianic kingdom; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 5:5); because they are unbelievers. No genuine believer would practice (habitually do) these sins. I do not believe the Scriptures teach that genuine Christians are incapable of committing these sins (cf. Rom. 13:13). However, I believe that there will be differences in rewards, for believers, depending on their faithfulness to God (1 Cor. 3:10-15). Here Paul is contrasting unbelievers, whose lives typically bear the marks of these vices, with believers, whose lives typically manifest the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23).

Gal. 5:22-23. Paul had just identified the behavior that results when we rebel against the Holy Spirit's leadership, and follow the dictates of our sinful nature (cf. v. 17). He now lists the behavior characteristics that become evident when we allow the Spirit to control us rather than the flesh.

1. "Love" (Gr. *agape*, self-sacrificing affection for others)
2. "Joy" (Gr. *chara*, deep-seated gladness regardless of circumstances)
3. "Peace" (Gr. *eirene*, inner quietness and repose regardless of circumstances)
4. "Patience" (Gr. *makrothymia*, forbearance even under provocation)
5. "Kindness" (Gr. *chrestotes*, benevolence and graciousness)
6. "Goodness" (Gr. *agathosyne*, constructive action reaching out to others)
7. "Faithfulness" (Gr. *pistis*, reliability, trustworthiness)
8. "Gentleness" (Gr. *praytes*, acquiescence to authority and consideration of others)
9. "Self-control" (Gr. *enkrateia*, ability to master oneself)

When the Holy Spirit is in control of our life there is a selfless and outgoing concern for others. Taken together they present a moral portrait of Christ, which we are to be a reflection of. Based on the fruit of the Holy Spirit being exhibited in the life of a believer, we have no foundation not to forgive someone.

Gal. 5:24-26. Paul writes that the believer in Christ has "crucified the flesh" in the sense that when he or she trusted Christ, God broke the domination of his or her sinful nature. While we still have a sinful human nature, it does not control us as it did before we trusted in Christ (cf. Rom. 6:6-7). Paul said that we ("those who belong to Christ"), not God, "have crucified" it. We did this when we trusted in Jesus Christ as our Savior (cf. 2:20). Therefore, it is inconsistent for us to return to the flesh. "Passions" are the outward expression of inner "desires." We need to continually crucify the flesh by choosing to yield to the Spirit (vv. 16, 18, 25; Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). "Since" (better translation than "if") God has given us new life, we should "walk" ("keep in step," NIV, as soldiers do when they march) daily "by (with) the Spirit" (i.e., in dependence on Him) (v.25). In verse 16, the Greek verb for "walk" is *peripateo*, which means "to walk about," referring to pursuing one's daily activities (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). In verse 25, the Greek verb for "walk" is *stoicheo*, which means "to walk in a row, go in order," referring to pursuing the right way in an orderly fashion (cf. Rom. 4:12). In verse 16 we were given the principle of walk; here in verse 25 it means 'to learn to walk;' so we are to begin to walk by the Spirit, it is a learning process. Paul closes this passage with an admonition (v.26). Believers are not to be 'conceited,' which is to boast of things that are insignificant and lacking in true worth, whether the boaster actually has them or only imagines that he has them or desires to have them. The traits of 'provoking' and 'envying' are traits of walking in the flesh, which Paul has admonished them not to do. This is a very instructive verse because it shows that our conduct to others is determined by what controls our heart.

Gal. 6:1-5. This passage begins (v.1) with a believer who is caught in sin, a sin that has taken control of his life; and a believer who is spiritual, as established by Biblical standards (Eph.5:18-20, Col.3:16). The spiritual believer is to restore (carefully mend) the believer caught in sin. The spiritual believer is to do this gently and with caution knowing that no one is immune from falling into sin, including himself. The

Greek words translated into English as “burden” are different and have two different meanings; (v.2) the Greek word “*bare*” is used here that means ‘heavy, oppressive load;’ (v.5) the Greek word “*phortion*” is used here that means ‘normal obligation.’ The spiritual believer is called upon to share heavy, oppressive burdens of another believer for the length of time necessary to lighten the burden (v.2). In context the ‘burden’ that is heavy and oppressive may be: 1) sin such as an addiction, 2) broken relationships, 3) loss of a loved one, 4) terminal disease, or 5) other difficult situations that have become a heavy, oppressing burden to a believer. When one believer helps another believer to ‘bear their burden’ they are fulfilling the Law of Christ (Gal.5:14, John 13:3-4, Rom.13:8-10). This help is to be done without pride but with self-examination, not comparing themselves to others. When proper self-examination is done, the spiritual believer can rejoice (take pride in) what God has done in their life to help their fellow believer. This is not sinful pride, but rather an acknowledgement of what God has done for them. When that is done, the spiritual believer will be able to carry their own burden of responsibility in service to the LORD and in their daily life (v.5).

Gal. 6:7-8. Paul introduces these verses with an abrupt warning; "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked". Why, because sowing inevitably leads to reaping. If a person selfishly withholds what he has, he will not see God multiply it and bless him with it. If he follows the prompting of his sinful nature in his thoughts and actions ("sows to his own flesh"), he will "reap" death ("corruption"), but if he follows ("sows to") "the Spirit," he will "reap eternal life." This is not saying he will necessarily die, but that his sowing will yield a disappointing harvest. Neither is it saying that he can earn justification. It is saying that his continuous, abundant, and Spirit-motivated sowing will yield the best harvest. Our harvest will suffer if we "grow weary" and stop sowing. The term "eternal life" has two different, though related, meanings in the New Testament. Essentially it is the *life of God* that He shares with believers. Eternal life is a gift that one receives by faith (John 10:28). However, it also refers to the quality of the believer's life, that depends on the extent to which he or she walks with God in fellowship (John 10:10).

Gal. 6:10. Believers have a responsibility to "do" what is "good to all people," including the unsaved. This is the “law of personal relationships.” We have a special responsibility to other believers ("those who are of the household of faith") as we "have opportunity." When we hear of a need and have the resources to help, we are to do so. But there is a greater accountability for a believer in need – they are our brother or sister in Christ. We will be spending an eternity together in heaven. They are a representative of Christ – and for a believer to be unkind, offend, or turn away from a believer is not only wrong, it is contrary to the faith and relationship with Christ that you claim to have. Our love for a fellow believer is a direct indicator to all of your love for Christ.

Gal. 6:14. Paul boasted (an expression of praise, not pride) *only* in Christ's "cross," the work of Christ for him. The cross was a symbol of shame to the world. But because of the ‘Cross’ the world system had lost its appeal to Paul; only being a "new creation" in Christ mattered (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). The world is spiritually dead to believers; and believers are to be spiritually dead to the world.

Eph. 2:1-10. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul explained God’s eternal plan in predestining (selecting) and choosing (electing) those who would be responsible to believe in Christ when they heard the gospel message...and that those believes would be brought under the headship of Christ as a part of the body of Christ (the Church). Beginning in chapter 2, Paul will explain how God makes unbelievers believers and places them into the body of Christ. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul describes how unbelievers who deserve God’s wrath are saved by His grace, through faith. Ephesians 2:1-7 is one sentence in the Greek. The subject of that sentence is God. The three main verbs are “made us alive...with” (vs. 5), “raised up together” (vs. 6a), and “made us set together” (vs. 6b). Therefore, the main assertion in

Ephesians 2:1-7 is that God made unbelievers believers, made them alive, raised them up, and seated them with Christ. Paul explains that natural man is spiritually dead in transgressions (false steps) and sin (acts of missing the mark) (vv. 1-3). This means that man deliberately acts against God and His righteousness. The use of the plural of these two nouns means that man is repetitious in his involvement in sin, based on man's sinful nature, which results in a spiritually dead state of being. Paul further defines the state of those who are spiritually dead.

- 1) They follow the ways of the world; they follow the lifestyle of the unbeliever.
- 2) They follow the ruler of the kingdom of air; Satan.
- 3) They allow the spirit (the atmosphere controlled by Satan) to work in them in conscious, active rebellion against God (sons of disobedience).
- 4) All men have lived or are living in this state; they follow the lustful desires and thoughts of the flesh and the mind.
- 5) All men, by natural state, are deserving of wrath because unbelief and disobedience create a relationship to God's wrath.

In verses 4-5, Paul explains that the grace of God gives life to the believer through Christ. The conjunction "But" is placed in an emphatic position in the sentence and introduces God's action toward unbelievers in contrast to what was previously described. God, who is rich in exhibiting undeserved kindness, acts of behalf of unbelievers. His action is based on His great love (agape) for us. God's mercy and love has made us alive through and with Christ, even though we were spiritually dead in sin without any ability to commend ourselves to God. This act of God is an act of grace (it is by grace you are saved). Believers have been raised up with Christ; positionally resurrected (v.6a). This is an immediate and direct result of a believing faith. Believers share a new, powerful, and unique position with Christ (Col. 3:1-2). Believers are seated with Christ in heavenly places (heaven) (v.6b). Believers are where Christ is (Eph. 1:20). Believers have a dual citizenship: earth and heaven. Note: Christ died and was raised physically (Eph. 1:20). Unbelievers are dead spiritually, are made spiritually alive by grace through faith, and are raised with Christ spiritually (Eph. 2:5-6). Christ is physically seated in heaven (Eph. 1:20). Believers are seated spiritually in heaven (before physical death) (Eph. 2:6). In eternity, God will show (display / demonstrate) the incomparable riches of His grace. All in heaven will marvel (for eternity) over the incredible kindness and love of God. The appropriate expression of God's love to those who are spiritually dead is to give them life, which is incomprehensible. The incomparable riches of His grace are built upon in verses 8 and 9. It is by grace that the unbeliever is given the opportunity to be saved by faith. Faith is the means by which one accepts God's free salvation; it is faith that is exhibited by humbling of oneself before God. This salvation does not have its source in man; it is the gift of God. This salvation does not have its means through the work of man; it is the grace of God which man must humbly accept. Therefore, since no man can bring salvation to himself by his own efforts, a believer boasting in salvation can only be in Christ. This salvation is God's workmanship; it is God's masterpiece (v.10). Believers, therefore, are God's masterpiece created in Christ to do good works. Good works cannot save, but good works are evidence of salvation. God has prepared a path of good works for believers, which He will perform in and through them as they walk by faith.

Eph. 4:1-16. Paul begins by exhorting the Jewish and Gentile believers to live a life worthy of their calling. The basis for this statement is what he previously wrote in Ephesians 1 – 3, where he declared that he was a prisoner of the Lord (Eph. 3:1). "Worthy" means "equal weight"; so to "walk worthy" means that the believer's calling and conduct should be in balance. "Called" refers to the believer's salvation and their union into the body of Christ. Therefore, a believer's conduct concerns both one's personal life as well as one's responsibility to other believers in the body of Christ. Paul went on to list the virtues that are to be predominate in the believer's life in verses 2 and 3.

- 1) Humility (lowliness) – In the culture of Paul’s day, humility was considered a vice only to be practiced by slaves. There was no Greek or Latin word for humility and it is believed that Paul created this word and used it in his ministry. Humility comes as a result of a believer recognizing who he/she is before God, with Christ being the supreme example of humility. Paul’s emphasis on unity can only be accomplished by humility because pride creates disunity.
- 2) Gentleness (meekness) – Meekness is having one’s emotions under control; it is not weakness. Meekness is the opposite of self-assertion, rudeness, and harshness. Meekness is the product of humility.
- 3) Patience (longsuffering) – Patience means “long tempered” and refers to a “resolved” patience that is an outgrowth of humility and gentleness. In addition, patience means to never give up but endure to the end, even in times of adversity. It is self-restraint that does not hastily retaliate for a wrong.

The attitudes of humility, gentleness, and patience establish the foundation for unity; they are carried out in one’s conduct by bearing with one another in love and by making the effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Believers are not only to create unity but they are to maintain and guard that unity. Believers are to maintain unity and peace even when they have differences.

In verses 4 through 6 Paul lists the elements of unity based on the three Persons of the Trinity. The unity of the Trinity is the basis for unity that should exist in the Body of Christ, the church.

- 1) One body – this refers to the universal church; all believers.
- 2) One Spirit – this refers to the Holy Spirit who indwells the believers, which are the church.
- 3) One hope – this refers to all believers who have a common hope regarding their future with God.
- 4) One Lord – this refers to Christ, the head of the church.
- 5) One faith – this refers to the body of truth given to the believers and their faith they have placed in Christ as their personal Savior.
- 6) One baptism – this refers primarily to the act of water baptism, which is the believer’s public confession of their faith in Christ. A secondary meaning is the baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurs at the time of salvation.
- 7) One God – this refers to God the Father and his relationship to all believers. The use of “all” four times by Paul draws the focus to...
 - a. “of all” – meaning all believers
 - b. “above all” – meaning God is sovereign over the believers
 - c. “through all” – meaning God lives through the believer
 - d. “in you all” – meaning God manifests Himself through the believer.

Paul changes his focus from the basis of unity to spiritual gifts that are used to preserve unity (vv.7-8). Each believer receives grace...as Christ apportions it to them. Grace is not something a believer earns; it is something Christ provides (gives). Since each believer receives grace, all believers are on the same level in exercising their gifts given to them by Christ. Ephesians 4:8 is a paraphrase, by Paul, of Psalm 68:18-19. The essence of this Psalm is a military victor who has the rights to give gifts to those who served with him. Christ, having won a victory over sin, death, and Satan, has redeemed a captive people. He is the Victor and has the ability to give gifts as He deems correct. In verses 9 and 10 Paul adds a parenthetical thought as commentary on “descended” and “ascended”. Before Christ could ascend, He had to descend. There is a lot of discussion about what is meant by “to the lower parts of the earth”. There are numerous thoughts. It is my opinion that “descend” has two thoughts – one, Christ descended from Heaven to Earth, and two, Christ descended from Earth into Hell. It is my opinion that the clearer understanding is Christ descending from Earth to Hell, as it was Christ’s destination between the crucifixion and resurrection. It was in Hell that He cast all sin from His being and claimed victory over sin, death, and Satan. From there He ascended as a Victor, fulfilling all scripture, gaining the

right to be the Head over the Church. Christ one day will take all who believe in Him to Heaven, but before that day occurs, He will give believers with spiritual gifts as gifts to the church. Ephesians 4:11-16 is one sentence, the 6th of 8 long sentences in Ephesians. From the previous explanation of Christ being the “Victor”, which gives Him the authority to give gifts (v.11). Paul continues. Christ Himself gives gifts of gifted believers to the Church.

- 1) Apostles. This refers to the 12 disciples who had seen the risen Christ. This includes Matthias who replaced Judas. Paul was also an apostle, but was uniquely set apart to be an apostle to the Gentiles. The apostles were the men who initially carried the gospel message with God’s authority to all of mankind. The term “apostle” means “one sent as an authoritative delegate”. (NOTE: The gift of apostles was a foundational gift, which gift ceased after the first generation of believers.)
- 2) Prophets. This refers to specifically commissioned men, after the resurrection of Christ, who were sent to a local group or congregation of people. They provided edification, exhortation, compassion, and discernment of truth to the early church. They were used to reveal God’s will to the local group and also preserved the teachings of the apostles before the biblical canon was complete. (NOTE: The gift of N.T. prophets was a foundational gift and it was a gift that ceased after the first generation of believers.)
- 3) Evangelists. This refers to men and women who proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers. Today we would best understand this term as missionaries because it refers to an itinerant ministry.
- 4) Pastors and / in particular Teachers. This refers to one office but to either two kinds of people who fill the office or the two characteristics within a person who fills the office. This gifted believer (who we believe is a man) ministers to a local congregation. The Pastor / Teacher is to comfort and guide other believers, like a shepherd and sheep, while instructing them in God’s truth.

Paul declares the purpose of these gifted believers to the Church – they are to prepare and equip other believers to serve (v.12). The literal interpretation of “perfecting” (preparing / equipping) is to mend or repair nets, to restore for proper use. Gifted believers are to minister the Word (God’s Truth) to others so they are readied to become involved in ministry to others. The goal of this purpose is to build up and edify the body of Christ. This includes all believers, no exceptions. All believers are gifted by Christ to serve others. In verse 13, Paul continues, this service of ministry to the Church is to continue until all the Church (the Body of Christ) attains (arrives at the determined destination):

- 1) Unity of the faith (body of doctrinal truth) and full knowledge of the Son of God.
- 2) Maturity; as a perfect, complete man.
- 3) Christlikeness; unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Paul states the intended purpose (or result) of gifted believers ministering to believers – so they will not be like immature children who are easily swayed and confused by cunning (dice-playing) man who deceitfully scheme for their own benefit (v.14). False teachers cause confusion regarding the truth in order to bring believers into their own schemes (plans / design / purpose). Paul concludes that speaking the truth in love (literally “trudging’ in love”), as a spiritually mature believer, will enable believers to grow up into Him, with and in reference to all things (vv. 15-16). Christ is the source of the believer’s growth. Christ is the Head of the Body of Christ (the Church), from which the Body derives its capacity for growth and activity. Every member of the Body is joined by being carefully fitted together....and each member of the Body is held (brought together) by means of every supporting ligament (according to the standard of the measured working of each believer). When this occurs, this causes the Body of Christ to grow and build itself up in love. Each believer is to function in Christ’s Body by God’s enabling grace in accord with the measure of the gift that Christ has bestowed. When each believer accomplishes that ‘measure’ which has been given as a gift – the Church grows properly. In this unity of

structure is variety of function. Each believer contributes to the unified growth of the Body when he / she allow their gift(s) to function in service to others.

Eph. 4:17-19. Paul now describes how a believer is to walk in their life, first from a negative perspective (vv.17-19). Paul states that the believer is to no longer walk (referring to their daily conduct) as the Gentiles (or unbelievers) do. Paul gives 4 characteristics of the ungodly lifestyle, which the believer is to forsake.

- 1) Do not walk in the futility of the unbeliever's thinking. The word "futility" (vanity) means being void of a useful aim or goal. Unbelievers do not have a true purpose of mind to guide their life or their conduct. Their rational processes are distorted and they do not understand the purpose of their life, the purpose of moral living, not do they understand God's revelation of truth.
- 2) Do not walk in life alienated from the life of God. Unbelievers are ignorant of God's life; therefore, they are ignorant of God's truth. This ignorance is a willful act on the part of the unbeliever and it causes moral blindness and separation from God.
- 3) Do not walk in a life being past feeling. Unbelievers are morally insensitive. They live life in such a way that their actions become a pattern of sin and a continual turning away from God. This pattern of actions repeats itself and with each cycle it creates more apathy in their life about moral and spiritual things.
- 4) Do not walk in lewdness and uncleanness. Unbelievers become more behaviorally depraved as they willingly give themselves to sensuality. They continue to lose moral restraint as they become greedy to indulge themselves in immoral and impure actions. Ultimately self-indulgence becomes their purpose in life because it will consume them. A life given over to self-indulgence and self-centeredness ultimately ends in a life seeking self-gratification without any restraint or regard for others.

These "learning's" of the believer are not commands; they are facts that are learned by the believer and are observed in the life of a believer by others. Believers are new people in Christ and they cannot live any longer live as the unbeliever lives.

Eph. 4:20-24. Paul now describes how a believer is to walk in their life from a positive perspective (vv. 20-24). Paul redirects the reader's attention to the believer and what they have learned, which is in contrast to the characteristics of the life of the unbeliever. The believer did not come to know Christ through the lifestyle of the unbeliever. The believer came to know Christ through learning; they learned of Christ by hearing Him or by being taught about Him. Jesus Christ is the Subject and Sphere of the believer's learning, because He is the Truth.

The content of the believer's learning of Christ is two-fold.

- 1) The believer is to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. Self-centered and self-indulgent lusts and desires (the characteristics of the unbeliever's life) are deceitful. They promise joy and happiness (which is temporary) but they only deliver emptiness and pain (which is permanent).
- 2) The believer is to put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Believers live a life based on truth, not deceitful lies. Believers have been made new in the attitude of their minds. They no longer have the characteristics of the unbeliever in their life. The righteousness and holiness of God delivers permanent joy and happiness.

These "learning's" of the believer are not commands; they are facts that are learned by the believer and are observed in the life of a believer by others. Believers are new people in Christ and they cannot live any longer live as the unbeliever lives.

Eph. 4:25-32. Paul is focusing on how the unified Jewish and Gentile believers are to walk (live) together. Paul has declared and explained to the reader of his letter – the body of Christ, the unity of the body of Christ, the gifts that Christ has given to the body of Christ...and the responsibility of each believer to edify one another to grow the body of Christ and maintain its unity. In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul describes how a believer is to conduct their life. In Ephesians 4:25-32, Paul exhorts the believer to practice the truth previously given to them.

- 1) Speak the truth (v.25). Paul states that the believer is to tell the truth. Believers are not to speak falsehoods, fabricate stories, or exaggerate facts. The believer's words should conform to reality, but they are to be spoken in love (Eph.4:15). The reason believers are to speak the truth is that all believers are members of one another in the body of Christ...and truth is required for the body to function as God designed.
- 2) Be angry against sin and sin not (v.26-27). By implication, Paul states that the believer can be angry about injustice, immorality, and ungodliness...but it is to be an unselfish anger that is based on love for God and others. But even justifiable anger is to be dealt with and put away before the day is over. The reason believers are to deal with their anger daily is because such anger, if held on to, will allow Satan to gain a foothold in a believer's life, which can be used to lead the believer away from the love of Christ. If anger begins to control the believer instead of the believer controlling the anger – the believer will fall into sin.
- 3) Work to meet your needs (v.28). Paul states that the believer is not to steal. Stealing in any form is a sin and is not to be in the life of the believer. A believer is to work; producing what is beneficial for himself / herself, family, and others. A believer working with their own hands is beneficial because it provides for their own material needs and it enables them to help others.
- 4) Speak helpful words (vv.29-30). Paul states that the believer is to not to speak unwholesome (rotten – spoiled fruit or putrid fish) words; but rather is to speak good, beneficial words. Good words benefit (give grace or enablement) the hearer by instructing, encouraging, correcting, or uplifting the hearer. A believer's words are to be truthful and loving – ministering to the hearer. God the Holy Spirit is grieved when a believer refuses to change their life and speech; their sin causes Him to sorrow. The believer is to be aware of the Holy Spirit in their daily life because it is the Holy Spirit who is the guarantor of the believer's eternal redemption. It is the Holy Spirit who seals (one who has paid the down payment) the believer until the believer receives his / her new body.
- 5) Be kind, be compassionate, be forgiving (vv.31-32). Paul states that the believer is to get rid of (put away):
 - a. Bitterness – piercing, sharp (poison within), smoldering resentment
 - b. Rage (wrath) – outbursts of anger in the passion of the moment
 - c. Anger – settled in feeling of anger, deep internal hostility
 - d. Brawling (clamor) – shouting, out of control
 - e. Slander – evil speaking
 - f. Malice – ill will, wickedness, evil

When a believer's life is an example of Christ's life...and these characteristics are a reality in the believer's life, the believer will be a good testimony for Christ in all they do....and the body of Christ is built up and the unity of the body of Christ is maintained. Scripture is clear on what is required of a believer; we are to be kind-hearted. We are "kind" when we say or do what is suitable or fitting with a sweet and generous disposition. We are "tender-hearted" or compassionate when we feel affection for someone else. We are "forgiving" when we let offenses and grievances go, freely and graciously. The reason we should be forgiving is that God has forgiven us freely in Jesus Christ. It cost God the death of His Son, as man, to forgive us. It costs us nothing to forgive our fellow man. The moment someone wrongs us we must forgive them. We are to have an attitude of constant forgiveness, quick to be

offered – and genuine when offered. Each believer has been forgiven so much by God that of all people we should be ready to forgive any and all offenses against us.

Eph. 5:1-21. In Ephesians 5, Paul exhorts the believer to practice the truth previously given to them in his letter to the Ephesians by telling them to “walk in love”. Paul states that each believer has no greater purpose than to be an imitator of God...this is what a believer should do because he/she is God’s child (vv. 1-2). The “and” in verse 2 is better translated as “that is” ... meaning that the believer is to imitate God by walking (living) in love. The ultimate example of this is Christ. Christ loved us and sacrificed Himself for mankind, with His sacrifice being effective for those who believed in God (prior to His coming) and those who would believe in Him (after His coming). He voluntarily gave Himself up because of His love for us, the believer. Christ’s sacrifice was an offering that was acceptable to God. There were 5 offerings described in Leviticus. The first 3 offerings were the: 1) burnt offering (Lev. 1:1-17), which depicted Christ’s perfection; 2) the grain offering (Lev. 2:1-16), which depicted Christ’s total devotion to God by the giving of His life to God; and 3) the peace offering (Lev. 3:1-17), which depicted Christ’s work of reconciling man to God. These 3 offerings were a “soothing aroma to the Lord”. The other 2 offerings – the sin offering (Lev. 4:1-5:3) and the trespass offering (Lev. 5:14-6:7) were required by God but they were repulsive to God. These offerings depicted Christ becoming sin in order to redeem man. The entire set of offerings pleases God completely because it resulted in man’s redemption to those who believe in Christ. Paul contrasted his challenge to “walk in love” by telling the believers that they had the responsibility to abstain from evil practices (vv. 3-4). The sin identified in verses 3-4 are self-centered vices, the opposite of self-sacrificing love, which the believer should not even have a hint of in their life. These self-centered sins are:

- 1) Sexual immorality
- 2) Moral impurity of any kind
- 3) Greed
- 4) Shameless talk and conduct / degrading talk
- 5) Stupid words / foolish talk
- 6) Vulgar jesting (innuendo) / frivolous wit

The believer’s life should be a demonstration of humility, service to others, and thankfulness / gratitude. In verses 5-6, Paul sternly warns the believers that the reason they are to abstain from these evil deeds is that those who practice these deeds are not a part of God’s kingdom – they are not a child of God. These evil deeds are a sign of self-centered idolatry, because they are putting their desires before God as idols in their life. Believers should not be deceived into thinking that this warning is empty words (words without content). These words are true, because those who practice sin (willful disobedience) will become the objects of God’s wrath. A believer is to be an imitator of God, not an imitator of Satan or other men. In verses 7-10, Paul writes... “Because of these things” (what has been written in Eph. 5:1-6), do not become involved with those who practice sin. A believer should not become partners with those who are objects of God’s wrath. The reason they should not is because the believer is no longer a part of darkness (sin). A believer is now a light in the Lord. Since they are children of the light – they should live as children of light exhibiting the fruit of light (Spirit), which is goodness, righteousness, and truth. To live as children of light they are to discern (put to the test) what pleases the Lord. The truth is that as a believer walks in the light of truth – the knowledge of the Lord’s will for their life becomes clear (Romans 12:1-2). Paul instructs the believers that they are not to be “sharers together” with the unbeliever’s fruitless deeds of darkness (sin) (vv.11-13). A believer is to show forth the “fruit of light” (Eph. 5:9), which is a direct contrast to the fruitlessness of darkness, because sin provides no benefits to oneself or others. Believers are to expose the deeds of darkness (sin) by conducting themselves as “children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Expose means to reprove or convince one through argument or discussion. The focus of this passage is primarily on the believer exposing the sin of another believer who has fallen

into sin, not the believer exposing the sin of the unbeliever. God is the One who exposes the sin of the unbeliever (I Cor. 5:12-13). The believer is to be careful about how they discuss sin, publicly and privately. Paul exhorts the believer not to discuss or talk about the deeds of darkness (sin). Such discussion is not beneficial for believers, because they are to be focusing on Christ, who is the Light and the believer is the child of Light. All deeds of darkness are exposed by Light, because it is Light that makes everything visible. The light of a believer, through the fruit of Light, will make visible the sin in the life of the believer who is sinning or in the life of the unbeliever. Paul concludes this instruction with an invitation – “this is why it is said” (therefore) – to those who are living in darkness (sin) to “wake up” and “rise from the dead” for “Christ will shine on you” with His life-giving Light (v. 14). This invitation comes from a paraphrase of Isaiah 26:19, 51:17, 52:1, and 60:1. It is thought that this “quotation” given by Paul is from an early Christian hymn. Paul exhorts and instructs the believer to be wise in their walk (vv. 15-17). The literal interpretation is “Look therefore carefully how you walk” but is best understood “Therefore look that you walk carefully”. Believers are to walk carefully, meaning accurately or precisely with great care. They are not to walk as fools, meaning those who do not believe in God. The manner of the believer’s walk is to make the right use of the time and opportunity given to them by God. The Greek word for time in this passage means a fixed, measured, allocated time – a clear reference to the lifetime of the believer given to them by God. The reason for this careful walk of the believer is that the days are evil. Many are walking in sin and it is the responsibility of the believer to make full use of the time and opportunity given to them by God...to help turn those who are walking in darkness to light. Therefore – the believer is to know and understand (comprehend intellectually) the will of the Lord. God has revealed His will to the believer in and through the Word of God (Bible). The believer is not to be senseless or unwise about God’s will for their life, but they are to be wise concerning God’s will. In verses 18-21, Paul explains how wisdom and understanding, as an intellectual and spiritual capacity, works in the believer’s walk (conduct). Paul begins with a negative exhortation – “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to excessive, riotous, incorrigible, wasteful living”. A drunken man acts abnormally because the alcohol is controlling him. Paul uses this negative illustration of control to contrast the positive exhortation – “Be controlled with the Spirit”. A believer is to be filled with the Holy Spirit so the Holy Spirit can control them. A believer yielded to the Lord and controlled by the Holy Spirit will manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Light). The Holy Spirit indwells the believer – therefore the believer has all of the Holy Spirit within them. Paul’s exhortation to the believer is that the Holy Spirit is to have all-of-the believer / the entire believer, meaning the Holy Spirit is to fill and control the believer. Paul gives 4 results that show that the Holy Spirit fills and controls the life of the believer.

- 1) Communicating with other believers through psalms (O.T. songs sung with stringed instruments), hymns (N.T. praise songs) and spiritual songs (general term. This is a public focus.
- 2) Communicating with the Lord through singing and making melody (singing with a stringed instrument) in your heart. This is a private focus.
- 3) Thanking God continually for all things; thankfulness for who God is and what He has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
- 4) Submitting ourselves one to another; a submission based upon a reverence for God – who He is and what He has done...and will do. A Spirit-controlled believer is willing to serve others and be submissive to them.... versus exalting themselves and lording over them.

A believer’s life is to be an example of humility and submission to the Lord by allowing the Holy Spirit full control of their life. Actions and words should be in harmony.

Phil. 1:20-24. Paul writes to the believers in Philippi that he knows that “this” (Paul’s imprisonment) has occurred to further the advance of the gospel (v.19). Paul did not want to feel ashamed (“be put to shame”) when he stood before the Lord at His judgment seat (cf. 1 John 2:28). The phrase “my earnest

expectation and hope" can be understood as meaning "my hope-filled eager expectation," which can be illustrated by someone sticking their head out of a window of a car to look forward to getting out at fun filled destination. Paul was confident that, with the prayer support of the Philippians and the Holy Spirit's enablement, he would not be ashamed irrespective of the results of his imprisonment. Nevertheless, he felt the need for courage. After all, he still had to stand before Caesar and undergo a Roman trial. His greatest desire, however, was that he would continue to *exalt* Jesus Christ, whether that meant that he lived or died. The use of the passive "be exalted" rather than the active "I exalt Christ" is unusual. It reflects Paul's conviction that essentially the Christian life involves following the leading of God's indwelling Spirit, rather than seizing the initiative and doing things for God (cf. Gal. 5:18). Verse 21 is considered by many the key verse of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul was not certain if he would experience death or release, but he was certain of one thing – he wanted Christ to be exalted in his body either way. Paul placed "to me" first in this verse for emphasis. Jesus' work on the cross had become the reason for all that Paul did. Paul desired that Christ be glorified whether he lived or died. Paul desired that he would not be ashamed of Christ or the gospel, but rather that he would boldly proclaim Christ – this was the essence of Paul's life. Yet for Paul he knew if he lived it was to spread the gospel of Christ, but if he died for Christ that was gain (beneficial) because he would go to be with Christ, the One he served. *Paul's hope for the future was centered on Christ, which kept him from making too much of his circumstances. The prospect of seeing Jesus Christ, and standing before Him one day motivated Paul, and constituted the goal for all he did. Many people today, if they were honest, would have to say that for them to live is money, fame, happiness, family, or any of a multitude of idols, not Christ.* Paul begins verse 22 with "But if" meaning if he lived, he would continue to spread the gospel and there would be fruit for his labor. If he had a choice between living and dying for Christ, he was at a loss as how to decide between the two – he did not know which to choose (*note – this dilemma only occurs for the true believer in Christ*). Paul stated he was "hard pressed" (in a strait between two – a narrow path with a rock wall on either side allowing the traveler to only go straight forward) to know what would bring the most glory to God. His personal desire was to "depart" (Greek "*analuō*" which means to release a prisoner from their bonds) and be with Christ. For Paul his death was far better (very much better) for him than life because it would release him from persecutions, hardships, physical pain and sickness (*note – if Paul believed in purgatory or soul sleep he would not have stated he preferred death*). But Paul knew that others, like the Philippians, needed him as well. For the believer's sake, it was more necessary that he remain alive and engaged in his ministry.

Phil. 1:27-28. Paul exhorts the Philippians to honor and glorify Christ, which is his primary reason for writing this letter to the Philippians. His challenge was for them to "conduct" themselves in such a way that it brought glory to Christ. The phrase "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy/let your conduct be worthy" is one Greek word – "*politeuesthe*" – which means "to live as a citizen." The Philippians understood this word because they took great pride in their Roman citizenship (cf. Acts 16:12, 20-21). Paul was exhorting them to live with integrity as 'citizens of heaven' and to live consistently what they declare they believe, teach, and preach. Whether he was there or not, he wanted to hear of their godly conduct. Paul exhorts them to "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving/contending" meaning to work together in genuine unity as one man and as a team working together for the faith of the gospel, the body of truth. Unity of the body of Christ is introduced by Paul here because they had a common cause and they were in and a part of the body of Christ. "One spirit...one mind" is a theme that Paul will continue throughout his letter to the Philippians. Paul wanted the believers in Philippi to 'strive together' (literal meaning – "to struggle along with someone") as a team striving for victory against a common foe. In their 'striving' Paul encourages them to not let the opposition from their foe to intimidate them, frighten them or detract them from their mission. Paul encourages them to live courageously for Christ in the midst of opposition and persecution. When the enemies of the believers

fail to intimidate or frighten them, it is a sign that the enemies of God will be destroyed and eternally lost (v.19, II Thess. 1:4-8). It is also a sign that the saints of God will be delivered by God Himself.

Phil.2:1-11. Because the Philippians were to strive together with one spirit and one mind, Paul continues his exhortation to the Philippians by expounding on the importance of unity and steadfastness as essential in the work of the gospel. Paul introduces his exhortation on unity and steadfastness with a word of encouragement, ‘if there be any consolation’, which means “to come along side and help, counsel, exhort.” He then states four conditional clauses that describe the qualities that were to be true in the believer’s life. These four qualities are first-class conditions in the Greek meaning that each quality Paul writes is something he considers to be true in the life of the believer. The “if” could be translated “since” or “since you have”, which brings clarity to Paul’s exhortation.

- 1) Since encouragement (help, counsel, and exhortation) comes from being united in Christ, and
- 2) Since comfort comes from His love, and
- 3) Since there is fellowship (an indwelling partnership) with the Spirit, and
- 4) Since there is tenderness and compassion from Christ toward believers... therefore, each believer should have spiritual unity with believers in Christ.

Unity within a body of believers is based on these four qualities; and if we are in Christ, we should be keenly aware of what we have in Christ. How real are these qualities of being in Christ in your life? How are you getting along with everyone in your church family? Humility and submissiveness are critical behaviors in creating and supporting unity, which was exhibited by Christ in His life. In verse 2, Paul exhorts the Philippian believers that they would make his joy complete if they could live and work together harmoniously – striving together with one spirit and one mind. Corresponding to the four qualities in 2:1, Paul lists four ways their unity and harmony would be expressed toward one another. They would:

- 1) Be like minded – meaning think the same way, and
- 2) Have the same love toward one another, and
- 3) Be in one accord (‘one-souled’) – meaning being united in spirit, knit in harmony having the same desires, ambitions, and goals, and
- 4) Be one in purpose – meaning to be collectively intent on one purpose.

The quality of the relationship between church leaders and the church family is essential to the peace, unity and ministry of the church. To create and maintain unity and peace within a church requires a great deal of communication between leaders and members and this communication must be with the attitude of humility and submissiveness. Paul continued his exhortation by telling the Philippian believers that they must put away selfish behavior and personal self-interests if they were going to live and worship together in harmony (vv.3-4). This describes the humility that is required for people to live and work together in unity. The foundation of unity is humility. Paul’s exhortation reveals a problem within the church at Philippi that existed between certain believers (4:2) – a lack of harmony and unity. Paul tells them that:

- 1) Nothing is to be done out of selfish ambition (selfishness, pride to seek to have their own way, pride that causes strife with others).
- 2) Nothing is to be done out of vain conceit (pursuit of personal glory, empty glory).
- 3) They should consider others more important than themselves (view themselves with humility not with pride).
- 4) They should consider and be concerned for the interests of others, not be focused only on themselves.

The emphasis of verse 3 is how we view other people, while the emphasis of verse 4 is how we relate to other people. These verses outline the critical requirements for living successfully with other people,

especially with other believers. We must realize that we are to serve one-another in humility, not just to help others when we feel like it.

- 1) A helper helps others when it is convenient. A servant serves others even when it is inconvenient.*
- 2) A helper helps people that he or she likes. A servant serves people that he or she dislikes.*
- 3) A helper helps with a view of obtaining personal satisfaction. A servant serves even when he or she dislikes the work.*
- 4) A helper helps with an attitude of assisting another person. A servant serves with an attitude of enabling another person to succeed.*

Verses 5-11 create the most important passage of Paul's letter to the Philippians. This paragraph is the focal point of his letter as Christ is the example that we are to follow because the secret of true joy in life is found in the way we think and live, which is to be Christ-like in attitude and action. Paul directs his exhortation to Christ as the example of humility and selfless concern for others (v.5). Paul exhorts the believers in Philippi to have the same attitude as Christ, to be like-minded as Christ; which He exhibited in His incarnation and through His example of selfless humility in life. The very quality of life that Paul was exhorting the Philippians to follow was observable in the life of Christ. Paul writes that Jesus Christ eternally has been God (v.6). Christ is the same nature and essence of God – and this is His continuous state. The word translated as “form” (*morphe*) stresses the inner reality of Christ as God meaning that the outward appearance of Christ accurately reveals the inner nature which was God. Christ, in His incarnation, embraced and became true humanity while being complete and absolute deity. Christ did not give up, lay aside, or surrender His full deity and attributes when He became a man; but He did voluntarily give up the independent exercise of some of His divine attributes for the purpose of living among men with their human limitations. Therefore, Christ in human form was equal with God. Christ did not regard His former manner of existence something He wanted to hold onto. His equality with God was not something He seized (translated “robbery” or “to be grasped”) because He did not think this was something to be exploited to His own advantage. Christ emptied Himself (made Himself nothing), taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Christ's humility, as described by Paul, is clearly seen in Christ's actions in John 13:3-17 where He washed the feet of the disciples. Christ set aside His privileges as God while taking on the limitation of humanity. Christ, by becoming human, voluntarily ‘emptied Himself’ / ‘laid aside His privileges’ / ‘made Himself nothing’ to the point that He did not demand normal human rights, but rather allowed Himself to be subject to persecution by His own created beings (man) who hated God. Christ gave up face-to-face interaction with God the Father, independent authority, eternal riches, and favored relationship. He took on all the attributes of humanity, becoming fully man yet retaining His deity being fully God. Christ did submit to a voluntary nonuse of some of His divine attributes in order to be truly human. Christ did not exercise His divine attributes on His own behalf though they had abundant display in His miracles. This is qualified to some extent by the fact that His omniscience is revealed in His prophetic ministry, but He did not use His divine knowledge to make His own path easier. He suffered all the inconveniences of the time in which He lived even though in His divine omniscience He had full knowledge of every human device ever conceived for human comfort. In His human nature there was growth in knowledge, but this was a contradiction of His divine omniscience. Limitations in knowledge as well as limitations in power are related to the human nature and not to the divine. His omnipotence was manifested in many ways and specifically in the many miracles which He did, in some cases by the power of the Holy Spirit and in others on the basis of His own word of authority. He did not use His omnipotence to make His way easy and He knew the fatigue of labor and travelling by walking. Though in His divine nature He was omnipresent, He did not use this attribute to avoid the long journeys on foot nor was He ever seen in His ministry in more than one place at a time. It can be said with confidence that Christ restricted the use and benefits of His attributes as they pertained to His walk on earth and voluntarily chose not to use His powers to lift Himself above ordinary human limitations. Furthermore, Jesus Christ became "in the

likeness of men" (v.7; cf. Rom. 8:3). "Likeness" (Gr. *homoiomati*) does not mean exactness (Gr. *eikon*). Christ had a divine nature as well as a human nature – at the same time. Even though Jesus had a fully human nature, that nature was not sinful. Every human being has a sinful human nature and is subject to death. Christ's humanity was in its *fallen* and *weakened* condition and He was burdened with *the results* of humanity's sin (Isa. 53:2-6), which meant He was subject to death even though He was not sinful. Paul described Christ's self-emptying as "taking the form of a bond-servant." "Taking" (Gr. *labon*) does not imply an exchange but adding on something. Christ did not lay aside the form of God; He did not cease to be God. *He added on the "form" of man as a bond-servant (slave), which reflects the humility of Christ as He came to do the will of God in becoming the perfect sacrifice for sin – and to provide the way of salvation for mankind.* Christ appeared to other people just as any other man (v.8). There were no visual clues in His "appearance" that He was deity or sinless. This was another aspect of His humility as He was clearly recognizable as a human. Christ was clearly human but He was without disease, deformity, mental deficiency or other human health challenges. Christ humbled Himself to the point of not demanding normal human rights. He humbled Himself by being obedient to the Father's will (Matt. 26:36-46). He humbled Himself by allowing His own created beings, who hated and rejected God, to persecute Him. He humbled Himself by allowing Himself to die as a criminal in the eyes of men by being put to death on a cross (cf. Isa. 53:12; Heb. 5:8). *Hanging on a tree* was a sign to the Jews that the person disgraced in this way was under "the curse of God" (Deut. 21:23; cf. Gal. 3:13). There was no one who was a better example of humility and selfless concern for others than Christ. *Christ is the example that we are to follow. We are to live a harmonious, humble life, based on the example of Christ. How humble are we in our daily walk? Paul has just explained (2:5-8) how Christ was the example of selfless ambition and humility; emptying Himself to become a servant who willingly died a criminal's death to provide the way of salvation to those who believe. How sensitive and submissive are we to doing God's will in our life no matter the circumstances or situation? Warren Wiersbe has stated: "The test of the submissive mind is not just how much we are willing to take in terms of suffering, but how much we are willing to give in terms of sacrifice."* Paul went on to explain that Christ's humility, selfless concern, submission, and obedience would be recognized by God the Father (v.9). God the Father literally "super-exalted" (Gr. *hyperypsose*) Christ to the place of highest honor in heaven, which was an answer to Christ's prayer in John 17:5. This exaltation included Christ's resurrection (Matt.28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-11), ascension (Acts 1:9-11), glorification in heaven at God the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33; Heb. 1:3) and His intercessor position as high-priest (Heb. 4:14 – 5:10). Christ in His exaltation will receive a name that is above every name (possibly a formal name for God the Son, the God-man - cf. Rev. 19:12,16); a new identity. The name that God the Father gives Him will not be just a title; it will be a name that refers to His person, His position and His status. In verses 10-11, the purpose of God the Father giving Christ – His Son, the God-man - such great exaltation and a "name" suitable to Christ's exalted position, is that "every" person "will bow" in submission to His authority (cf. Isa. 45:23, where all bow before the LORD and Exod. 20:3, where God prohibited everyone from worshipping anyone but Himself). The extent of Christ's authority in this exalted position extends to all creation and created beings in heaven, earth or under the earth. All will submit to the authority of Christ and all will bow before Him to acknowledge and worship Him as LORD. It is at THE NAME that belongs to Christ the Messiah that every knee will bow to submit themselves to Him as their LORD. At that day, all created beings, angelic and mankind, will confess with their tongue that Jesus Christ is LORD. The Greek word translated "confess" means "to acknowledge, to affirm, to agree." Verbal confession by all created beings of Christ being LORD of all will accompany their physical bowing of their knee in humility and submission to Christ as LORD. This recognition, submission, and confession by all created beings to Jesus Christ as LORD, brings glory to God the Father. *Paul has given us a very powerful example of humility, submission and faithfulness through the life of Christ. Christ is the greatest example of life of humility and submissiveness yielded to doing God's will that could ever been given. And the humility, submission,*

faithfulness and exaltation of Christ should be a motivation for us, as believers; to live a life of submissive humility doing God's will faithfully. For the day is coming when we will bow before Christ and confess that He Is LORD Of All. If we submit to God and to one another for the glory of God, as Christ did, rather than for selfish glory, our motivation is correct.

Phil. 2:14. Paul now provides specific instructions on how to “work out” one’s salvation while doing God’s good pleasure. Paul understood the situation of the Philippian believers. He wanted them to stand for righteousness while living in a corrupt society...so they could be shining lights for the gospel to the unbeliever. Paul’s first word is “do all things without,” which is an emphatic emphasis by Paul. Paul goes on to describe what needs to be absent in all activity in the life of a believer:

“complaining/grumbling” is the initial activity that results in “disputing” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:2; 4:2). Every action, word, and deed in the believer’s life was to be done without complaining or arguing. This was not a focus in a singular event, but it is to be a continuous action. The Greek word translated “complaining” means “a bad attitude expressed in grumbling”. The Greek word translated “disputing / questioning / arguing” is a legal term which refers to the practice of going to court to settle a difference.” The Philippian church was evidently complaining and arguing amongst themselves, in the public eye of the community, as well as with others in the community. They were not united and one in Christ...and the unbelievers were not being attracted to the gospel because of their actions. *We frustrate and stop God's work of producing unity within the church, which He does by reproducing the mind of Christ in us (i.e., humility), when we complain and argue.*

Phil. 2:21-22. Paul knew (and expressed) that Timothy was often tested, and was proven to be genuine and worthy. Paul makes a general statement “they all seek their own interests / for all seek their own,” which indicates that other workers may not have made this trip a top priority and/or they did not put the interests of Christ above their own as Timothy did. Paul was Timothy’s spiritual father and Timothy worked with Paul like a son would his father. Timothy had demonstrated his worthiness as a servant of Christ and of Paul over more than 10 years. He had established a good reputation (“his proven worth”), not only in Philippi, but wherever he had served. Together they served the Lord (as slaves) in the work of the gospel. *A believer who puts the interests of Christ before his or her own is still a rare individual (cf. 1:21). Not all Christians are partners in the work of the gospel; but working together in a partnership in the gospel is the Christian's calling in life (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). Warren Wiersbe wrote: "The submissive mind is not the product of an hour's sermon, or a week's seminar, or even a year's service. The submissive mind grows in us as, like Timothy, we yield to the Lord and seek to serve others."*

Phil. 3:2-3a. The Philippians were encountering problems with one particular group, the Judaizers. Judaizers were creating many problems for Paul and his ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul writes a three-fold repetition of “beware,” which underlines the serious dangers the Philippians faced from the Judaizers. Paul called the Judaizers “dogs”; the term “dogs” meant filthy animals because dogs at the time of Paul were essentially wild scavengers that ran free and created trouble. The phrase “evil workers” stresses the evil character of their labors; specifically, men who would do evil by design and on purpose. The phrase “false circumcision / mutilators of the flesh” gives the most insight to the false teaching of the Judaizers; the Greek word translated “circumcision” in this verse means “to cut down or to cut off.” Paul used two Greek verbs that are very similar. *Peritemnein* means to circumcise, and *katatemein* means to mutilate. *Peritemnein* describes the sacred sign and work of circumcision, but *katatemein*, as in Leviticus 21:5, describes forbidden self-mutilation. So what Paul is saying is this: “You Judaizers think that you are circumcised, but really you are only mutilated,” because the Judaizers “circumcision” was not a sacred sign but rather a physical mutilation. By teaching the need of “circumcision,” the Judaizers were teaching that the ‘works of the Law’ were necessary, in addition to

faith in Christ, for salvation and Christian living. They taught that people could only be justified and become a believer in Christ through Judaism and submission to the Mosaic Law. The Judaizers emphasized “circumcision,” because it was the rite that brought a person into Judaism, which they viewed as a prerequisite to justification (cf. Acts 15:1). This false teaching promoted trusting in oneself and/or in the rite-keeping of circumcision for salvation. The Judaizers emphasis on the Old Testament rite of circumcision caused many problems for Gentile believers, not just the believers in Philippi. Paul clearly stated to the believers (“the circumcision”) at Philippi that the true people of God. Paul was referring to the ‘circumcision of the heart’ that happens when a person trusts in Jesus Christ. Paul uses three phrases to characterize ‘the circumcised of the heart’; 1) they worship God in the Spirit of God (real worship is with the heart when the Holy Spirit guides the heart to learn of Christ with praise and adoration to God the Father), 2) they glory in Christ Jesus (looking to Jesus as our Savior who makes us acceptable to God), and 3) they put no confidence in the flesh (putting no confidence in anything that we can naturally do to make us acceptable to or accepted by God). True believers have no confidence in the flesh or the works of man for salvation. Those who rely on rites and ceremonies for salvation do not have the Spirit of God. They are not believers in the gospel. True believers understand that they cannot save themselves but they must accept the person and work of Christ Jesus by faith for their salvation.

Phil. 3:7-8. Paul had formerly regarded all these "things" he listed that he possessed, and whatever other religious things, as contributing to God's acceptance of him (vv. 3b-6). Paul had been convinced that God would accept him for his works' sake. Each of his family and religious advantages strengthened his false hope of salvation. Paul had formerly regarded all these "things" he listed that he possessed as contributing to God's acceptance of him. But now he did not consider his background to be profitable (to be considered gain), but rather considered his background to be a loss for the sake of Christ. The Greek word translated “considered/counted” means “to think through or reflect on.” Paul had considered his family and religious credentials and had come to the conclusion that they were a loss; it was a decision made once, was still correct, and was continuing in Paul’s life. *Gordon D. Fee wrote this in his book entitled Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: "While Christ did not consider God-likeness to accrue to his own advantage, but 'made himself nothing,' so Paul now considers his former 'gain' as 'loss' for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. As Christ was 'found' in 'human likeness,' Paul is now 'found in Christ,' knowing whom means to be 'conformed' (echoing the morphe of a slave, 2:7) to his death (2:8). Finally, as Christ's humiliation was followed by God's 'glorious' vindication of him, so present 'suffering' for Christ's sake will be followed by 'glory' in the form of resurrection. As he has appealed to the Philippians to do, Paul thus exemplifies Christ's 'mindset,' embracing suffering and death. This is what it means 'to know Christ,' to be 'found in him' by means of his gift of righteousness; and as he was raised and exalted to the highest place, so Paul and the Philippian believers, because they are now 'conformed to Christ' in his death, will also be 'conformed' to his glory."* Not only did Paul consider his earthly credentials as a loss but he considered everything in his life to be a loss in exchange for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus personally. He had come to realize that absolutely nothing apart from Jesus Christ's work on the cross was of any value in his gaining God's acceptance (v.8). Good works does not improve our standing before God. Our earthly works are all like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Paul considered his former credentials and works as “rubbish / dung” so that he might gain Christ. The Greek word translated "rubbish" (*skybalon*) occurs only here in the New Testament. Its derivation is uncertain, but it appears to have referred to excrement, food gone bad, scraps left over after a meal, and refuse. Therefore, Paul means, through the use of the word “rubbish/dung,” that his former standing, wealth, and position in the Jewish community were not only worthless, but strongly offensive and potentially dangerous. Paul had learned to value Christ Jesus as his Lord; he came “to know” Christ. This knowledge (Gr. *gnosis*) is the kind that one obtains only by personal relationship. It is different from the knowledge we gain through objective academic study (Gr. *oida*), though information is part of our

growing personal knowledge of Christ. It is knowledge of the heart in addition to knowledge of the head (cf. John 17:3; Gal. 4:9; 1 John 2:18, 29; 4:8). To gain this fuller knowledge of Christ, Paul had let everything else in life go. All Paul wanted was a fuller and deeper experiential appreciation of his Savior (cf. Ps. 73:25). *Is this our desire?* Those who “gain” Christ are found in Christ; which means they are spiritually united into Christ.

Phil. 3:12-14. Paul makes it clear that he has not obtained the intimate and personal knowledge of Christ and the power of His resurrection that he would like. He also did not want his readers to understand him as saying that his conversion had brought him into the intimate personal relationship with Christ that he desired. At his conversion his views about what is important in life changed drastically, yet he did not believe he was ‘perfect.’ Paul uses the analogy of a runner to describe the pursuit and goal of becoming Christlike; which we know as sanctification. Sanctification does not come automatically by faith like justification and glorification do, it is something we must pursue by diligently following the Lord (vv. 13-15; cf. Gal. 5:16; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). Paul stated that he was pursuing (pressing on, engaging in aggressive energetic action) Christlikeness like a runner pursues the finish line in a race. Paul pursued that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him – meaning Christ chose Paul for the purpose of conforming him to His image / likeness. Paul was determined to press on toward the goal of being Christlike. Note Paul's pursuit to his goal to be Christlike: 1) "that I may gain" (v. 8); 2) "that I may know" (v. 10); 3) "that I may attain" (v. 11); and 4) "that I may lay hold of" (v. 12). Pressing forward to becoming more Christlike is a mark of growing, vital believer. Paul, having expressed his pursuit to be Christlike, now clearly states that he has not achieved his goal to be Christlike, but it is the one thing he is determined to do (v.13). He viewed his pursuit of Christlikeness in the way that a runner looks at a race. He was not looking back ("forgetting what lies behind"). He was “forgetting” past heritage, attainments, and sin. Now he was pursuing a new goal (“reaching forward to what lies ahead”) which is the personal intimate knowledge of Christ – becoming Christlike. Paul sets a "goal" (Gr. *skopos*, meaning a goal marker, the object at the end of the course on which the runner focuses his attention) for his life of obtaining complete knowledge of Christ (v.14). Paul's achievement of that goal, the "prize," would occur when he entered the Lord's presence and saw Him face to face (1 John 3:2-3). The "prize" would come at the end of his pursuit of his goal, meaning at the end of his life, but not before then. Therefore "the prize of the upward call" is a reference to ultimate salvation and Christlikeness which occurs in God's presence in heaven. *Gerald Hawthorne in his book Philippians explains the imagery of the “prize of the upward call:” “In keeping with the vivid imagery drawn from the Greek games that pervades this section there is still another explanation of the 'upward call' that seems the most reasonable explanation of all. It sees in the expression tes ano kleseos [“the upward call”] an allusion to the fact that the Olympian games, which included foot-races, were organized and presided over by agonothetes, highly respected officers called Hellenodikai. 'After each event they had a herald announce the name of the victor, his father's name and his country, and the athlete or charioteer would come and receive a palm branch at their hands' (G. Glotz, 'Hellenodikai,' in C. Daremberg and E. Saglio [eds.], Dictionnaire des antiqués grecques et romaines [Paris: Hachette, 1900-1963] 3,1,60-64). This is the call to which Paul is now alluding (Collange).”* Paul was pursuing a complete knowledge of Christ while he was living on the earth. He pursued, worked hard, ran diligently each day because he wanted to get to know the Lord as well as possible before going into the His presence, where he would: 1) receive rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10), 2) see Christ face-to-face (I John 3:2-3), and 3) become like Christ (I John 3:2-3). *How are we doing in our daily walk in Christ? Are we pursuing Christlikeness? Are we as focused and diligent in our quest to be Christlike as Paul was in his life?*

Phil. 4:4. Paul now exhorts the believers to rejoice in the Lord - - twice. Paul desired that the Philippian believers have an attitude of joy in the Lord, in spite of the circumstances they faced. He must have felt

that there was a great need for this attitude in Philippi. There were a number of reasons why the Philippian believers could have felt discouraged: 1) Paul's imprisonment and the possibility of his death; 2) Epaphroditus' illness, 3) antagonism and persecution of unbelievers; 4) Judaizer's false teaching; 5) antinomian libertine's false teaching; and 6) internal factions and discord within the church among believers. To counteract this attitude, Paul exhorted them to "rejoice in the Lord always," and he repeated this exhortation again to place emphasis on his admonition, "Again I will say, rejoice." There are many circumstances which believers find themselves in that do not make them happy, but even then, they can always rejoice in the Lord. Paul had set a good example of this rejoicing by singing when he was in prison in Philippi (Acts 16:25).

Phil. 4:8-9. Paul closes his exhortation with the word – "finally", which is a reference and tie in to his previous teaching. Paul focuses his exhortation on the thought life of the believer. One of the greatest areas for sin in the believer's life is in their mind and thoughts. It is from the mind (Rom. 12:1-2) and heart (Prov. 4:23) that the issues of life come. Paul mentions six objects of thought that should be the focus of the thought life of a believer. Each object of thought is introduced by the word – "whatever", which in the Greek is plural – meaning several things could be included in each object of thought mentioned. The thought life of a believer is to be focused on these objects of thought – "whatever" is:

- 1) True (*alethe*) – What is valid, honest, reliable, genuine and sincere (cf. Rom. 3:4; Prov. 8:7). It is the opposite of dishonest, unreliable; it is not to be concealing.
- 2) Noble / Honorable (*semna*) – What is dignified and worthy of respect; admirable in dignity and respect (cf. I Tim. 3:1–13).
- 3) Right / Just (*dikaia*) – What is conforming to and in harmony with God's standards; in accordance to what is good and proper; in conformity with fact; upright.
- 4) Pure (*hagna*) – What is morally pure and wholesome; free from contamination, cleanness, unmodified.
- 5) Lovely (*prospBILE*) – What promotes peace rather than conflict; what is pleasing and amiable; delightful, pleasing, of great moral beauty.
- 6) Admirable / Good report (*euphema*) – What is positive, constructive; praiseworthy because it measures up to the highest standards; highly regarded and well thought of; not negative or destructive; inspiring approval or reverence.

Paul ends this narrative with a rhetorical phrase "if there," meaning he was placing the responsibility on the individual to make their own decision about their thought life. The six objects of thought Paul highlighted are described as being excellent and praiseworthy. Paul was challenging the believers to meditate on these things, which implies that they were thinking of other things that were distracting from or destroying the ministry of the gospel....and the unity of the church. Dwight D. Pentecost in his book *The Joy of Living: A Study in Philippians* stated: "On the authority of the Word of God, I submit to you that the greatest conflict being waged is not international, not political, not economic, and not social. The greatest conflict taking place in the world today is the battle for control of our minds." It has been correctly stated that we, as individuals, are responsible for our thoughts because no one forces us to think what we think, you choose what you think. Paul now challenges the Philippian believers to live as he lived (v.9). The objects of thought outlined in v.8 were taught by Paul to the Philippian believers. The Philippians had "learned and received" lessons from Paul. They also had personally "heard" his verbal instructions "and seen" his life in light of those lessons and instructions. Paul knew that the Philippian believers knew him so he could ask them to follow his life example. They needed to put these "things" into "practice," not just think about them and discuss them. Paul encouraged them to follow his teaching (as given in Philippians 4:4-8) because God would be with them if they followed his teaching and they would have the peace of God in their lives. Paul spoke from experience and knew this to be true. Paul had exhorted the Philippians to engage in five things; 1) rejoice in Christ always, 2) be

forbearing with all people, 3) pray about difficult situations, 4) think correctly and wholesomely, and 5) practice what they had been taught. These are fundamental principles are God's will for all of us who are believers, which must be shown by actions not words. These principles are vitally important in becoming Christlike in our life and being an example to others. Submission to these principles is important to maintaining peace in the local church so the gospel of Christ will go forward effectively, even in the face of opposition.

Phil. 4:11. Paul did not want the Philippians to misunderstand him. He was not rejoicing primarily because their gift had met his need, but because their gift expressed their love and concern for him. Paul went on to state that he had no real need. He had learned the lesson of contentment and was able to rejoice regardless of his circumstances. Paul's contentment indicates an independence from any need for help, which he had because of his complete trust in God's ability to meet his need, whatever his circumstance.

Col. 1:18. Paul instructs the Colossians that Christ is the head of the Church, giving it life and direction. The Church is the universal church into which all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Christ (I Cor. 12:13). Christ is the "source" of the church. He gave life to the Church through His death; and through His resurrection He became its Sovereign. And Christ is the Firstborn from the dead. Christ was the first to rise in an immortal body (I Cor. 15:2), never to die again. Because of this fact He heads a new order of those who will be raised from the dead to be immortal as Sovereign. His victory over death establishes His supremacy over all created beings; He is preeminent. He is given first place over all creation. We are to worship Christ in spirit and in truth.

Col. 3:1-2. Paul had previously taught the believers in Colosse that they had died with Christ; now he teaches them that they have also been raised with Christ. Because believers in Christ have a union with Christ, they have spiritually entered into His death and resurrection, so Paul taught that they were co-resurrected with Christ. As believers they should set their hearts on things above. The believer's life should be dominated by a pursuit of knowing Christ more intimately and all that belongs to living with and for Him. Christ is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father, where He is our advocate before Him (Heb. 8:1). Paul wrote to the believers "'have this 'set disposition' in your minds towards things in heaven". As believers we are to concentrate our concerns on the eternal, not the temporal. Paul is saying that life in this world will be better if it is lived by and through the power of the resurrected, ascended, glorified Christ; who now sits in the seat of authority at the right hand of God the Father. Paul is not introducing a new asceticism nor is he disdaining temporal or material things, for everything was created by God, but he is stating that we should not set our affections on worldly things and pervert God's creation for our own fleshly desires. The principle that is being presented is that what your mind thinks upon, that is what you become.

Col. 3:5-10. Paul now turns his attention to challenging the believers to put off the sins of the old life. Paul teaches the believers that because they have died with Christ, they can get rid of sinful practices (v.5). Paul writes this as a command – "mortify", which means it is a definite act that is completed. The believer was not to go on living as though they were alive to sin, when in actuality they are not. Paul continues by stating that "whatever belongs to your earthly nature" is literally "the members that are upon the earth". This is in direct contrast to what he previously wrote in Col. 3:1-4. Paul listed the evil activities that come from man's earthly nature, man's sinful nature:

1. Immorality / fornication – any form of sexual sin.
2. Impurity / uncleanness – evil thoughts and intentions.
3. Lust / inordinate affection – uncontrollable passion, unbalanced natural desire.

4. Evil desires / illicit craving – obsession with lust.
5. Greed / covetousness – insatiable desire to gain more.

The result of these things is idolatry; which is mankind following their own desires more than God's by placing themselves above God; it is the essence of worshipping themselves. Paul highlights the results of self-worship – it is to experience the wrath of God (v.6-7). The wrath of God is coming (present tense) and will culminate in His judgment of evil. God will judge those who follow their natural, earthly desires – those who know the truth but ignore it to do what they desire. It is this self-worship that the believers once had lived in. The believers did live in these evil ways before they came to know Christ as personal Savior. But Paul commands them to walk no longer in those evil ways by “putting off” (getting rid of – “throwing off like a dirty shirt”) these things (vv. 8-9):

1. Anger – a chronic attitude of smoldering hatred
2. Rage / wrath – an acute outburst of anger
3. Malice – an attitude of revenge and bitterness that is the root of anger and rage
4. Slander / blasphemy – evil speaking
5. Filthy language – shameful and abrasive speech

Paul teaches that as believers they are not to lie to one another because at salvation the “old man” and the former ways of life were discarded (“put off”). The basis for the “putting off” is the fact that the “old man” died in Christ and the “new man” lives in Christ. Therefore, believers are to “put off” sinful deeds and are to “put on” Christlikeness, which is done by the renewing of the mind with the Scriptures (Rms. 12:1-2). The believer is to “put on” the “new man”, which is a new way of life (v.10). For the believer, at the time of salvation, a qualitative change of identity occurred – from the “old man” to the “new man”. Now the believer must bring their behavior into line with their new identity. This change of behavior is constant and in need of constant renewal. This renewal is necessary in order for the “new man” to have dominion over moral conduct before others. This renewal is like a baby being born – it is complete but immature; it is complete but has the capacity to grow through renewing itself (food, sleep, care, etc.). This renewal for the believer is in knowledge, which takes place when the believer comes to a greater, growing personal knowledge of and fellowship with Christ. This renewal is an on-going process and it is in the image of its Creator – Jesus Christ. It is the goal of renewal to make the believer like Christ – the Son of God.

Col. 3:12-14. Paul is writing to believers who God has made them the objects of His love; God (the offended) has offered salvation and forgiveness to man (the offender); and God (the offended) initiates and draws men (the offender) to Himself. In view of what God has done through Jesus Christ for the believer, Paul describes the behavior and attitude God expects of a believer. God expects the believer to engage their will to “put on” (‘to clothe themselves’) with:

1. "Compassion" (Gr. *splanchna oiktirmou*) shows sensitivity to those suffering and in need.
2. "Kindness" (*chrestotes*) manifests itself in a sweet disposition and thoughtful interpersonal dealings.
3. "Humility" (*tapeinophrosyne*) means having a realistic view of oneself, "thinking lowly of ourselves because we are so."
4. "Gentleness" (*prautes*) means not behaving harshly, arrogantly, or self-assertively—but with consideration for others.
5. "Patience" (*makrothymia*) is the quality of being long-suffering, self-restraining. The following two qualities expand on the thought of patience.
6. "Bearing with" one another (*anechomenoi*) means putting up with others and enduring discomfort.
7. "Forgiving" (*charizomenoi*) involves not holding a grudge or grievance but letting go of it immediately.

8. "Love" (*agape*) means doing what is best for another person.

All these features deal with the believer's interpersonal relationships – believer-to-believer and believer-to-unbeliever. These features are the things that all believers are to concentrate on so they become and are the characteristics of their life. In interpersonal relationships especially, the life of Christ should be visible in us to others. Christ, who is the model of forgiveness, has forgiven all sin of all mankind totally and completely by his action on the cross. He did that before anyone asked Him for forgiveness (cf. Luke 23:34). Therefore, God's forgiveness is in place before we asked for it or repented of our sin. We did ask for His forgiveness of sin and repented of our sin when we realized that His forgiveness was there for us to accept. And we accepted His forgiveness by faith, which He gave to us to believe in Him – it is nothing that we did. Therefore, we must be willing to forgive others without reservation – as soon as possible. This includes reaching out first to forgive and not waiting for the other person to initiate the request for forgiveness – because that is what Christ has done for us. Correct understanding of this scripture (and others) does not support a belief that one does not forgive another until the other party has asked for forgiveness.

Col. 3:18 – 4:1. These verses establish the "law of interpersonal relationships;" wives-to-husbands, husbands-to-wives, children-to-parents, fathers-to-children, employees-to-employers and employers-to-employees. Paul wrote these instructions to enable believers to understand what behavior is consistent with their union with Christ. It is within these interpersonal relationships that forgiveness, along with all the other attitudes and characteristics of Christ must be recognized and lived out. Verse 18; Paul instructs the wife to willingly "submit" to the husband. Verse 19: Paul instructs the husband to love his wife (note the similarity to Eph. 5:25). The Greek word "agape" is used here, which means the love of the husband for their wife is to be sacrificial; a love that is rendered selflessly. Verse 20; Paul instructs the children to obey their parents in everything. Verse 21; Paul turns his instructs the father not to provoke their children (note the similarity to Eph. 6:4). Verses 22-25: Paul now instructs slaves (note the similarity to Eph. 6: 5) to obey their earthly masters. They were to work honestly and with their whole heart (genuine from within) for the Lord, not for men (or master). Working with an awareness of God's presence and His character enhances the dignity of labor so that all things can be done to the glory of God. It is the Lord Christ (note: this is the only time Lord Christ is used in the N.T.) that the believer serves. Paul explains that one day an inheritance, as a reward for their labor, is coming from the Lord and He will judge without favoritism. Paul concludes this exhortation on personal relationships by addressing the masters of the slaves (note the similarity to Eph. 6:9) (4:1). The masters are to give deliberate care for their slaves with what is right and fair (equitable). The master of the slave is to show mutual respect and honor to the slave. They are to use their authority with justice and grace; not threatening or abusive or unkind because they are accountable to the Lord, their Master in heaven, for

I Thess. 2:3. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, stated that his message was true, his motives were pure, and his methods were straightforward. He and his companions had behaved in Thessalonica as they had elsewhere, as faithful servants of God. They did not preach for the *approval* of "men," but of "God," who scrutinizes motives. Paul was genuine in his motives because his message was true.

I Thess. 4:3-7. Paul is writing about the "will of God." In verses 3-5, "The will of God" for the believer is clear. Positively, it is "sanctification," a life set apart from sin unto God; it is a life that has a change in its use and its purpose, from self-centeredness to serving the Lord. Negatively, sanctification involves abstinence (self-denial) from all kinds of sexual behavior that are outside the prescribed will of God, including adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, etc. Rather than participating in these acts, the believer should learn how to control ("possess") their own body ("vessel," cf. 2 Tim. 2:21) and its passions. The believer is not to behave "like the Gentiles who do not know God;" who sought to fulfill

their sexual lusts and practiced sexual immorality commonly, even incorporating such immoral practices into their religious practices. Sexual immorality is the "matter" in view in verse 6. Sexual immorality is wrong, not only because it transgresses the will of God, but because it injures and defrauds the sexual partner. It brings God's judgment down on two people, not just one; it defrauds the partner of God's blessing and it brings judgment upon the one who practices sexual immorality. The Lord is the "avenger," the judge of those who are sexually immoral. The general principle the Thessalonians were to keep in mind was that God's purpose for all believers is "not ... impurity," but purity (v.7). We are to have a life that is set apart from sin ('sanctification') unto holiness (cf. Eph. 2:10).

I Thess. 5:16-18. Paul is exhorting (commanding) the Thessalonians in these verses. In verse 16, the command is to "Rejoice!" We can "always" rejoice if we remember what God has given us in Christ (cf. Phil. 4:4). We are to pray without ceasing (v.17). Greek writers used the adverb translated "without ceasing" to describe a hacking cough. Paul did not expect his readers to be in prayer every minute around the clock, but to continue praying frequently as a fundamental activity of life. If we live always "rejoicing" and "praying," we consciously remind ourselves of our dependence on God, conscious of His presence with us, conscious of His will to bless, in everything we do. When we do this consistently and constantly, we will "give thanks" about everything (v.18); knowing that God is "working all things together for good" for His people who love Him (Rom. 8:28). Paul said all of these commands are definitely "God's will" for every believer. If we do this, we will not quench the Spirit (v.19).

II Thess. 2:9-12. Paul is writing about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:1) because they thought that the 'day of the Lord' had come. It is in this context that this passage is written. In verses 9 and 10, the "lawless one" will be revealed when the Holy Spirit's restraint of sin is removed (v.7). The "lawless one" will be Satan's instrument here on earth. Satan will empower him to deceive most people (those who do not believe in God or will listen to the gospel message; "they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved") into thinking *he is God*, by enabling him to perform awe-inspiring, powerful miracles (cf. Rev. 13:2-4; 17:8). "Signs" refer to miracles that unbelievers will think signify the lawless one's supernatural ability. "False wonders" stresses the counterfeit nature of his awe-inspiring feats. "Deception" identifies the intent and outcome of his wicked acts. It is "for this reason," a reference back to "because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved" (v. 10). Thousands of people, but only a small proportion of the entire population, will place their faith in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation (Rev. 6:9-11; 7). The "strong delusion" will come upon those who refuse to believe and accept the truth because, it appears, that the judgment that comes upon them is an inability to accept the truth (v.11). They instead will believe "the lie." "The lie" that they believe is the denial of the fundamental truth that there is a God and that God is God; it is the rejection of his self-revelation as Creator and Savior, righteous and merciful Judge of all. This will lead men to worship men, which is what will occur with the 'man of lawlessness' and to practice sin and evil without restraint. Verses 10-12 present the same downward career of the wicked that Paul wrote about in Romans 1:18-32: First, they set themselves against the truth. Second, God gives them over to their desires so that they become slaves to their passions; sin and evil will go unchecked during this time. Third, He punishes them eternally. Paul's readers could, therefore, be confident that "the day of the Lord" had not yet begun. The tribulations they were experiencing were not those of "the day of the Lord," about which Paul had taught them while he was with them. Furthermore, three prerequisite events had not yet taken place. Following the *general apostasy*, which started in the first century and has subsequently increased throughout the Church Age, the events of (1) the *great apostasy*, (2) the revelation of the man of lawlessness, and (3) the removal of the restraining work of the Holy Spirit had not occurred.

I Tim. 2:1-4. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus during his period of freedom from prison. Paul advises Timothy concerning the issues that were arising in the church at Ephesus; and that he should speak the truth in love. Paul turns Timothy's attention to the need for prayer as he deals with the false teachers (v.1). It is possible that the false teachers had created an atmosphere that had caused the church in Ephesus to stop praying. Paul exhorted Timothy to put prayer first as a priority for himself and all believers....and that their prayer should be for the salvation of all men. The terms Paul used for prayer; supplications (requests), prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings are terms written by Paul to build on one another for emphasis rather than distinction. Having said that, it is interesting to look at the meaning of these words to better understand what prayer is and entails.

- 1) Supplication: from the Greek root word that means "to lack". This is a prayer that focuses on need.
- 2) Prayer: from the Greek word that means to pray earnestly in worship.
- 3) Intercession: from the Greek root word that means "to draw near so as to speak intimately".
- 4) Thanksgiving: the expression and act of giving thanks, expressing gratitude and appreciation.

Paul went on to specifically identify government leaders as a group to pray for (v.2). The infamous Nero was Caesar of the Roman Empire at the time that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. Because of his hostility to God and believers, it was easy for believers to be bitter and angry against Nero and his government officials. Paul encouraged Timothy and believers on the necessity of praying for them and their spiritual need of salvation. Paul was keenly aware of the deteriorating political atmosphere for believers within the Roman government having just been released from prison. Yet he urged the believers to pray for the salvation of the government leaders so a stable, non-interfering political environment might prevail for all. Paul's desire was to live a quiet (absence of external disturbances), peaceable (absence of internal disturbances) life; a life that was godly and dignified in every way. This desire of lifestyle was consistent with living a life modeled after the life of Christ. There is thought that the lifestyle described by Paul was not the lifestyle being exhibited by the false teachers. Paul was exhorting Timothy not to be like them but rather to set an example before the believers at Ephesus like Paul had. In verse 3, Paul encourages Timothy that this prayer – the prayer for the salvation of unbelievers and leaders in government – is good and pleases God. A literal interpretation of the Greek indicates this type of prayer is "acceptable in the presence of God". Paul explains that God desires (wants) all men to be saved (come to the knowledge of the truth) (v.4). Paul is countering the "exclusive" teachings of the false teachers. God desires that all men come to know the truth so they do not perish (II Peter 3:9). This is known as God's will of desire, which is different that God's will of decree. God has provided a free and universal offering of salvation to every human being; it is God's desire to make this offering, which shows that the offer is a bona fide expression of God's will.

I Tim. 2:9-10: Paul now specifically addresses female believers. Paul's writing indicates that there was an issue with the women in the church at Ephesus where they had become a distraction to the ministry of the church and of the gospel message. Paul begins by addressing the external adornment of the women; they were to dress modestly with decency and propriety. The emphasis here is on their public appearance that it be simple, moderate, judicious, and free from ostentation. Specifically, Paul mentions braided hair, gold, pearls, and expensive clothes. These things are not wrong in themselves but are inappropriate when coupled with the wrong attitude.... they become an indicator of misplaced values. There is an indication that the adornment that Paul refers to were styles and attitudes associated with the temple prostitutes of Diana. Paul wanted the women in the church to focus on the internal values through the adornment of themselves with good deeds. The women who profess to worship God were to exercise and depend on their faithful service to make them attractive. This is not a plea by Paul to have the women make themselves unattractive, but rather it is an exhortation to reject the world's standard for measuring beauty and adopt God's standard for beauty (I Peter 3:4).

I Tim. 2:13-14: Paul explains the foundation of his statements made in verses 11 and 12. Why was it so important that the women exhibit a quiet and submissive spirit? Why is a quiet and submissive spirit in a woman of great worth in the sight of God? Paul answers those questions; because it manifests a clear understanding and acceptance of God's design for role of the male and female. Paul explains God's design for the male / female relationship through Adam and Eve, God's original creation of male and female. Paul explains that God's fundamental design created the role for the man and the woman – God made the man to be the leader and the woman to be his helper. The Fall was Eve usurping the authority of leadership from Adam....and then Adam failing in his role as a leader by following after Eve. The actions of Adam and Eve plunged the human race into sin because they violated God's plan. Eve was deceived; Adam willfully disobeyed God's command. Ultimately the responsibility for the Fall rests with Adam since he chose to disobey God apart from Eve being deceived.

I Tim. 5:9-13: Paul instructs Timothy to create a list of qualified widows who were in need of the church's support. To be placed on this list, the widows were to meet the following qualifications:

1. She must be over 60 years old.
2. She must have been faithful to her husband ("a one-man woman").
3. She must be well known for her good works...
 - a. In raising children.
 - b. In hospitality.
 - c. In humble service (washing the saint's feet).
 - d. In helping people in trouble.
 - e. In various other kinds of good works.

The women on the widow's list must be those who reputations for godly living were well known. In the creation of the "widows list" there were widows under the age of 60 who would have petitioned the church to be on the list. Paul instructs Timothy not to put the younger widows on the list for two primary reasons...

1. The younger widow may face normal sexual desires which would overcome their dedication to Christ, which they pledged to the church to get on the list. As a result, they would want to marry, which would bring judgment on themselves because they had broken their pledge of service ("first faith") to Christ and the church. Also, in context – if the widow married an unbeliever, she would take the religion of her husband as that was the culture of the day.
2. The younger widow may be tempted with idleness and would be more susceptible to going from house to house being an idle gossip and a busybody saying things they should not say.

Paul's counsel to Timothy was that the younger widows should not make a pledge to Christ and the church to be placed on the widow's list, but instead they should seek to remarry, manage their homes, and in so doing give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

I Tim. 6:6-10: Paul continues his instruction to Timothy not to teach and exhort as false teachers (v.3-5) but with godliness and contentment. He tells Timothy that godliness does not give financial gain; godliness itself is gain when accompanied by contentment (contentment – a state of happiness and satisfaction, not a state of apathy or laziness). Believers are to be striving yet satisfied, self-sufficient but not pridefully independent, and seeking to improve while not seeking for more (covetous) than what God has given. They are to be content with what God has given as they depend on Him as they work. Paul states a truth that we did not bring anything into this world and we will not take anything with us when we die. The thought conveyed is that material things should be freely used and enjoyed to the glory of God...but they do not contribute to godliness or contentment. The provision of the basic necessities of life, food and clothing, ought to be enough to create contentment in the life of a believer. Paul does not condemn possessions as long as God graciously provides. Paul contrasts the proper

attitude of contentment with the self-indulgent desire for money, which comes from discontentment (vv.9-10). Those who “desire to get rich” means to have a “settled wish born of reason:” obtaining wealth (money) is the only thing they think of (greed). They have made a choice because of their love their love for money....the two (desire and love) work together to create greed. Paul writes that greed leads to: 1) temptation, 2) a trap and 3) foolish and harmful desires. All of these ‘fruits’ of greed work together to lead to ruin and destruction. To illustrate this point, Paul refers indirectly to individuals that Timothy knows; individuals who have fallen away from the faith because of greed. Eager for money, these individuals have wandered away from the faith by either falling into a false teaching or by walking away from the faith. In either case, their greed had caused them to be pierced with many griefs and pains.

II Tim. 2:20-23. Paul illustrates his point about the authority and authenticity of the inscriptions on the foundation. He uses a metaphor of a large house and the containers within the house. In a large house there are all sorts of containers. Some are made of gold and silver. Some are made of wood and clay. Some are used for noble and honorable purposes. Some are used for ignoble and repulsive purposes. The reference in the metaphor is to those who are faithful (honor – separated from evil) as compared to those who are not faithful (dishonor – involved with evil). Paul shifts the metaphor slightly to show how one can be a container for noble and honorable purposes through cleansing. Paul makes two points.

1. Anyone (any container) who wants to be used for the Lord for noble and honorable purposes becomes useful when purged and cleansed from evil. Any container in the house can be “thoroughly cleaned out / completely purged” and used for noble purposes.
2. Anyone (any container) who wants to be used for the Lord for noble and honorable purposes becomes useful when, after cleaning and purging, it is separated from the ignoble and repulsive containers to avoid contamination through contact.

Paul’s point is clear. Timothy was to have nothing to do with the false teachers. Timothy was made holy, set apart, and useful to the Lord. It is important to note that Paul’s point that what is clean and set apart for use can be easily contaminated and rendered unusable through contact with evil. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he was still a young man (vv.22-23). It was possible that Timothy had displayed some of the characteristics and passions of the young when he was with Paul; impatience, intolerance, love of argument, pride, desire for wealth and power, self-exaltation, and quick to judge with bias. These were the youthful lusts that Paul was referring to. While sexual immorality could be added here, it is not the primary meaning of the Greek word used here by Paul. Paul knew Timothy would pursue something as a young man, so he expressed his desire that Timothy flee the desires of youth and pursue the opposite virtues; righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart. Paul’s expression to Timothy was in the form of a command: “Flee what is wrong, pursue what is right”. This pursuit of right is to be done with other believers. Connection within a community of faith is essential for personal growth, encouragement, accountability, and perseverance. Timothy was to pursue the right virtues....and was to refuse to get caught up in foolish and stupid arguments with false teachers, which only results in quarrels (fights / arguments). Timothy was to pursue righteous virtues, which was in stark contrast to the hypocritical virtues of the false teachers.

II Tim. 3:14-17. Paul again makes a strong address to Timothy – “But as for you” (‘But you must’ / ‘But continue thou’) (v.14). Paul exhorts Timothy to continue in the “things he has learned”. Paul and others had taught Timothy from the Word of God, which would have been the O.T. These “learned things” were truths that Timothy had become convinced of. Paul inserts a reminder in his exhortation to Timothy of his godly heritage – the teaching he had received from his mother and grandmother (II Tim. 1:5). Paul identifies two sources for Timothy’s “learned things”: one, his godly, holy heritage and the teaching he had received as a young child through his growing up years; and two, the Holy Scriptures,

which was the O.T. (v.15). The O.T. scriptures pointed to Christ and revealed the need for faith in God's promises. For a person seeking truth, God, through the Holy Scriptures will lead a person to the "knowledge of truth (II Tim. 2:25); salvation is brought by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures. The Scriptures bring salvation only when one places their personal faith in Christ Jesus. Paul was exhorting Timothy to have complete confidence in both of these sources of his "learned things". Paul knew that if Timothy stayed true to his roots, his learning, and the truth he was convinced of, it would be enough to prevent any slippage in his commitment to the Christ Jesus, the truth, and the gospel. Now Paul exhorts Timothy regarding the role of God's Scripture in his life and ministry (v.16). Paul begins by telling Timothy that all Scripture is "God-breathed". The Greek word "theopneustos" does not occur anywhere else in written Scripture or in contemporary Greek literature. The term, thought to have been created by Paul, stresses the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures. The term explains the "inspiration" of the Scriptures –primarily O.T., but applicable to the N.T. Paul was instructing Timothy that God's words were given to men superintended by the Holy Spirit so their writings were without error. Paul then asserted the power and usefulness of the Scripture in ministry; it was profitable (useful) in – training and instructing people in God's truth (doctrine) – in rebuking sin and wrong belief in people – in restoring those who have fallen from their original condition – in positively training a child (and new believer) in godly behavior. Paul's conclusion – "in order that" – is that the "man of God" (the technical term in the Greek for the "preacher of the truth, the one who provides spiritual leadership to others") is "complete, capable, and proficient to meet all demands" through the Scriptures (v.17). The truth in the Scriptures is sufficient in all matters in life; specifically, regarding truth, salvation, and moral behavior. This was a major challenge that Paul placed on Timothy – but he was confident in God's ability to supply all of Timothy's needs through the Scriptures; as long as Timothy was committed and dependent of the Scriptures to meet his needs.

II Tim. 4:8. Paul looks back at his life – a life dedicated to fulfilling the will of God in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (v.7). He states that he has fought a good fight, he has finished, and he has kept the faith. As a result of his faithfulness in completing God's will, Paul states that he will stand before the Lord, the righteous judge, at the Judgment Seat of Christ ("that day") (v.8). At that time, Paul was confident that he would receive a crown of righteousness as a reward for his faithfulness. The crown of righteousness is either righteousness itself or it is a reward for righteousness, the Greek phrase can be interpreted either way. In either case, Christ will give the crown to Paul as a reward for his life of ministry. Paul then states that all believers who have loved the appearing of Christ, ones who have hearts desiring the return of Christ, will also receive a crown of righteousness from Christ.

Titus 1:15-16. Paul, in his letter to Titus, emphasizes the need to guard the church (a group of individual believers) against false teaching. The "commandments of men" mentioned in 1:14 involved circumcision and asceticism (abstaining from certain foods). Paul tells Titus that to the pure in heart all things are pure and clean; including food (v.15). However, the defiled heart spreads impurity wherever it goes through words and deeds. If the mind is defiled it cannot accurately inform the conscience. Therefore, the conscience cannot warn a person accurately. When the conscience is accurately and truthfully infused with God's Word, it can function as the warning system God designed it to be. Therefore, nothing from the outside can corrupt one who is internally pure, but someone who is internally impure corrupts everything they touch. The internal impurity and unbelief of the false teachers rendered them as abominable and disobedient to God as well as disapproved (unfit) by Him for doing anything good (v.16). Even though the false teachers claim to know and follow God, their actions demonstrated just the opposite; there is a one-to-one relationship between theological error and moral deficiency. Of all bad men, religious bad men are the worst; because under the guise of truth they lead people to an eternal hell. Whenever a person's talk and walk conflict - it is usually his walk rather than

his talk that reveals what he really is. Verse 16 is the hinge verse of the epistle. Here Paul identifies a key issue: the false teachers are teaching that what a person believes and how a person behaves are not related, and that godly living is not a necessary corollary to God's salvation plan and work. Later in Titus, Paul will give two creedal statements that show that obedience comes out of salvation and must come out of salvation, for it is a purpose for which salvation was provided.

Titus 2:12. Paul now stresses the importance of building up the inner life of believers as the best protection against error. The previous paragraph [2:1-10] was a challenge to the believers in the Cretan churches to accept and demonstrate patterns of righteous behavior. Godly living is demanded by God's truth; the truth that demands godly living is "grace" (v.11). Believers are to live this way because ("for") the grace of God that saves also instructs one to live in a new way, in contrast to the world. When the believer understands "grace", it teaches them that salvation is transforming and it produces new life in which the power of sin is broken (v.12). This new lifestyle provides a witness to all who observe that God's plan and purpose of salvation is fulfilled through grace. Saving grace teaches believers to say "no" to sin and "yes" to godliness. Negatively it instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly passions, which are the passions and desires that unbelievers find so appealing but which are not in harmony with God's character and will. Positively it instructs the believer to live sensibly (self-controlled inwardly), righteously (morally upright outwardly), and godly (reverent upwardly) in this present age. The use of the term "present age" stresses that believers are to live sensibly, righteously, and godly here and now. It also sets up the reference to the future return of Jesus Christ. Certainty about the future enables constancy in the present.

Heb. 3:7-13. This warning is directed to God's people (genuine believers) indicating that believers are capable of hardening their hearts against God and experiencing His judgment. Verses 7-11 teach four things about the Holy Spirit: (1) He is God (cf. 1:1; 2:3; Acts 4:25; 2 Pet. 1:21). (2) He is a person, not merely an influence (He "says," v. 7). (3) He existed before Christ's incarnation (He spoke through David). (4) He authored Old Testament Scripture. "Today" stresses the urgency of immediate action. Verses 7-11 quote Psalm 95:7b-11, which is very significant. The verses immediately precede Psalm 95:6-7a, which are a call to bow down and worship the Lord. It is the writer's desire that believers avoid Israel's sin; not to become discontented because of their suffering, and not to let discontentment give way to open rebellion, lest they, like the Israelites, lose the blessings of the privileges that now were available to them as believers. "Rest" (to cease from labor), as used in verse 11, points to a place of blessing where there is no more striving but only relaxation in the presence of God and in the certainty that there is no cause for fear. For the believer today, "rest" is the enjoyment of all that God has promised us when we finally subdue our enemies, complete our God-given task and enjoy the rewards that can be ours if we follow the Lord faithfully. In verse 12 is an exhortation to the believers to apply this lesson (vv.7-11); do not depart from the truth; the danger of apostasy. The word, "*apistiasis*," used here is not unbelief but 'disbelief'; meaning a refusal to believe, an evil heart marked by disbelief which has no mark of intelligence then or now. William Newell wrote: "We may have much consciousness of, and struggle with, unbelief, but could our hearts be described as evil hearts of unbelief—that is, hearts willfully inclined to a state of unbelief and rejection of the fellowship of the 'Living God'?" This exhortation is aimed directly at believers, not unbelievers. Experience confirms this conclusion. False teachers have deceived many believers into believing that the truth that they formerly believed is not true, even truth about Jesus Christ. The cults are full of people who formerly professed belief in the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, but who no longer do so. However, this does not mean that genuine Christians who become deceived will lose their salvation (John 10:28; 2 Tim. 2:13). They will not. We are not saved by our good works, and we do not lose our salvation by our bad works (i.e., failing to persevere faithfully in the faith). "Justification" is a *legal verdict* that God renders, in which He

declares the believing sinner forgiven, and He never rescinds that verdict. Arthur Pink wrote: "There is no prayer that a Christian needs more frequently to present than, 'Lord, increase my faith'; 'deliver me from an evil heart of unbelief.'" The writer counseled his readers to "encourage" each other to continue to walk with God (v. 13). He did this to help them avoid the rationalizing that people can get into when they do not confess and forsake their sins. If a sinner continues in his or her "sin," he or she may conclude that sin does not matter (cf. Num. 14:22). This is sin's "deceitfulness": one may think that because God does not punish the sinner immediately, sin does not *really* matter. Sin matters very much. William Newell identified three other ways in which sin deceives us: (1) because of delayed judgment, (2) by appearing harmless, and (3) by hardening our consciences. Meeting regularly with other believers for mutual encouragement is a great help to any believer, in being reminded from the Word that failing to continue to trust God will bring bad consequences. This needs to occur "Today!" We need to encourage one another "day after day," not just when we go to church. Mutual encouragement in godliness is something we all need frequently so that we do not become "hardened" to sin. H.W.G. Thomas wrote: "One of the best ways of keeping ourselves true is to help other people, and the duty is here set forth of exhorting one another. There is scarcely anything more striking in Christian experience than the fact that in helping others we often help ourselves." The idea that a genuine Christian could never have "an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God" is simply naïve. Scripture frequently warns believers against being misled by false teachers and false teaching, departing from God like the prodigal son did from his father, and choosing to sin, which results in heart hardening. Experience also confirms that true Christians can withdraw from fellowship with God and end up not believing things that are true.

Heb. 4:11-13. The writer of Hebrews addresses the accountability each believer has when they are instructed in the truth from the Word of God. As believers, we are to be diligent in being faithful to God and the truth of His Word. We need to be obedient to the instruction and commands provided to us by God's Word; and that obedience and perseverance will be rewarded with 'rest', which is the condition of finished work in obeying and doing God's will. Specifically, each of us will be responsible to the LORD for obedience to His Word regarding forgiveness and our heart condition and actions in forgiving others. "That rest of which the author of Hebrews has been speaking to is not something to be trifled with; it calls for full seriousness and intensity of application on the part of those who wish to enter into "that rest". The issue is eternal in its consequences, for the sole alternative to entry into "that rest" is not entering into "that rest." To not enter into "that rest" is to enter into "no rest;" it is to "fall" which is punishment from God and/or no blessing from Him. God's Word will be used to examine our life and the decisions and actions we engaged in during our life; that examination is ongoing today and will be ultimately completed when we stand before God to give an account of our life. He will examine our innermost attitudes ("thoughts") and motives ("intentions"). The Word of God will be a "two-edged sword" that will be used like a 'scalpel' to cut into and separate. The Word of God is "living" because it is the word of the *living God* (3:12), and it is "active" (energetic, powerful). The Word of God will examine and distinguish between what is selfish self-centeredness and what is others-oriented and Spirit-guided in our motivation and actions. It will expose our "thoughts" (attitudes) and "intentions" (motives; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5). We will not be able to make excuses or rationalize our behavior. We will not be able to bluff our way out. We will not be able to blame others. We will not be able to blame God. We will not be able to keep our thoughts to ourselves. Why, because there are no secrets hidden from God. God will examine every believer. This should motivate every believer to remain faithful to God until we see Him. We should "fear" (anticipate seriously, v. 1) as we prepare for it (cf. 1 John 2:28). Will God find us faithful when we see Him?

Heb. 6:4-6. This passage has been interpreted in many different ways. A “falling away from the truth” is what is being addressed; either as a believer who has turned apostate (cf. Heb. 3:7-13) or as an unbeliever who clearly understands the truth but ultimately rejects it. It is not a passage that teaches that a believer can lose their salvation, which some people falsely teach. The writer described this group of people as those who were once "enlightened" (v.4). The "heavenly gift" of which they have "tasted" (cf. 2:9) when they were 'enlightened' seems to refer to salvation (cf. John 4:10; 6:51-58; Rom. 6:23; James 1:17-18). Elsewhere the same Greek word translated "tasted" refers to 'complete appropriation' (e.g., Jesus Christ "tasted death" for everyone, 2:9; cf. 1 Pet. 2:1-3). Believers become "partakers" (cf. 1:9, "companions"; and 3:1, 14, "partakers") of the Holy Spirit through Spirit-baptism. Normal understanding of these phrases leads to the conclusion that people being referred to are saved, not merely exposed to the Spirit's convicting power but unresponsive to it. Yet the later understanding can be supported. Every true believer has "tasted" the Word of God and found it to be "good" to some extent (v.5). The five events listed in verses 4 and 5 view salvation as involving different aspects; however, they do not present a succession of events that result in salvation. Verses 4 and 5 leads to verse 6 where the writer warns the readers about "falling away." The Greek term "*parapiptein*" is a reference to the expression of a 'total attitude reflecting deliberate and calculated renunciation of God,' indicating a decisive moment of commitment to apostasy. Apostasy entails a decisive rejection of God's truth. What is visualized by the expressions in v 6 is every form of departure from faith in the crucified Son of God. This could entail a return to former convictions and practices as well as the public denial of faith in Christ. *Falling away from the truth* is not a hypothetical possibility, but a tragic reality in too many cases among believers. To what is it "impossible" for an apostate to be *renewed* (cf.v.4)? The writer said it is "repentance," not forgiveness or salvation. Immediately the question arises whether this understanding is correct, since some believers who have departed from the truth have repented and returned to belief in the truth. I believe the writer meant that in the case of apostates, the really hard cases who are persistently hostile to Christ, it is impossible to restore such people to repentance (cf. vv. 1, 3, 7-8). This inability to repent is the result of sin's hardening effect, about which the writer had sounded a warning earlier (3:13). It is also the result of divine judgment (cf. Pharaoh, Exod. 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). Esau lost any future opportunity of spiritual leadership when he sold his birthright to Jacob (Heb.12:16-17); because he 'found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears' (12:17). Some people, who earlier in their lives have given evidence of being true believers, have later renounced their belief in Christianity, and even in the deity of Christ. Does this mean they were never saved in the first place? Possibly; but it may also mean that they were believers and were misled by false teaching. Or they may be prodigal sons who have deliberately departed from the Father's house to seek greener pastures elsewhere. If such a person persists in his or her departure from the truth, this verse warns that he or she might not be able to return to the truth. God has pledged Himself to pardon all who truly repent, but Scripture and experience alike suggest that it is possible for human beings to arrive at a state of heart and life where they can no longer repent. Why, because He has determined not to do so. By repudiating Jesus Christ, hardened apostates dishonor Him. The writer spoke of this dishonor ("open shame") in terms of taking the side of Jesus' enemies who crucified Him ("they again crucify to themselves the Son of God") and publicly humiliating Him ("put Him to open shame"). They *recrucify* Him, in the sense of passing judgment against Him again and His work, just as those who literally crucified Jesus did. They put Jesus out of their life, they break off all connection with Him and He is dead to them. Verses 4-6, describe a genuine believer for at least three reasons: (1) the author had expressed concern about his readers earlier (3:12) calling them 'brethren'; (2) 6:4-6 cannot be divorced from what he has said about them in 5:11-14 that they are spiritual babies who have not matured; and (3) the terminology in 6:4-5 is descriptive of Christian experience. Yet, it can be supported that this passage also refers to individuals who clearly understand the truth of Scripture and reject it – hardening their heart to the point that repentance is taken from them.

Heb. 9:22. In verses 16-18 described the original covenant God had with men that did not have blood. In verses 19-21 the Mosaic Covenant went into effect when the Levitical priests shed the blood of animal substitutes, and applied ("sprinkled") that "blood" to the covenant beneficiaries (on "all the people"). The exception to which the writer alluded was God's provision for the poor in Israel (v.22a). But as a general principle, God required the "shedding of blood" (death) for "forgiveness" under the Mosaic Law. This principle is true of the New Covenant as well. The New Covenant went into effect, when Jesus Christ shed His blood, and God applied it to its beneficiaries (believers) spiritually (cf. Matt. 26:28). Blood (death) is essential for decisive cleansing and the cancellation of a debt, charge and penalty ('remission'), which Christ accomplished on the Cross.

Heb. 9:28. Because Jesus Christ died ("was offered once") for our sins, we do not need to fear condemnation after death (v. 27; cf. Rom. 8:1), but we can and should early look forward to ultimate deliverance (i.e., glorification, v. 28). The reference to the 'many' is not to be understood as limiting the effects of Christ's sacrifice to those who accept it in faith. The implied contrast, (cf. Isa. 52:12; Heb. 2:10; Mark 10:45, 14:24) is between the one sacrifice and the great number of those who benefit from it. His appearance at His Second Coming will confirm that His sacrifice has been accepted and that He has secured the blessings of complete and eternal salvation ('glorification') for those who genuinely believed in Him – from Adam until the final person trusts in Him.

Heb. 10:12-14. The writer further stresses the finality of Jesus Christ's offering with the contrast in these verses. The Levitical priests never sat down, but stood "daily" because they never finished their work (v.11). But Jesus Christ "sat down" beside His Father, because He *finished* His work (v.12). "For all time" can modify either "offered one sacrifice for sins," or "sat down at the right hand of God," or both. Because Jesus sat down, it is the guarantee of a finished work and an accepted sacrifice. Now He awaits the final destruction of His enemies (v.13). The offering of Himself was done once (v.14). Those who "are sanctified" by His offering are those whom He has perfected and they are now fully acceptable to God.

Heb. 10:15-18. The writer of Hebrews confirms his interpretation of Psa. 40:6-8 by repeating Jer. 31:33-34 (which he had previously quoted in Heb. 8:8-12). The ultimate, complete and permanent forgiveness for sin took place at the Cross when Christ died and shed His blood. Therefore, as believers, we have no foundation not to forgive someone or put conditions. Forgiveness may not entail forgetting because many times the offense cannot be purged from one's memory. Forgiveness does entail the engagement of the believer's will 'not to remember.' The statement that God "will remember ... sins ... no more" (v. 17) means that He will no longer call them back to memory, with a view to condemning the sinner (cf. Rom. 8:1). Since God is omniscient, He remembers everything, but He does not *hold* the forgiven sinner's sins against him or her. The same is true of genuine forgiveness given by a believer; it does not hold the sin or offense against the one who offended. To forget is to have no memory of it. To 'remember no more' is a refusal to call a memory to mind; it is a promise to not bring the past back up. It has been stated that forgiveness is a threefold promise: you promise not to remember an offense by no longer bringing it up to: 1) the person who offended, 2) to others, or 3) to yourself; it is buried never to be brought up again.

Heb. 10:23-25. As believers we are to exercise faith (v. 22), hope (v. 23) and love (v. 24). The admonition, to "hold fast" to "the confession of our hope," is the primary admonition of Hebrews. This is an exhortation for believers to persevere. Since Christ has consecrated a new and living way in which we can walk before people in the world (v. 20), the first admonition is for us as believers to continue

steadfastly in this walk before others in the world. The basis of our steadfastness is the fact that God is faithful to His promises concerning our future. The second admonition in v.24 addresses our responsibility to fellow believers. The admonition "to love" one another is necessary because, as believers, we need "stir up/ to stimulate one another" to remain faithful to the Lord ("to love and good deeds"). This 'stimulation' refers to each believer individually but the primary emphasis is corporately. This type of love is the product of communal activity; we cannot practice it in isolation from other believers. What is being addressed here by the writer of Hebrews is the regular attendance to church meetings. A corporate meeting of believers facilitates love for one another; because it is there that we exhortations to persevere coupled with opportunities to serve one another. The evidence of a believer who is abandoning their faith or is walking away from their faith is being absent from corporate meetings of believers. However, this is the very thing such a person should not do. We need each other. The failure of regular attendance to corporate meetings of believers is evidence of selfish individualism. Specifically, the habit of 'forsaking' of meeting corporately with other fellow believers is 'willful sin; and it is a public statement that the believer who does not meet with other believers has an unconcern for Christ Himself, because the 'forsaking' of meeting corporately together advances the danger of apostasy (vv. 26). In addition to that the 'forsaking' of corporate meetings by a believer is very serious because a believer cannot profess allegiance to Christ and publicly deny His Church. The third and final admonition is for mutual accountability that occurs when believers meet corporately, since we all will have to give an account of ourselves to God. The "day" that is approaching is the day we will give an account of ourselves to God (cf. v. 37). Also, as that 'day' is approaching there is a greater and greater need of admonition, exhortation and encouragement as sin grows greater and greater.

Heb. 10:26. The writer turned from positive admonition to negative warning, in order to highlight the seriousness of departing from the Lord. The writer describes more fully the nature and consequences of apostasy, previously described as 'falling away from the living God' (cf. 3:12; 6:4-6). *Willful sin* in the context of Hebrews is deliberate apostasy, turning away from God and living a lifestyle in which one *continues* to sin. If an apostate rejects Jesus Christ's sacrifice, there is nothing else that can protect him or her from God's judgment. And all the warnings passages in Hebrews make it clear that genuine Christians *can* apostatize. And as stated before, the person who clearly understands the truth of the gospel and willfully rejects it can be in view here (cf. 6:4-6). In verse 27, the writer indicates that a 'fearful' and 'fiery' judgment will take place; 'fire' is a frequent symbol of God and His work and it often indicates His judgment (Mal. 3:2; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). For an apostate believer, the "judgment" in view will take place at the judgment seat of Christ, not the Great White Throne. That is a judgment of believers (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), not of unbelievers (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). It will result in loss of reward, not loss of salvation. The same "fire" (divine judgment) that will test believers will also consume unbelievers (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). The description of judgment as a fire that devours and utterly destroys recalls the actual experience of the followers of Korah who were consumed by fire because they had shown contempt for God (Num. 16:35; 26:10). The consequence of willful sin and apostasy is irrevocable judgment – for the believer and the unbeliever.

Heb. 10:36. The writer is encouraging people that now is not the time to "throw away" that "confidence" in a better reward (cf. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19). They needed "endurance" to persevere, to 'keep on keeping on' during struggles and tribulations (vv. 32-34). They needed "endurance" and patience as they do the will of God. By doing this, they would do God's will and will "receive" what God has promised. The promise is an eternal reward (1:14; 3:14; 9:15); so, they need to endure rather than turn away from the truth to apostasy. William Barclay wrote: "Perseverance is one of the great unromantic virtues. Most people can start well; almost everyone can be fine in spasms. Most people have their good days. Most men have their great moments. To everyone it is sometimes given to mount up with wings as

eagles; in the moment of the great effort everyone can run and not be weary; but the greatest gift of all is to walk and not to faint."

Heb. 11:1. The writer of Hebrews describes "faith" in verse 1 prior to identifying individuals who historically walked by "faith." "Faith" is having the confidence ("the assurance") that *things* yet future and unseen ("hoped for," cf. 10:35-39) will happen as God has revealed they will. The Greek word '*hypostasis*', translated as "assurance" or "substance" literally means 'that which stands under.' That means that "faith" is the 'substance / assurance / substructure / foundation' of the believer's life and the believer's hope. True faith is not based on empirical evidence but on divine assurance. It is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). This is the basic nature of faith: it enables us to treat as real the things that are unseen; it provides a firm standing-ground and a sure support while we await the fulfillment of God's promises; it enables a person to perceive the invisible realities of life. Faith and hope go together; the same things that are the object of our hope are the object of our faith. Faith is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that he has promised to us in Christ. Faith is a hope that is absolutely certain that what it believes is true, and that what it expects will come; it is a hope which looks forward with utter certainty. The faith that the writer wrote about is *not*: believing what you know is not true, or believing in something that you do not understand because it is unclear.

Heb. 11:6. The writer does not attempt to offer arguments and proofs for the existence of God because, based upon Scripture, the existence of God is never a matter of doubt or debate. Scripture states that God is the supreme reality, and the foundation and source of all created beings and everything that exists. Because of this assurance, we are to draw near to God because we *believe that He exists*. We are not being asked to take a step into the dark or to work up a blind faith; but we are to entrust the whole of our being to Him who is truth, light and life. Walking by "faith" involves not only believing that God exists, but also believing that He will *reward* the faithful. We often are faced the temptation to abandon that hope. Note that those He will reward are those who "are seeking after Him" (present tense in Greek), not believers who have stopped seeking after Him. Martin Bucer wrote: "That the Lord rewards his people for their good works is not on the grounds of their righteousness, but purely from his free grace and for the sake of his dear Son (Rom. 11:6), in whom he chose us for eternal life before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and created us for good works (Eph. 2:10) which through him he effects in us (Jn. 15:5) and rewards so generously (Rom. 8:10-14, 26-30).' Consequently, 'when God rewards our good works, He is rewarding His works and gifts in us, rather than our own works.' Moreover, while the faith we exercise and the good works we perform proceed from our own free will, 'nevertheless it is he who produces this good will and action in us, impelling us by his Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:13)'; thus 'all the good that God does to us and the eternal life that he gives us still remain the results of his grace alone, so that no one should boast of himself, but only of the Lord (Phil. 2:13; Rom. 6:23; 11:5f., 36; 1 Cor. 1:29f.)'"

Heb. 12:1. "Therefore" is a very crucial word indicating an emphatic conclusion to the passage of Scripture from 10:19 through 11:40. The "cloud of witnesses" refers to the Old Testament saints whom the writer just mentioned in chapter 11. They are "witnesses," because by their lives they bore witness to their faith in God. The description of these predecessors as a "cloud" is an interesting one, since they are presently without resurrected bodies, which they will receive at the Second Coming of Christ (Dan. 12:2). But, I believe, that they do exist in their intermediate bodies (cf. Luke 16:19-31; II Cor. 5:1-8). The writer's main point was that we have many good examples of people who faithfully trusted God in the past. Nevertheless, the word "witness" does also *imply* a spectator (cf. 10:28; 1 Tim. 6:12). In view of the "witnesses," we should "lay aside *everything* (encumbrance)" that impedes our running the Christian race successfully (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Tit. 2:12). "Encumbrances / every weight" are added

weights (burdens), which may not necessarily be sins, but are things or events that make perseverance difficult. We should lay aside anything that is superfluous, that we do not need, in order to run the race successfully. We should also "lay aside ... sin" of any kind. "The sin" that the writer warned his readers against especially in Hebrews is unbelief, apostasy. However, many different kinds of sin can trip us up, and we should avoid *all* sin for this reason. The reason for this self-discipline is so that we can *keep on running the Christian race* effectively. Here the writer compared the Christian life to an endurance race, a marathon, not a 50-yard dash. The real test of the Christian life of a believer is faithfulness and perseverance – steady progress in the face of worldly pressure and self-centeredness.

Heb. 12:5-11. The writer tells us that trials and sufferings in the believer's life come from God who uses them to educate and discipline believers by such experiences (cf. Prov. 3:11-12). God allows us to experience some opposition to make us stronger in the faith (Deut. 8:5; James 1). God deals with persevering believers in love-motivated "discipline" ("child training"; cf. 5:8). God's "discipline" assures us that we are His "sons." All believers are "partakers" (cf. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4) of discipline. Another value of divine discipline is that it prepares us to reign with Christ (cf. 2:10). The "illegitimate children" in view seem to be genuine children of God but not approved sons (cf. Rom. 8:14-17). Ishmael is an Old Testament example of an illegitimate child. He was the true child of Abraham. Yet because he was "illegitimate" (i.e., the son of Hagar rather than Sarah, Abraham's wife), he did not receive the inheritance that Isaac, the *legitimate* child, did (cf. Gen. 17:19-21; 21:12-14). Ishmael received some blessing because he was Abraham's son, but he did not receive the *full inheritance* because he was an illegitimate child. At the time that Hebrews was written, the culture of the day found it incomprehensible that a father could possibly love his child and not punish him. In fact, a real son would draw more discipline than an illegitimate child for the precise reason that greater honor and responsibility were to be his. A *father* who neglects to discipline a *son* is deficient in his capacity as father, and a son who escapes all discipline is losing out on his sonship. As believers, we need to submit to God's discipline in our lives, because it will result in *fullness of life*, and greater holiness and righteousness that yields "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (vv.9-11). God always designs discipline for our welfare ("good"), even though it may not be pleasant ("joyful") to endure it will yield a 'peaceable fruit.' The title "Father of spirits" (v. 9) occurs only here in the New Testament (cf. Num. 16:22; 27:16). It means something like "our spiritual Father," as some English versions translate it (TEV, NEB, JB), in contrast to our physical (earthly) fathers. This passage clarifies the reason for the believer's trials (cf. James 1; 1 Peter). It is essential that we view our sufferings as being the Lord's *discipline*, rather than an indication of His displeasure, His punishment, or His *hatred* (cf. Deut. 1:26-27), in order to persevere faithfully. There is a real, as well as a linguistic connection, between "discipline" and "disciple" and "discipleship." There is no discipline of God which does not take its source from love, which is always aimed for good.

Heb. 12:14-15. The writer of Hebrews admonishes that as believers we need to live peaceably "with all people" as much as we can (cf. Matt. 5:9; Mark 9:50; Rom. 12:18; 14:19; 2 Tim. 2:22), because peaceful interpersonal relationships foster godliness (James 3:18). The "peace" here is the objective reality of "peace," that results from Christ's death, not on our subjective enjoyment of *peace*. In view of the preceding and following contexts, "all people" are other believers in particular. Because we will one day see the Lord, we must also pursue *holiness* in our lives now. So, as with peace, holiness is our present state; and we need to continue to manifest it to others by remaining faithful to the Lord when we are tempted to depart from the Lord. The two exhortations, to follow peace with all men, and that holiness without which none can see the Lord, comprise the whole Christian life. They refer to our relationship to the Lord and to our neighbor; and in so doing they embrace both tables of the law. (cf. Matt. 22:37-40). Then the writer of Hebrews warns against neglecting God's "grace" (help). God's "grace" enables us to

persevere (cf. 3:12), but here it is almost synonymous with *the Christian faith*. This neglect would result in *unfaithfulness* spreading as a poison (of "bitterness") among God's people (cf. Deut. 29:18-19). The writer pictured departure from the truth here as a "root" that produces bitter fruit in the Christian community. It normally results in the eventual spiritual defilement of many other believers. The writer was not implying that most of his readers were in danger of apostatizing (cf. 6:9), but that the failure of only one individual can affect many other believers. The sin of one individual can corrupt the entire community when that sin is apostasy, because defilement is contagious. One who is defiled by unbelief and apostasy becomes a defiler of others. This is the reason why believers are not to neglect meeting together (cf. Heb. 10:23-25).

Heb. 13:5-6. The believer is to be content – a state of peace and satisfaction – because of what they have in salvation (cf. Heb. 12:14-15). Discontentment usually has its foundation in the lack of material things or in the desire to have material things. Discontentment breeds greed and greed has lured many believers away from a life of faithful discipleship. We need to cultivate a spirit of *contentment* ("free from the love of money"), so that we do not turn from the truth. Genuine contentment has nothing to do with how much money we have; it has everything to do with our relationship with the Lord. We have the Lord, and *in Him* we have all we need (cf. Luke 12:15; Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6-10); and He has promised never to abandon ("desert" or "forsake") us (Matt. 28:20). Too many times we, as believers, have allowed discontentment to breed jealousy and envy; those things lead to bitterness.

Heb. 13:15. The writer states that under the New Covenant God desires the praise and thanksgiving of His believers rather than the offerings of animals or grains. Even though God does not require periodic animal and grain sacrifices from us, we should offer other sacrifices to Him. These "sacrifices" include "praise" ("fruit of the lips that give thanks"; cf. Hos. 14:2), "doing good" works, and "sharing" what we have with others (as well as giving Him ourselves, Rom. 12:1). We should offer these sacrifices of the New Covenant "continually" (cf. Ps. 34:1; 92:2; 104:33); for the believer praise should go up to God all the time. Adolph Saphir wrote: "The heart that praises God is delivered from anxious care and self-centered gloom."

Heb. 13:17. 'Those who rule over you' are the church elders / pastors (cf. vv. 7, 24). These leaders "watch over (our) souls," and will have to "give (an) account" to God, one day, for their leadership and rule over us. We are to obey them because they exercise the authority of Christ when they preach, teach and apply Scripture (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Thess. 5:12-13). We are to be obedient and submissive to them; when they are preaching, teaching and applying Scripture truthfully. As believers in a church, do we tend to be obstinate or rebellious? The church is responsible to help its leaders do their work with joy and satisfaction. Will the leaders of your church be able to tell God that leading you was a pleasure when they stand before Him?

James 1:2-7. James is writing to the Jews who were scattered around the world. He begins by telling his 'brethren' (meaning all believers, not just Jews) to count it all joy when they fall into various trials. What kinds of trials was James talking about? Did he mean troubles such as running out of money, or failing a test in school, or having to stay up all night with a sick child: everyday troubles? Yes. The Greek word translated "trials" (*peirasmois*) means a "proving," specifically, "the trial of a man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy ... also an enticement to sin, temptation. Various temptations to depart from the will of God are in view. The context supports this conclusion. Verse 3 restates these trials as "the testing of your faith." James was speaking of the different kinds of trials in which we experience temptation to accompany sinners, rather than remaining faithful to the Savior. He was not distinguishing between internal and external temptations. Trials come from both directions (cf. v. 14). Any trial can constitute a

test of our faith, namely, a temptation to cease trusting and obeying God. James is counseling his readers to view the "various" kinds of "trials" and tribulations they were encountering in their lives as opportunities for growth. He did not urge them to rejoice that they were undergoing trials. Rather, he commanded them to view their trials as *profitable*, even if unpleasant. Another translation of "all joy" can be "pure joy." The opposite would be "some joy" along with much grief. The attitude James advocated here can take all the bitterness out of even the most uncomfortable trials. Regardless of the source of our difficulties, the world, our flesh, or the devil, we can and should be glad as we go through them. Trials are the means that God uses to make believers the kind of people that bring honor to His name, namely, mature ("perfect and complete") believers (vv. 3-4). "Testing" (Gr. *dokimion*) implies demonstrating the true quality of something when it undergoes a trial. The true nature of gold becomes evident when the refiner heats gold ore over a fire. Similarly, the character of God within a believer (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) becomes apparent through trials, if responded to properly. These are trials that test our faith in the sense that our trust in God and obedience to God are being stretched to the limit; they are tests of a living faith, which will be very important to remember whenever James writes about faith and works (2:14-26). These trials can result in endurance, steadfastness and perseverance ("patience"). The Greek word translated "patience/endurance" (*hypomonen*) describes the quality that enables a person to stay on his or her feet when facing a storm. If we endure these tests, they will eventually make us "perfect / mature" (one who fulfills the purpose for which God created him or her, fully developed - cf. Matt. 5:48; 19:21) and "complete" (developed in every essential area of our lives). Therefore, we should not try to escape from trials, but submit to the maturing process gained by the trials with patient 'endurance and joy.' In view of this fact, we should rejoice in our trials rather than rebelling against them. They are God's instruments for perfecting us. James' reference to "lacking ... nothing" (v. 4) led him to digress briefly from his discussion of trials, to explain the wisdom necessary to deal with trials appropriately (vv. 5-8). One of the deficiencies that trials often expose is lack of wisdom; the wisdom needed to cope with the various trials being experienced. The "wisdom" James refers to in verse 5 is God's wisdom; here it refers to what God has revealed about His will for the believer's life as revealed in His written Word. Believers often fail to appreciate the value of enduring trials because they often take the world's attitude toward their trials, rather than God's, and try to escape them at any cost. Most believers "count it all joy" when they escape trials, and they "count it all grief" when they have to endure them. If we do not understand God's view of life, James urges us to "keep on asking" (Gr. present active imperative) God to enable us to understand it. The believer who needs more wisdom, who repeatedly asks God to open their eyes and heart, can count on God *repeatedly* granting their request. He will give this wisdom freely and graciously ("generously and without reproach"); giving without bringing up one's past sin and ingratitude, or his future abuse of God's goodness. God will do this as often as we need help (cf. Isa. 42:3; Matt. 12:20). This description contrasts God with the double-minded man in verse 8. In verse 6, asking "in faith" always means one of two things. It means either believing God *will* do what He has promised, or, if He has not promised it, believing that He *can* do what the person requesting is asking (cf. Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 4:35-41). The translation "without any doubting, for the one who doubts" is unfortunate. The Greek word *diakrinomenos*, used twice in this verse, is better translated, "let him ask in faith, *free from divided motives and divisive attitudes*, for such a person is like an ocean wave ..." A lack of faith in God's faithfulness or power manifests itself in a lack of consistency and instability in the believer's life; which James to 'the surf of the sea,' because something other than itself drives it. The "surf" corresponds to the believer, who, by not submitting consistently to the will of God, is driven by forces outside themselves rather than by the Holy Spirit within. When a believer is being blown around by other forces rather than the Holy Spirit, their problems are not only *subjective*, feeling their circumstances are directing them rather than God, but they are also *objective* (real) (v.7). They really are at the mercy of circumstances and events that are beyond their control. This type of inconsistent ("double-minded" or "unstable," v. 8) person resists God's work in their

life. Rather than perfecting maturity in the believer through trials, God now also has to discipline (educate) them regarding their attitude toward their trials. In the context, "anything" (v. 7) refers to wisdom (v. 5). If such a believer is not going to trust God ("ask in faith," v. 6), they will fail to enjoy the confidence that comes from knowing that God is in control of their trials. If a believer is not going to trust God, then they should not expect anything (i.e., spiritual wisdom) from God. In this context, the "double-minded" man is one who trusts and obeys God only *part* of the time, but not consistently. A "double-minded" person is one who has a *divided* opinion or allegiance. He is "unstable," unsteady, fickle, staggering, and reeling like a drunken man. In summary, God will help us to take His view of trials, which James explained in verses 3 and 4, if we "ask" Him to do so in prayer. We can and should be *joyful* while experiencing trials that constitute temptations to depart from God's will. We can "count it all joy" because we know that, if we remain faithful to God, He will use these trials to produce what is glorifying for Him and what is good for us, namely, our spiritual maturity.

James 1:13-15. James did not want us to conclude that because God permits us to experience trials; He therefore must be the source of temptation. God is never the source of temptation (v.13). He does not try to get us to sin ("He Himself does not tempt anyone"), even though some people blame God for their sins. God Himself is not even subject to temptation ("cannot be tempted by evil"), because He is totally separate from sin and not susceptible to evil. Every difficult circumstance that enters into a believer's life can either strengthen him if he obeys God and remains confident (trusts by faith) in His care or the circumstance can become a solicitation for evil if the believer chooses to doubt God and disobey His Word. The only sense in which God *appears* responsible for sin's existence is that He permits other things to tempt us: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Rather than blaming God, we need to recognize that *we* are responsible when we yield to temptation, not God (v.14). There is *nothing* in God that responds positively to sin, but there is *much* in us that does. The phrase 'drawn away' means to be lured into a trap; temptation promises something good and pleasant but which is actually harmful. The word 'desire,' as used here refers to fleshly, selfish, illicit desire. While the word often describes sexual passions, the use of the singular here suggests a broader conception of any natural desire that is out of balance; a desire that creates an obsession. The word 'enticed' is a fishing term that means "to capture" or "to catch with bait." In verse 15, the word "lust" or "desire" means the desire to do, have, or be something apart from the will of God. Lust is covert, but sometimes it manifests itself overtly. If we do not check (quickly control and stop) lust, it will lead to sin, and if we do not confess and forsake sin, it will lead to death (Rom. 6:21-23; 8:6). Someone wrote: "Sin is the result of the surrender of the will to the soliciting of lusts instead of the guidance of reason." "Lust" can lead to physical death in a believer (1 John 5:16), and it can lead to physical and spiritual death in a non-believer. James used the illustration of the childbearing process to describe the cause-and-effect relationship between "lust," "sin," and "death;" the outcome of yielding to lust is sin and sin results in the birth of 'death.' But the ultimate outcome of resisting temptation and lust is the fullness of life (cf. John 10:10).

James 2:1-9. James' previous reference to hypocritical religiosity (1:26-27) seems to have led him to deal with one form of this problem that is still with us today. It is the problem of inconsistent love for other people that manifests itself in how we treat them. It is especially appropriate for James to address his readers as "my brethren" here, since he proceeded to encourage them to practice brotherly kindness without partiality. The believer must show courtesy to all, compassion for all, and consistency to all. James came right to the point in verse 1. "Partiality" or 'favoritism' is something a believer who worships the "Lord Jesus Christ" should not engage in or practice (cf. Matt. 22:16 Acts 10:34). All earthly distinctions disappear in the presence of our glorious Lord (cf. Heb. 1:2-3). And impartiality is in harmony with the "glorious Lord Jesus Christ." It may be helpful to distinguish partiality or favoritism (Gr. *prosopolepsia*; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; cf. Acts 10:34) from some of its synonyms. One

definition of *prosopolepsia* is “the fault of one who when called on to requite or to give judgment has respect to the outward circumstances of a man and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers as the one more worthy is the one who is rich, high-born, or powerful; as compared to another man who is not rich, is of lowly birth and has no power.” Favoritism" or “partiality” implies an inclination to favor a person or thing because of a strong fondness or attachment. Treating people with partiality may spring from predilection, or from prejudice, or from bias: 1) predilection implies a preconceived liking formed as a result of one’s background, temperament, etc., which inclines one to a particular preference; 2) prejudice implies a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion, usually an unfavorable one, marked by suspicion, fear, intolerance, or hatred, and 3) bias implies a mental leaning in favor of or against someone or something without passing judgment on the correctness or incorrectness of the preference. The situation James described in verses 2 and 3 presents what some have called “the case of the nearsighted usher.” In verse 2, a man comes into an assembly wearing fine clothes and another man comes into the assembly wearing dirty, filthy clothes. The “assembly” is a “synagogue.” When a man entered into a synagogue, the synagogue official who directed people to their seats, the *chazzan* (the man who “had charge,” an usher), would direct the man to a seat or ask the man to remain standing. In James’ example, the usher made two errors. First, he showed favoritism in dealing with the two men because of what the rich man might do for the assembly if he received preferential treatment. Second, he manifested evil motives in judging where to seat the two men. His motive was what the assembly could *obtain from* them, rather than what it could *impart to* them. His actions reflect a double-minded and hypocritical attitude because he was thinking like the world. He should have treated both men graciously and without partiality, as God does. James’ three questions in these verses 5-7 all expect positive answers, as is clear in the construction of the Greek text. In verse 5, “Has God not chosen the poor of this world to rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” Since God has chosen “the poor of this world” to be the recipients (“heirs”) of His blessings (“the kingdom”), it is inconsistent for Christians to withhold blessings from them (cf. Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20). In reality, God has chosen *more* “poor” people than rich (cf. Luke 1:52; 1 Cor. 1:26) to be in the kingdom. The “kingdom” is probably the messianic millennial kingdom, those who will receive it, are *believers* (cf. 1:12; Matt. 5:3, 5; Mark 10:17-22; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). When a Christian dishonors “the poor,” he or she treats them exactly opposite to the way God treats them (v. 6; cf. 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Pet. 2:17). In verse 6 James asks the question, “Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into courts?” James reminded his readers that the characteristic response of “the rich” to them had been to “oppress” them (cf. Mark 13:9; Acts 4:1-3; 13:50; 16:19; 19:23-41). The oppression in view could have been physical and or legal (“personally drag you into court”). In verse 7, James asks the question, “Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?” The rich not only typically oppose believers, they also typically speak against Christ (“blaspheme the fair name/that noble name”). To “blaspheme” or slander means to mock deliberately, or to speak contemptuously of God. It is inconsistent to give special honor to those who despise the Lord; the One whom believers love and serve! James now calls the believers to their duty (vv.8-9). It is the believer’s responsibility to “love your neighbor as yourself.” We should love *everyone*, and treat *every* individual as we would treat ourselves (Matt. 7:12; cf. Lev. 19:18). The “royal law” is “royal” because it is the law *of the King* who heads the kingdom that the believers will inherit (v. 5). It is also “royal” in that it is *primary*; it governs all other laws dealing with human relationships, governing conduct that is worthy of a king (Matt. 22:39; cf. Lev. 19:18). In verse 9, James used the verb form (“show partiality”) of the same Greek word (*prosopolepteo*) he used in verse 1. The type of preferential treatment James dealt with here (2:1-13) violates the royal law, because it treats some as inferior and others as sources of special favor (cf. Acts 10:34). It also violates specific commands found in God’s Word that reveal God’s will in interpersonal dealings (Matt. 7:12; cf. Lev. 19:15). The passage calls us to consistent love, not just polite ushering. People of low income are to be fully welcomed into the life of the church. The passage calls us to be blind to economic differences in how we

offer our ministries. The poor person is as worthy of our discipling and pastoral care and love as the person who has the means to rescue our church from its budget crisis. Anyone who shows favoritism breaks the supreme law of love for his neighbor, which is the law that comprehends all laws that governs one's relationships to one's fellowmen.

James 2:14-26 (14,17,20,26). James writes about the importance of vital, genuine faith in verses 14-26. James has argued for genuineness and warned about superficial self-deception. James wrote this section (2:14-26) to challenge his readers to examine the vitality of their faith in God. Were they really putting their faith into practice, applying their beliefs to their behavior? There are two legitimate primary interpretations of this passage of Scripture. One: The passage refers to an unbeliever who professes to be a Christian, but has never truly exercised saving faith in Christ. His faith is only intellectual assent to gospel truth, not saving faith. Second: The passage refers to a believer who is not living by faith. He is not behaving consistently with what he believes. The first interpretation of this passage describes unbelievers. The second interpretation of this passage describes believers. We will not go through a verse-by-verse commentary on this passage, so we will present a summary of this passage. The key to understanding this passage is a correct understanding of what "dead faith" is. James used "dead" (vv. 17, 26) as a synonym for "useless" (vv. 14, 16, 20). He was not saying the person with dead faith has **no** faith, that he is unsaved. He meant that the person with dead faith has saving faith, but he is *not living by faith* now. His faith has no vital effect on the way he presently lives. He is not trusting and obeying God day by day. "Useless" means of no practical value; it does not mean nonexistent. Other important terms to define correctly in this passage are "justify" and "save." "Justify" (vv. 21, 24) means to "declare righteous," not to *make* righteous. And "save" (v. 14) is an umbrella term that covers justification, sanctification, and glorification, not simply justification. To summarize, I believe what James wrote in verses 14-26 means this: good works are necessary to keep us from falling under God's disciplinary punishment that may even result in premature physical death; but they are not necessary to keep us from going to hell. It is possible for a believer not to use their faith and to stop walking by faith. Therefore, we who are believers should be careful to continue to keep trusting and obeying God each day. It is possible for a Christian to exercise "saving faith" and then to stop "walking by faith." James' emphasis on faith alone shows that he affirms the necessity of faith; what he is opposing is a faith that denies the obligation to obey Christ as Lord. The faith which is mentioned in this passage is not dogmatically oriented, but practically oriented because we are admonished to practice our faith by our works. When Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7:16), He was giving a general way of evaluating people, not that a person's works always and inevitably indicate his or her salvation. If that were the case, then every time a believer sins they would be giving evidence that they are not saved. Works are a fairly reliable guide to a person's salvation, but not a completely reliable guide. There are many exceptions (e.g., Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares; Matt. 13:24-41). Some Christians live in a state of carnality for years, and even die in it. Nevertheless, they go to heaven when they die, because they once trusted in Christ, He forgave their sins, and He declared them righteous. I believe James' point was that we should continue to live by faith, and to trust God day by day, not just to receive eternal life by faith. Many Christians trust God *very little* as they live day by day. I believe the context supports the second interpretation that this passage speaks to believers who no longer live by faith. But this does not discount the first interpretation that this passage speaks of professing believers that have no living faith, only an intellectual assent to the gospel.

James 3:2-18. James has much to say about speech ('the tongue'). The person who speaks much is going to sin ("stumble" – cf. Prov. 10:19) much in his or her speech, because the "tongue" (vv. 5-12) is the hardest member of the "body" to control. No one has been able to master it except Jesus Christ (v.2). Yet spiritual maturity requires a tamed tongue (cf. Titus 1:11). Nothing causes the believer more

problems that their tongue. Yet a controlled tongue is very influential (v.3-4). The tongue has as much destructive power as a spark ("small fire") that can burn down a large "forest." It is small but powerful ("small ... yet boasts of great things") (v.5). The tongue is the gate through which the evil influences of hell can spread like fire ("set on fire by hell") to inflame all the areas of life that we touch ("defiles ... and sets on fire the course of our life") (v.6). Most offenses a believer experiences is through the tongue, by the words that are spoken and the tone of the words spoken. This is the reason that forgiveness must be done in person – one-on-one – speaking to one another. The tongue is not easily subdued and brought under control (vv.7-8), so it is vitally important that forgiveness is spoken directly to the person offended or the person who offended – as an offense is given and/or received so forgiveness is to be given. Apart from the Holy Spirit's help, no human being has ever been able to *subdue* (meaning of "tame") his or her own "tongue." The tongue is deadly it can "*destroy*" simply with words (cf. Ps. 62:4) personal relationships, unity of an organization, business, church, nations, the list goes on. Believers have a unique challenge with their tongue; we desire to honor God with our words but many times we turn right around and dishonor and defame people who are made in the image of God with our words ("curse" - v.9). We must be very careful with our words (cf. Matt. 12:36) because if we "curse" (meaning "to speak degradingly to cause an offense; angry disputes and slanderous remarks that create strife and division") we are implicitly "cursing" God who made man in His image. That is the reason that it is contradictory for a believer to have "from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing" (v.10). When the tongue is causing strife, it is not under the control of the Holy Spirit. James illustrates this in verses 11 and 12 (cf. Matt. 7:16): a water source ("fountain") can yield only one kind of water (fresh or not fresh); a "tree" can only produce fruit of its own kind. Your speech and the messages you send out to others declare to everyone the contents of your heart (cf. Prov. 4:23; Matt. 15:18; Luke 6:45). The tongue is controlled by the heart...and the mind. James now addresses the control of the mind in the believer (vv.13-18), because the mind is used to enable the control of the tongue. The first thing James highlights is the importance of humility (v.13), which is strength under control. The evidence of this attitude is a deliberate placing of oneself under divine authority. The only way to control the tongue is to place one's mind deliberately under the authority of God and to let Him control it (have His way with it; cf. Matt. 11:27; 2 Cor. 10:1). The second thing James highlights is the importance of graciousness (vv.14-16). "Bitter envy/jealousy" (v.14 – "having a characteristic of 'sharp' and 'pungent'") and "selfish ambition/self-seeking" (v.15 – having the meaning of 'pride, faction, strife, split') should not reside in the heart of a believer. If these do exist in a believer's heart the believer will be saying things that they should not and their life will abound in arguments and strife. The residence of these things in a believer's heart will always create the 'we-they' syndrome, which always results in dysfunction and disorder (v.16). God is not the God of "disorder" (Gr. *akatastasia*, commotion, tumult), but of order and peace (Gen. 1; 1 Cor. 14:33). He opposes "every evil thing" (1 John 1:5). Therefore, *ungracious* "jealousy" and personal ("selfish") "ambition" are not a part of the wisdom He provides. William Barclay in his book *The Letters of James and Peter* wrote this: "There is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever; he has an acute brain and a skillful tongue; but his effect in any committee, in any Church, in any group, is to cause trouble, to drive people apart, to foment strife, to make trouble, to disturb personal relationships. It is a sobering thing to remember that the wisdom that that man possesses is devilish rather than divine, and that such a man is engaged on Satan's work and not on God's work." James now writes of the contrast, which is wisdom from above (v.17). The wisdom that God gives that should reside in the life of the believer has several characteristics: 1) it is "pure" (Gr. *hagnos*), meaning free of the defilements mentioned in vv.14-16; 2) it is "peaceable" (Gr. *eirenikos*), namely: peace-loving, peace-practicing, and peace-yielding; 3) it is "gentle" (Gr. *epiekes*) or considerate of others; 4) it is "reasonable" (Gr. *eupeithes*), that is, open to reason and willing to yield to reasonable requests; 5) it is "full of mercy" (Gr. *eleos*) in that it is actively sympathetic to the needy; 6) it is "full of ... good fruits" (Gr. *karpos*, good works); 7) it is "unwavering" (Gr. *adiakritos*): single-minded in its devotion to God, rather than double-

mind; and 8) it is "without hypocrisy" (Gr. *anupokritos*), true to appearances. When these characteristics exist in the heart of the believer, they will reap a harvest of righteousness that makes peace (v.18). Righteousness and peace come from a tongue under control of the Holy Spirit. Those results are the exact opposite of the fruit of the tongue that is not under the control of the Holy Spirit, where words inflame and antagonize people. To restate James' teaching, our words are very important as we seek to carry out the ministry God has called us to fulfill. We cannot control our tongues easily. The only One who can control our tongues is God, who alone can give us the "from above" wisdom. The marks of the wisdom He provides are humility, graciousness, and peace. James' teaching is very important to know and understand because most offenses in life come from words that are spoken – and forgiveness comes from words that are spoken.

James 4:6-12. God has set a high standard of wholehearted love and devotion for His people, but He gives "grace" that is "greater" than His rigorous demand. God *opposes* "the proud" (cf. Prov. 3:34), meaning those who pursue their own pleasures. However, He *gives grace* to "the humble;" those who put God's desires first in their lives. He gives "grace" (help) to withstand the onslaughts of the flesh within and the world without. The imperatives identified in verses 7-10 demand decisive action similar to receiving a command from an officer in the military. We must "submit" in humility to God (v.7). This means making what is of importance to Him important to us, ordering our priorities in harmony with God's priorities. It means not living to fulfill our personal ambitions, but using our lives to fulfill His desires. Submission involves the surrender of the will, which allows for obedience. We must "resist" Satan strongly (cf. 1 Pet. 5:9). When we do, he will flee from us. We must "draw near to God" (v.8). When we do, "He will draw near" to us. We must purify ourselves to allow the 'nearness.' We must "cleanse" our "hands;" meaning we are to 'clean up' our outward actions. We must "purify" our "hearts;" meaning we are to 'purify and clean up' our inner attitudes and motives. We must remove *sin* from our hands and *duplicity* (double-mindedness) from our hearts. We "cleanse" and "purify" them by confession and repentance. We must repent (v.9). James was calling believers who had compromised with the world by following hedonism, to get right with God. James was not saying Christians must be *constantly* miserable, mourning, weeping, and gloomy as these are the outward signs of repentance. We are to "humble" ourselves in submission to God (v.10). We are to put Him first before self; this always results in God lifting one up ("He will exalt you"), both immediately and eventually. Do not speak evil of a brother (v.11). Criticizing others is dangerous, not only because it is a form of selfishness, but also because the critic exalts himself *even over God* when he or she criticizes. The *speaking* evil and maligning is speaking disparagingly of, or down on, another believer. To criticize ("speak against") another, a person must conclude that he himself is right, and the person he is criticizing is wrong. This is passing judgment where you take the role of God by taking the role of a courtroom judge. The "law" in view refers to God's law. We *sin* against God's law when we criticize a brother, because God has revealed that we should not speak against, or pass judgment on other believers (cf. Lev. 19:15-18; Matt. 7:1). We are to submit to one another (e.g., Gal. 5:13; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3). "There is only one Lawgiver" and "Judge" (v.12). God is the 'Lawgiver' and 'Judge,' not us. We all are responsible to God, ultimately, and must leave the judgment of His own children up to Him (Rom. 14:1-13). James' point in this passage was that we should be extremely careful about judging other people, because God will judge us with the same severity with which we have judged one another (cf. Matt. 7:2). His point was not that we should never *criticize* anybody, but we should never "pass judgment" in the sense of *condemning* someone, passing ultimate judgment, since only the final Judge has the authority to do that. Recognizing this as the standard, it does not prohibit believers who are walking by the Spirit, who observe other Christians overtaken by a fault or sin, from seeking to restore them *in love*. We are not to ignore them (Gal. 6:1).

James 4:14-16. We are not to boast about what we are going to do tomorrow (v.13). Boasting of tomorrow is the foolish practice of atheists (cf. Luke 12:18-20; John 15:5). We do not know the future, only God does. Our life is short, like a vapor; here one second, gone the next. The problem is what we do not often consider in our daily life, our complete dependence on God. We need to make our plans with a conscious dependence on God, recognizing His sovereign control over all of life (v.15; "If the Lord wills, we will live and ... do this ..." - cf. Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Phil. 2:19, 24). We must always condition our plans on the will of God; and not to repeat 'if the Lord wills' or 'Lord willing' mechanically without real meaning from our heart. In verse 16, James rebuked those who were living with this God-neglecting, atheist attitude. Men who believe they control their own destiny and take credit for what God has given him ("you boast in your arrogance") will be judged for this attitude, sometimes with their life. "Boasting" of this kind puts man in God's place and for this reason it "is evil."

I Pet. 1:3. Peter personalized the believer's relationship with God by identifying Him as the Father of 'our' Lord Jesus Christ. Peter called out God's abundant mercy in providing salvation to sinful men by giving us new birth in our salvation. Then Peter called on all believers to bless (praise) God for giving us "a living hope." This 'hope' has its roots in "the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Because He lives, we shall live. Our new birth gave us this life. Consequently, our hope is both alive within us *and* part of our new life in Christ.

I Pet. 1:14-19. Peter has introduced this passage with "Therefore" in verse 13, tying in all the thoughts in vv. 3-12 to this passage. Believers were to steadfastly and clearly focus their mind on the hope of the future grace of God (v.13). Believers are to be like "obedient children," children whose spirit is obedience. Believers are to stop letting our sinful passions ("former lusts") dominate and control us (cf. Rom. 12:2). Self-indulgence is characteristic of those who are willfully ignorant of God in disobedience. As believers, we are to imitate God, the One who "called" us to "be holy," and to "be holy" in all our behavior ('conduct'); in our thoughts, words, and deeds (v.15; cf. 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10; Mark 1:17). "Holy" means *set apart from sin to God*. Peter was telling the believers that holiness should distinguish them in their behavior. Peter reinforced this by quoting; "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (v.16; cf. Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). Intimate fellowship with God is the greatest good that a believer can experience (cf. Phil. 3:8), but *without holiness* it is impossible (cf. Heb. 12:14). *Note: The Word reveals God's mind, so we should learn it; God's heart, so we should love it; God's will, so we should live it. Our whole being, body, soul and spirit (including our mind, will, and heart) should be controlled by the Word of God. Care should be taken so we study the Bible that we might get to know God better. We can get so involved in study and interpretations that we do not really get to know God. It is good to know the Word of God, but our study should help us get to know better the God of the Word.* Peter continues in verse 17, since ('if') we *do* call on God as *our* "Father," He *is* our Father (Matt. 6:4, 6, 9; Luke 11:2; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6) who is the Judge *of all*, and He judges "impartially," not on the basis of appearances but on the basis of reality ("each one's work"). Since we must all stand before God for an evaluation of our works, we should live now during our "stay" in the 'fear' of the Lord (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). It is good for us to maintain respect ("fear") for God as our Judge, since He has this power (authority) over us (cf. Heb. 12:29). The Greek word translated *judges* carries the meaning 'to judge in order to find something good.' As we live here on earth looking toward the day we meet Christ, we should live knowing that we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (vv.18-19). The Greek word for "redeemed" (*elytrothete*) means "to ransom," or "to free by paying a price" (cf. Mark 10:45; Luke 24:21; Tit. 2:14). Placing our faith in the death of Christ has freed us from the spiritual bondage of sin, because Jesus Christ paid the price to ransom us. Jesus Christ's life, represented by the "precious blood," is of infinitely greater value than any mere metal ("silver or gold"), as precious as that metal may be (cf. Acts 3:6; 8:20). The Greek

word 'precious' has a two-fold meaning, one, 'costly' in the sense of value; and two, 'highly esteemed or held in honor.'

I Pet. 2:1-3. Peter's conclusion "Therefore" goes back to his instruction in 1:3-12, as well as 1:22-25. The believer is to take off all kinds of evil conduct like so many soiled garments (cf. Zech. 3:1-5; Rom. 1:29-30; 2 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; James 1:21). The sins he mentioned are all incompatible with brotherly love (cf. 1:22). "Malice" (wickedness) and guile ("deceit," craftiness, lit. to catch with bait) are *attitudes*. The remaining three words describe specific actions: "hypocrisy," "envy," and "slander." These sins are local church-destroying and gospel-damaging sins often found in the body of Christ. Peter urges them, since they had experienced the new birth (1:3, 23), to seek after the 'pure milk of the word' (v.2). The "pure milk of the word" is the Word of God itself. Believers are to "long for / desire" the Word of God; this is a strong expression that can be understood as 'develop an appetite for.' God's Word is spiritual food that all believers instinctively desire, but we must also cultivate a taste for it (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18). As we grow, we discover that the Word is 'milk;' it is 'meat' (1 Cor. 3:1-4; Heb. 5:11-14); it is 'bread' (Matt. 4:4) and it is 'honey' (Psa. 119:103), meaning God's Word is spiritual food for all believers as they grow spiritually. God's Word is "pure," in that it is free from deceit (cf. 1:22-25). Believers have already "tasted" God's goodness ("kindness") in their new birth (salvation). Greater consumption of God's Word will bring greater satisfaction, as well as increased spiritual growth.

I Pet. 2:11. Peter begins a new exhortation here; "Beloved, I urge you" typically introduces exhortations. Peter reminds us that we are 'sojourners' ('aliens') and 'pilgrims' ('strangers'). Aliens have no rights in the land where they live. Strangers are only temporary residents. In view of our status as 'aliens and strangers' we should refuse the appeal of our desire to indulge in things that are contrary to God's will for us. "Fleshly lusts" are selfish natural appetites that appeal to our sinful nature (cf. 1 John 2:16). We often experience temptation to satisfy bodily desires in ways contrary to God's will. Peter spoke of the soul as the whole person (cf. 1:9; 2:25; James 1:21). When we yield to the desires of the flesh that God's Word condemns, we become double-minded. This Peter aptly described as 'war' in the soul. We can only wage 'war' against the flesh through submission to the Lord's commands and prayer.

I Pet. 2:13-17. Peter addresses relationships in this passage. As believers we are not to have a sense of entitlement or present oneself as being entitled. Peter begins by stating that a believer is to 'submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake' (v.13; cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Titus 3:1-2). This is a reference to all human institutions which man set up with the object of maintaining the world which God created. We are to "submit" to the "authority" of government rulers by obeying them. We should do this, not because these individuals are personally worthy of our submission necessarily, but "for the Lord's sake," because by submitting to them, we *honor* God by obeying His Word (cf. Matt. 22:21). The principle of the redeemed Christian life is not self-assertion or mutual exploitation, but the voluntary subordination of oneself to those in authority. Peter did believe that there was a proper place for civil disobedience, however (cf. Acts 4:19-20). It is any occasion when the laws of human government make it illegal to obey God (such as a law that forces Christians to violate their conscience, e.g., making them have abortions, or to worship a different "god" than the biblical God). In such a case, we should obey God rather than man. However, we should also realize that in disobeying the law, we will probably have to bear the consequences of disobeying. The consequences may involve a fine, imprisonment, or even death. In the context, Peter meant that by obeying the law, we can obviate unnecessary and illegitimate criticism (v.15). Jesus did this by faithfully paying His taxes (Matt. 17:24-27; 22:21). Note that Jesus also told His disciples to pay their taxes, even though Rome used their tax money for purposes contrary to God's will. Paul taught that Christians should pay their taxes, too (Rom. 13:6-7). By submitting to civil authority, believers take away the 'reason and cause' for those who looking for a reason to damage the

cause of Christ. Peter stated that believers are “free” in the sense of being under no obligations to God to gain His acceptance (v.16). He has accepted us because of what Jesus Christ did for us. Also, believers are “free” from the tyranny of Satan; but should not use this “freedom” to sin (“for evil”), but to refrain from sinning and to serve God. In verse 17, Peter gives believers four injunctions that summarize our social obligations. The first two and the last two are pairs. We should respect everyone (“honor all people”), but we should “love” fellow believers (“the brotherhood”). “All people” are worthy of “honor,” if for no other reason than because they reflect the image of God. Our primary responsibility to other believers is to “love” them (cf. 1:22; John 13:35). We are to “fear God” (reverence Him, cf. 1:17); whereas the “king” (‘ruler/leader’) is worthy of respect and “honor.” Peter added a final word about the “king.” He probably did so because his readers found it especially difficult to “honor” the *Roman emperor*, who was evidently “Nero” when Peter wrote this epistle (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-2). Respecting people and treating them with respect are two different things. *Feeling* respect for someone is different than *showing* respect for someone. Honoring others is our responsibility; earning our respect is theirs. This is especially difficult when those in authority are persecuting us. These two pairs connect with Jesus’ teachings that we should love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35), and “render to Caesar what is his, and to God what is His” (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25).

I Pet. 2:20-24. As a believer we are not higher or greater than Christ. When He was falsely accused, He did not seek revenge; Christ never retaliated. He willingly suffered offenses against Him – and we must be ready to do the same because we will have similar experiences of being wronged without cause or justification (cf. Luke 22:63-65; 23:1-2, 9-10, 22-23, 34-36). Peter, in this passage, writes to distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable suffering (v. 20). He addresses a believer suffering unjustly (“if you do what is right and suffer for it”) saying God commends that conduct when they endure such unjustified suffering. As a believer we can expect that righteous behavior will one day result in our suffering – because Jesus Christ suffered for His righteous conduct at the hands of sinners (cf. Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65). We are to follow Christ’s example (v.21-23) with the proper spirit. As it relates to an offense against us, nothing seems more unworthy and therefore less tolerable, than to suffer without real cause, which can become a source of bitterness. But that is when we look at Christ, who undeservedly suffered, and our bitterness should go away because who has reason to keep bitterness alive in your life when Christ suffered so much for us. It is interesting to note that Christ kept His tongue under control in this unfair and undeserved suffering; His tongue was absent of “deceit” and it did not “revile (‘heap verbal abuse’) in return.” This is the example we are to follow when someone offends us – and it is the example we are to follow in not offending someone. Christ, as our example, trusted God (“kept entrusting Himself to Him” – v.23) to deal with His persecutors justly (“who judges righteously”), as we should. This is the true foundation for forgiving someone who has deeply offended you; God will deal righteously with the one who is at fault (cf. Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19). Why, because Christ has paid for our sins (v.24); His death separated our sins from us so we can stand before God with no connection to the sin in our life, therefore we can now live unto righteousness rather than unto sin (cf. Rom. 6:1-11). Therefore, we have no foundation not to forgive one who has offended or wronged us. Christ is our example of that.

I Pet. 3:4. Peter was not telling wives to refrain from giving attention to their physical appearances. His point was that this should not be their total or primary concern. He urged the cultivation of the inner person (“hidden person of the heart”) as well. Beauty is more than skin deep. He contrasted what human society values and what God values. A “gentle” disposition and a tranquil (“quiet”) “spirit” is attractive, not only to God but to her husband (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Tim. 2:9-10).

I Pet. 4:8-9. Peter considered it most important that believers keep their brotherly "love" at full strength with other believers (1:22; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Thess. 5:8, 15; 1 John 4:7-11). The same expression occurs in non-biblical Greek to describe a horse at full gallop, or a runner straining for the tape at the finish line of a race. The person with this kind of love is willing to forgive, and even "covers a multitude of [the] sins" of others committed against himself or herself, rather than taking offense (Prov. 10:12; James 5:20). Pride and hate do the opposite; they seek to discover some sin or some issue in the life of someone or a brother and then broadcasts it, often exaggerating and gloating over it. Offering and showing hospitality, without complaining, is one way to demonstrate love for a brother and others (v.9; cf. Matt. 25:35). We should always be willing to open our homes to be hospitable to others, especially fellow believers.

I Pet. 5:5-7. Peter has addressed the elders of the church in verses 1-4 of chapter 5. Here he addresses the "younger ones" meaning 'young people' both male and female. At the time of Peter, society was divided in 'older people and younger people, just as we view divisions in society like 'men and women.' "Elders" in this verse refers to those *people* in the older age group. The "younger" people in the church were and are to take a position under the authority of ("be subject to") the older people ("your elders"). The reason for this is that the older people have more experience in living (cf. Job 32:4). All believers, regardless age, should put on "humility" as a garment, (i.e., let it be what others see as we serve; cf. 3:8). The Greek word translated "clothe" is a rare word that comes from a word referring to the apron that slaves put on over their regular clothes. This garment prepared them for service (cf. John 13:4-15). We should be ready and eager to serve one another, rather than insisting on having our own way and expecting others to serve us (Mark 10:45). Peter quotes Prov. 3:34 for support of his statement. Humility creates and preserves peace; pride creates strife and division. Peter urged the believers to submit to and humble themselves under 'the mighty hand of god' (v.6). The Old Testament writers used God's "hand" as a symbol of discipline (Exod. 3:19; 6:1; Job 30:21; Ps. 32:4) and deliverance (Deut. 9:26; Ezek. 20:34). Peter assured them the believers that God would raise them up, and "exalt" them to a higher position in 'due time.' The believers at the time that Peter wrote this were enduring persecution. In verse 7, Peter explains how to humble oneself: by entrusting oneself and one's troubles to God (Psa. 55:22; cf. Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:6). "Cast" is the translation of a word that means "having deposited with." We can "cast all" our care, anxiety and concern upon Him because we can have confidence that God "cares" for our welfare.

II Pet. 3:9. Peter is addressing the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to return for His own (John 14:2-3). The Lord is not late or loitering, He has not forgotten His promise, was lying, or cannot fulfill it. Peter tells the believers that He "is patient toward you / longsuffering toward us;" meaning that He is waiting to fulfill the promise of His return so people will have time to repent. The Lord sincerely "desires" (Gr. *boulomenos*, "desires," in contrast to the stronger *thelontes*, "determines") that every person come to salvation. Just as the Lord also desires that everyone be holy, but not everyone will be holy. If the Lord *determined* that everyone would be saved, they would be saved. However, it is more important to the Lord that people be free moral agents; and that they can *freely and willingly make the choice to accept or reject His grace* instead of making everyone accept it without the ability to make a choice. The Lord is so sovereign and in control; and His ultimate will still get accomplished even though He gives man the ability to make choices. Our freedom is *real*, but limited. Dr. Scofield wrote: "Three aspects of the will of God may be observed in Scripture: (1) the sovereign will of God (Isa. 46:9-11; Dan. 4:17, 35; Heb. 2:4; Rev. 17:17); (2) the moral will of God, i.e. His moral law (Mk. 3:35; Eph. 6:6; Heb. 13:21); and (3) the desires of God coming from His heart of love (Ezek. 33:11; Mt. 23:37; 2 Pet. 3:9). The sovereign will of God is certain of complete fulfillment, but the moral law is disobeyed by men, and the desires of God are fulfilled only to the extent that they are included in His sovereign will. God does not desire that

any should perish, but it is clear that many will not be saved (Rev. 21:8)." Charles Hodge wrote: "The final cause of all God's purposes is his own glory (cf. Rev. 4:11; Num. 14:21; Isa. 48:11; Ezek. 20:9; I Cor. 1:26-31; Eph. 2:8-10).

I John 1:7-10. John, as one of the disciples who was with Christ during His ministry (cf. 1:1) has written that "God is light and in Him is no darkness." Here John is addressing those who claim to be believers (vv. 6-7). A genuine believer habitually walks in the 'light' (truth and holiness), not in 'darkness' (falsehood and sin). Walking "in the light" means the believer walking in the sphere in which God lives and operates and where His will is seen and known. "How do we do this? If I enter a lighted room and walk around in it, I am walking in the light; I am moving in a sphere which the light illuminates as it shines not only on me but upon everything around me. If I were to personalize the light, I could also say that I was walking *in the presence of* the light. Since according to this passage God not only *is* light (verse 5), but He is also *in* the light, to walk in the light must mean essentially to live in God's presence, exposed to what He has revealed about Himself. This is done through openness in prayer and through openness to the Word of God in which He is revealed. Two things are equally true of believers who "walk in the light;" one, we enjoy "fellowship" with God and others, and two, we are experiencing cleansing from every ("all") "sin." God "cleanses" us at conversion, in the sense that He will never bring us into condemnation for our sins (cf. Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:7). It is the power of Jesus' *blood-sacrifice, the pouring out of His blood, in Christ's death*, that cleanses us (cf. Heb. 9:22). We believe that Christ's historical, physical blood-sacrifice *continues to cleanse* believers from the defilement of sin, and this cleansing process is absolutely necessary for believer's continued fellowship with God. We need *continual* cleansing from the defilement that sinful daily living brings, because it hinders our fellowship with God (cf. John 13:10). This continual cleansing is necessary because, as believers, we will have an old nature and we do sin after salvation. John addresses this in verse 8. If a believer claims to be enjoying fellowship with God, he may think he is temporarily or permanently entirely sinless. Yet our sinfulness exceeds our consciousness of guilt. We have only a very limited appreciation of the extent to which we sin. We commit sins of thought as well as deed, sins of omission as well as commission, and sins that spring from our nature as well as from our actions. This verse warns against all forms of the heresy of sinless perfection. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;" then God's truth does not have a full hold on us and is not controlling our thinking. The phrase "the truth is not in us" means we do not understand the 'facts' (cf. vv. 5-7) that we need continual cleansing because of our sin nature. If a believer 'believes' they are sinless, then they are being controlled by pride and self-will. Verse 9 is the contrast to verse 8. Acknowledging the sins of which we are aware is opposite to saying we are not guilty for sinning. The Greek word translated "confess" (*homologeō*) literally means to say the same thing. Confessing, therefore, means saying about our sins what God says about them; they are indeed sins, offenses against Him, and not just mistakes, blunders, or errors. Augustine stated: "He who confesses and condemns his sins already acts with God. God condemns thy sins: if thou also dost condemn them, thou art linked on to God." "If we confess our sins," God will then "forgive" the sins we confess and will "cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness." Consequently, we do not need to worry that He might have failed to forgive us for sins of which we are unaware! Sin incurs a debt to God, but forgiveness (Gr. *aphiemi*) cancels the debt and dismisses the charge. Sin also pollutes the sinner, but God's cleansing (*katharizo*) removes the stain so we can be holy again. God absolutely promises forgiveness that is consistent with His justice (because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for *all* our sins). So, should confession include repentance (turning away from sin)? Since true confession involves saying the same thing about our sin that God does, it must include repentance. God not only said that sin is wrong, but He also said that we should turn from it. If we only label a particular act of sin as sin, we are not really saying the same thing about it as God says. We must be willing to say that we will turn from it if we want to say about our sin what God says about it. John continues with this thought in verse

10. We must see sin as God sees sin. The false claim being addressed in verse 10 that the sin we have committed is *not really sin*. Such a claim puts God's revelation of sin aside, and makes man the authority for what is and what is not sin. This claim says God is wrong in His judgment of man, and is therefore "a liar." The one who claims that they have not sinned dismisses God's Word and declares it invalid (e.g., Ps. 14:3; Isa. 53:6; John 2:24-25; Rom. 3:23). There are three false claims in verses 6, 8, and 10 which are a denial of the truth that immediately precedes those verses in verses 5, 7, and 9.

1. **Truth:** God is light (v.5) **False Claim:** We can have fellowship with God even though we walk in darkness (v.6).
2. **Truth:** Walking in the light is necessary for fellowship with God (v.7). **False Claim:** We are not guilty when we sin (v.8). —respectively.
3. **Truth:** Confession is necessary to restore fellowship with God (v.9). **False Claim:** We have not sinned (v.10).

As believers, we have a new nature and an old nature. We are sinners before we are saved and we are sinners after we are saved. Our faith in Christ will lead us into 'walking in the light,' and this life is a life of continued repentance, of continual faith in, of thankfulness for, and love to the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

I John 2:1-2. John begins portion of his writing by addressing believers as "my little children;" a family term of endearment that means "little born ones" (2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; John 13:33; cf. Gal. 4:19). He is writing to them so "that you may not sin." "May not sin" does not mean "may never ever sin again." Sinning is inevitable for sinners, even forgiven sinners. Avoidance of sin is important, even though it is not entirely possible. "If" (since) we sin, we have an "Advocate" before God the Father, Jesus Christ. As our "Advocate" (*parakleton* : one called to the side of another to help; friend in court, mediator, defense attorney), "Jesus Christ the righteous" pleads the cause of the sinning Christian before God the Father (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24). This ministry appears to be broader than simply aiding the sinner after he or she sins. It includes pleading the sinner's cause with the Father whenever that becomes necessary, as when Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail (Luke 22:31-32). Here, however, the emphasis is on Jesus Christ's help after we have sinned. Since Jesus Christ is "righteous," He is the *perfect* Advocate with God (cf. Acts 3:14; 7:52). John goes on in verse 2 to explain that Jesus Christ did not just *make* satisfaction for our sins, as a priest, though He did that. He *is* the satisfaction Himself, as a sacrifice (cf. Rom. 3:25); He is the "propitiation" (*hilasmos*, satisfaction; cf. 4:10). Jesus' body was the site where God placated (make someone less angry) His wrath against sin. Jesus' death not only expiated (cancelled, dismissed, waived) "our sins," but it provided cleansing from their defilement, and satisfied God's wrath against sin with an acceptable offering. This verse provides strong support for the fact that Jesus Christ died for *all* people (unlimited atonement). In His death, the Lord Jesus provided salvation that is *sufficient* for all ("the whole world"), though it is *efficient* (or *efficacious*) only for those who trust in Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15, 19; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 22:17). In other words, Christ's death made eternal life available for all, but not automatic for all. "Our" refers to the sins of all believers, and the "whole world" means all humankind, not just the elect (cf. 4:14; John 1:12, 29; 3:16).

I John 2:12-13. John writes to all believers in v.12 through v.14. He addresses: 1) "children" (newer believers), 2) "fathers" (mature believers), and 3) "young men" (less mature believers but not new believers) in their spiritual development. The "children" (new believers) have experienced forgiveness of their sin Christ's sacrifice and provision of forgiveness by faith (cf. 1:5—2:2). Forgiveness is one of the first things that a new believer appreciates about his or her salvation. And it is forgiveness that as believers, we are always to extend to others. The "fathers" (mature believers) have experienced fellowship with God through Jesus Christ (cf. 2:3-11). "Fathers" connotes someone who has had some fellowship with Christ ("Him who has been from the beginning"; cf. John 1:1). "Fathers" continue to

remember their forgiveness of sin and set an example of forgiveness to all believers. The "young men" (less mature believers but not new believers) are learning and growing in their faith. They have experienced some victories over their spiritual adversary, Satan (cf. 2:15-23). The "young men" are learning to exercise forgiveness in their life as they learn to be controlled by the Holy Spirit – in their mind, life and tongue. Forgiveness is an essential part of the believer's life as he or she grows in the LORD.

I John 2:16. John summarized the appeal of the world system as three-fold. Here is a picture of the infernal trinity, the three faces of the world, and three sources of worldly temptation (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4). All of the appeal of the world is based on man's pride; his desire to be the 'god' of his own life. *Lusts* are natural desires and cravings that are out of balance, controlling one's life; and in the context they are *evil* because they are not in harmony with God's will. The "lust of the flesh" is the desire *to do* something apart from the will of God (all corrupt bodily desires, illicit sex, hedonism, idolizing pleasure). The "lust of the eyes" is the desire *to have* something apart from the will of God (materialism, idolizing possessions, what appeals to our senses but is not properly ours to desire or obtain). The "pride of life" is the desire *to be* something apart from the will of God (controlling people, circumstances, egoism, idolizing power, denying God, self-will). The first desire appeals mainly to the body, the second desire appeals to the soul (mind or intellect), and the third desire to the spirit.

I John 2:28. John introduces a new thought here. Again, he addresses the believers as "little children," a term of endearment. He encourages them to "abide in Him." His exhortation to 'abide' is the outworking of John's concern to "abide" that he presented in 2:12-27. "If" might better be translated "whenever," which supports the fact of the Lord's *appearing* is certain, even though its time is not known. When John wrote "when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed / shrink before Him:" it is an indication that John believed that Christ could return for His own while he and the readers of his letter were still alive (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8, 4:5, 15:51-52, 16:22; Phil. 3:20, 4:5; I Thess. 1:10; II Thess. 1:10-12; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-9; Rev. 3:11, 22:7, 12, 17, 20). The prospect of meeting Jesus remained the basis for John's instruction through 4:19. "Confidence" (Gr. *parresia*) is freedom or boldness of speech that comes as a result of a clear conscience. John's idea was that if we walk in fellowship with God, *now*, we will not feel embarrassed to meet Him *whenever* we see Him (cf. Mark 8:38). The prospect of seeing Jesus Christ one day *soon* should motivate us to abide in Him *now* (cf. James 5:8). J. Vernon McGee wrote: "There is nothing that will affect your life as much as the knowledge that you are going to stand in the presence of Christ and give an account of your works."

I John 3:2-3. John addresses his beloved "children" and their future destiny. Even though we are presently God's "children," we do not yet fully reflect His image as we will one day. "When" (not 'if') Jesus Christ appears and we see Him, we will experience full transformation ("be like Him"; be glorified) When we see Jesus Christ that event will fully transform us physically and spiritually (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). John's references to Jesus' appearing, in 2:28 and 3:2, frame his references to the new birth in 2:29 and 3:1. Every true Christian will participate in this appearing. Until His appearing, we should anticipate seeing and knowing Jesus Christ fully, and that anticipation ("hope") should have a purifying effect on us now (cf. 2:1, 6, 29; 3:7, 16; 4:17; Matt. 5:8). Similarly, in the future, seeing and knowing Christ will have a completely purifying effect on us (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). The believer's hope is not "in him" (AV and NIV; i.e., "within himself"), but "on Him" (NASB; i.e., "set on Christ"; Gr. *ep auto*).

I John 3:6-9. John appears to be contradicting his previous writings in verse 6. If abiding in God equals being a believer, then verse 6 appears to contradict what John wrote in 1:8 and 10. There he said that believer's sin (cf. 2:1; 15; 3:18; 5:16, 21). It also seems to contradict personal experience, since genuine

believers *do indeed* sin. So, this is a challenging verse to gain a proper understanding of what John is teaching. Two interpretations of verse 6 have validity, albeit different focuses. A key to understanding this verse lies in the other terms that John used in the verse: "abides," "has seen," and "knows." John used these words throughout his letter to refer to a believer who is walking in intimate fellowship with God (1:7; 2:3, 10). **Interpretation One:** With the use of these terms established, John is stating that while a believer is walking in close fellowship with God, he *does not sin*. The abiding believer never repudiates God's authority over him by doing anything that resists God's law or will, *while he is abiding in Christ*. If he does, his fellowship with God suffers; He no longer "knows" God in that intimate sense. He no longer "sees" God because he has moved out of the light into darkness. Summary: There was no sin whatsoever in Jesus Christ (v. 5). Jesus consistently abided in and obeyed the Father (cf. John 14:9). The believer who consistently "abides" in Christ, a sinless Person, does not sin (v. 6). Some believers have used this verse to support their belief that believers are sinless and perfect. If we could abide in Christ without interruption, that would be true as we would be sinless. Unfortunately, we cannot do that. So, does this interpretation not contradict what John said about the depravity of sinners, even believing sinners (1:8)? **Interpretation Two:** Using the terms as defined previously, John is stating that a believer does not habitually sin. If habitual sin exists without restraint in the life of a person who claims to be and professes to be a believer, they are not a believer and are lost, destined for hell. This interpretation is based on the interpretation of the present tense of the Greek verb (*harmartanei*), that they take to mean "keeps on sinning." It is then asserted that this tense necessitates the translation to be: 'Whoever has been born of God does not *go on* sinning,' or, 'does not *continually* sin.' The inference to be drawn from such renderings is that, though the Christian may sin somewhat (how much is never specified), but he may not sin regularly or persistently. This interpretation is not free from difficulty because it stresses the present continuous form of the verb in a way which they do not do elsewhere in the New Testament. Zane Hodges wrote: "The perfect tense here is not intended to categorize a person as either saved or unsaved, since even believers' sin (1:8). Instead, the statement is intended to stigmatize all sin as the product, not only of not abiding, but also of ignorance and blindness toward God." **So, what is the best way to understand verse 6 in light of all Scripture?** Any sensitive believer who is honestly trying to live a holy life will admit that they sin repeatedly every day. Every believer is guilty of sins of omission, of motivation (actions and responses that often arise from unconscious pride and selfishness), and of ignorance, as well as deliberate sins. Genuine believers have even confessed to habitually practicing *gross sins for extended periods* of time. Every believer is a habitual sinner, and we will be until the Lord takes us to glory. Obviously, this does not mean that we should resign ourselves to sinning (cf. 2:1; Rom. 6:1); but rather that we should wage war daily against sin, incidental or habitual (cf. Eph. 6:10-18), but we will never be completely free from its degrading influence in this life. In verses 7 and 8, John addresses false teachers who were teaching the opposite of what he taught in verses 4-6. John's point was two-fold: conduct manifests spiritual relationship (sin with the devil; righteous with Christ, cf. 2:29), and God hates sin (cf. v. 5). All men are born sinners, enslaved to their 'father' the 'devil;' therefore a sinner's sinning has its source in "the devil." Because of this, the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) came, so He could destroy the works of the devil (defeat sin and death by His sacrifice on the cross). In verse 9, John writes that 'whoever is born of God does not sin,' which extends the interpretation issues noted above in verse 6. As noted before, there are two primary interpretations of verse 6; and again, the focus is on the Greek tense of the Greek word translated "does not sin." A common translation is "does not make a practice of sinning" or "habitually practices sin." However, the Greek present tense does not always indicate habitual action, as pointed out previously; frequently it describes absolute action. Since, earlier, John wrote that the Christian *does* sin habitually (1:6-10; cf. 2:1), the idea that the Christian does *not* sin habitually is unacceptable interpretation here in verse 9. The reason one "born of God does not (cannot) sin" is that he has been born of God. John could say the Christian is *sinless* in this sense, because a sinless Parent (God) has begotten a believer (Child). The

believer becomes a partaker of God's divine sinless nature when they experience the new birth; they get a 'new' nature. Yet, the believer sins because they also have a sinful human nature. In this verse, John is looking only at the *sinless new nature* of the indwelling Christ that each believer possesses. Jesus told Nicodemus that people need to experience a second birth (John 3:5-7). Every believer has been born twice, once physically and once spiritually; and here John is looking at the consequence of the believer's second birth. As a total person (human being, old nature), we do sin and can never claim to be free of sin, but our 'inward self' (new nature) that is regenerated does not sin because it is the indwelling of Christ / Holy Spirit. J. Vernon McGee wrote: "A child of God is given a new nature, and that new nature does not and will not commit sin. The reason that the Prodigal Son could not stay in the pigpen is that he was not a pig. He was a son of the Father, and he longed for the Father's house." Again, if we were able to abide in Christ without interruption, we would never sin (cf. v. 6). The sinless nature of Christ controls the abiding Christian, whereas the sinful human nature controls the non-abiding Christian (cf. Rom. 6:16). No sin ever committed by a regenerate child of God has come from the new person inside who has been born of God. Instead, every sin a regenerate person commits comes from their old sin nature.

I John 3:17. We may not have the opportunity to save a brother's life by dying in his place (v.16). But we can and should do the next best thing, by helping him out and sustaining his life when he has material needs. When we give to a brother "in need" what might keep us alive, we have followed the Lord Jesus' example of self-sacrificing love. Just as our love for God is manifested by obedience to His commands, our love for other believers is manifested by sacrifice we make for them.

I John 3:23. Jesus taught the apostles to trust in Him and to love each other; and John distills His teaching of Jesus' commandment to love one another here. "Believe" in this verse refers to believing in Christ for eternal salvation. The tense of the Greek verb points to this, as does the object of belief, "the name of His Son Jesus Christ." Also, Jesus taught that we should trust in the *efficacy* (effective power) of *His name* when we pray to His Father (John 14:12-15; 16:24). Each believer should take Christ's own self-sacrificing love as the model by which they should love their brother in actual deeds and in accord with the truth (cf. vv. 16-18). How are we doing in loving our brother?

I John 4:7-8. John introduces to the believer 'why' they are to love one another; God is the essence of love. "Love," as well as 'faith' (i.e., acknowledging the true doctrine of Christ, vv. 1-6), is a product of God's Spirit. The believer (one "born of God"), who also "knows" God (i.e., has intimate fellowship with Him); "loves" (cf. 2:3-5). Absence of love shows that a person "who does not love" does not have intimate fellowship with ("know") God (v.8). "God is love" and it is shown in His activity; as He creates, He creates in love; as He rules, He rules in love; as He judges, He judges in love; all that He does is the expression of His nature, "love." Because God 'is love,' love which He shows is generated by Himself only and not by any outside cause. The word "God" is preceded by an article, which means that the statement is not reversible; it cannot read, 'Love is God,' only "God is Love."

I John 4:19-21. John summarizes his teaching in chapter 4 in verses 19-21. He begins with "We love because He first loved us." Our ability to "love," and our practice of "love," come from God's love for us ("He first loved us"). In context, we do not need to fear as we stand before God as our Judge, because we love Him and He loves us. The believer's assurance (including confidence on the judgment day, v. 17) is not to be found in *our* loving, however 'complete' our love' is (v. 18), but in God's past, present and future love for us. Simply stated, God always makes the first move in love and forgiveness. A believer's claim to "love God" is a poor substitute for genuine love of the brethren (v.20). Verse 19 left open the possibility of such a claim. John clarifies that a claim to love God is not a *true demonstration* of love. Love for the *unseen* God will find expression in demonstrated love for our brethren whom we *can see*.

Do we love our brother in a way that is seen by others? Do we claim to 'love God' but are always in strife with a brother or seek to separate from fellowship with other brothers?

Summary: John has identified 7 characteristics of a hypocritical, bitter believer or a professing believer that has no relationship with the Lord: 1) they are not honest with others (cf. 1:6), 2) they are not honest with themselves (cf. 1:8), 3) they are not honest with God (cf. 1:10), 4) they are not honest with Christ (cf. 2:4), 5) they are not honest with the world (cf. 2:6), 6) they are not honest with their believing brother (cf. 2:9), and 7) they are false before all men (cf. 4:20).

Jude 21. Jude uses the imperative 'keep' establishing the responsibility of the believer to be obedient and faithful to God, which is a demonstration of loving God (it is a 'keeping of yourself in the love of God' – John 15:9-10; Rom. 5:1-5, 8:37-39). The believer 'keeping themselves in the love of God' is an indication that they are in fellowship with God; they are in a place where God can bless them as His children and they look forward to being with Him (I John 2:28). To 'keep yourself in the love of God' means that the believer must remain in the place of obedience where God's love can be poured out on His children (cf. I Cor. 11:27-31; Heb. 12:5-11). When believers depart from God's Word and His will – then barriers are built that block the free flow of God's love to the believer. The imperative 'keep' is a direct reference to the perseverance of the believer, which is accomplished by a continual: 1) building one's self up in the Word of God; 2) praying in the Holy Spirit; and 3) looking (waiting expectantly) for eternal life through Christ. "Looking" is the eager anticipation of Christ's Second Coming to provide eternal life to the believer (cf. II Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:11-14; I John 3:1-4). Each believer is to keep in their mind and consciously look forward to eternal life – it is the believer's hope. Eternal life is the supreme expression of God's mercy on the believer, to whom Christ's righteousness has undeservedly been imputed (cf. I Pet. 1:1-9). Jude has presented the believer with a synopsis of the Christian life in vs. 20-21; we are to have an inward look in the development of our spiritual life (v.20), we are to have an upward look in our relationship with God (vv. 20-21), and we are to have a forward look in having an eternal life with God (v.21). The reality is that we, as believers, only have a short time to 'build', 'pray' and 'look'; therefore, we only have a short time to 'keep'. How are we doing? How are you doing?

Rev. 2:5. The corrective for a cold heart that the Lord prescribed was a three-step process: They needed to: (1) "remember" how they used to feel about Him (first love), (2) "repent" (change their attitude), and (3) *return* to the love that formerly motivated them ("do the deeds you did at first"). A generation earlier, Paul commended this church for its love (Eph. 1:15-16). The "deeds" they used to do ("did at first") probably refer to the *activities* that came from their love as well as their *service* for Him (v. 2). To rekindle "first love" there needs to be a return to "first works," because there is an intimate relationship between love and good works (1 John 5:2).

Rev. 2:20-21. The church at Thyatira was a corrupt church. A "woman," claiming to be "a prophetess" had been influencing some in this church to join the local trade guilds, which ultimately led to participation in the guild feasts that included immoral acts and the worship of idols. These were practices that the apostles at the Jerusalem Council specifically prohibited (cf. Acts 15:29). God had not brought judgment upon the church previously, in order that it might "repent" (2 Pet. 3:9). Since there was a refusal to change her ways ("she does not want to repent"), God would judge "unless they repented of their deeds." God desires repentance. He is longsuffering, but He is just.

Rev. 3:15-19. The church at Laodicea received no commendation, a fact that makes this letter unique compared to the letters to the other churches. The lackadaisical deeds of the Laodicean Christians manifested their heart attitude. They were "neither cold nor hot" in their love for God, just "lukewarm," another term would be apathetic. The Laodicean church would have known how the Lord felt, because

their city's drinking water came from a spring six miles to the south over an aqueduct, and it arrived disgustingly lukewarm; and hot, spring water (valuable for its medicinal effects) also came to Laodicea from Hierapolis and during its journey to Laodicea it lost some of this heat and medicinal value by the time it arrived in Laodicea. The Lord's 'spitting' (lit. "vomiting") His people 'out of His mouth' (v. 16) does not mean they would lose their salvation but it indicates His intense disgust, and the Greek wording occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The Lord did not mean that He would rather that we be *spiritually cold* than that we be *spiritually lukewarm*, either. He *did* mean that He would rather we be *spiritually refreshing or healthful*, as cold or hot water are, rather than that we be *spiritually bland*, as lukewarm water is. The Laodicean church enjoyed material prosperity (v. 17) that led them to a false sense of security and independence. The expression "I am rich, and have become wealthy" is a literary device that inverts the natural sequence for emphasis (cf. v. 19; 5:2, 5; 10:4, 9; 12:10; 19:13). Here it stresses that the wealth attained came through self-exertion. Spiritually they had great needs (cf. Rom. 7:24): "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." This self-sufficient attitude is a constant danger when Christians live lives of ease and enjoy plenty. Many people today say: "I don't need God." Since they considered themselves to be "rich"—but were *spiritually poor*—Jesus urged them to "buy," implying self-sacrifice (as their currency), the *spiritual things* they really needed (vv.18-19; cf. Isa. 55:1). Instead of real gold, they should buy "gold refined by fire," namely, pure *spiritual riches* (cf. Ps. 66:10; Prov. 17:3; Zech. 13:9; Luke 12:21; 1 Tim. 6:18; James 1:3-4; 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12-13). Instead of buying the *black garments*, which were popular in Laodicea, they should buy "white garments" that symbolize righteous conduct, purity, and sacred festal occasions (cf.19:8). Instead of the eye salve that the Laodicea produced and sold, they should purchase spiritual "eye salve," a reference to the Word of God, that enables us to see life realistically (cf. John 9:6; 1 John 2:20, 27). The Lord reminded them that the reason He said what He did was because He loved them (cf. v. 9; 1:5; Prov. 3:11-12). They should, therefore, "be zealous" (Gr. *zeleue*, cf. *zestos*, "hot," vv. 15, 16) "and repent" (i.e., repent with zeal). The only way for spiritually "cold" people to become spiritually "hot" in their love for the Lord is to "repent" (i.e., do an "about face"). Does the Laodicean church's spiritual apathy represent our spiritual life?

Rev. 20:11-15. The phrase "And I saw" introduces something new that John sees. The "great white throne" John sees seems to be different from the thrones he referred to earlier in this chapter (Rev. 20:4). It appears to be God's throne of judgment, specifically made for this occasion. It is great because it is God's throne and because it is the seat of this final and last judgment. Its whiteness suggests that the verdicts that proceed from it are pure, holy, and righteous (cf. Ps. 97:2; Dan. 7:9). The One sitting on this throne is God. This is probably a general reference to God the Father in the person of Jesus Christ the Son and King - since both will judge finally (Rev. 3:21; 4:2-3, 9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5; 22:1, 3, 12; Dan. 7:9-10; John 5:22-23, 26-27; 8:16; 10:30; Heb. 1:3). John saw earth and heaven flee from God's presence (cf. Ps. 114:3, 7). This seems to indicate that the Great White Throne is located in space – not in heaven, not on earth, but somewhere in between. This seems to be confirmed by the statement that "there was found no place for them" – meaning that the unbelievers were suspended in space before God as the Almighty Judge. The Great White Throne judgment now brings to an end His dealings with this earth as we know it (cf. 2 Pet. 3:7, 10-12). The flight of the present earth and heaven from God's presence strengthens the description of Him as the ultimate Judge. Verse 20 states that the dead before the great white throne are the unsaved of all ages who now stand resurrected (Rev. 20:5; Dan. 12:2). They come from all classes and groups of humanity. The "books" contain a record of their deeds (cf. Deut. 32:34; Ps. 56:8; Isa. 65:6; Dan. 7:10; Mal. 3:16; Matt. 12:37). These books contain the record of every thought, word, and deed of the unbeliever (Luke 8:17, Rom 2:16); all recorded by the divine omniscience of God. These records are compared to God's holy standards (Matt. 5:48, 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Not one person will be excused from judgment. The "book of life" contains the names of God's elect (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27; Isa. 4:3; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3). God will

condemn unbelievers raised to face this judgment because of their works, but primarily for their failure to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior (John 6:29). God will judge all people on the basis of their works (v. 12; cf. Ps. 62:12; Matt. 25:41-46; Heb. 4:12-13). This is also true of Christians at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10). All final judgments deal with works, whether the works of the believer at the Judgment Seat of Christ or the works of the unbeliever at the Great White Throne judgment. The question of who is saved is determined during life on earth; it is not determined when one goes to heaven as some believe. What is revealed here is the confirmation of one's destiny by means of God's written record. This is confirmed by the contents of the "book of life" – the written record of those who believe – "from the creation (foundation) of the world" (Rev. 17:8). One the saved, genuine believer is recorded in the "book of life". Since God is the judge of one's works, there seems to be a difference in degrees of punishment just as there will be differences in rewards for believers (cf. Matt. 11:20-24). There is no revelation about what will happen to mortal believers who are alive at the end of the Millennium. Perhaps Satan and his followers will kill them all before God judges the rebels. Another possibility is that they will live through the final rebellion and God will give them immortal bodies with which they will be able to enter the new heaven and earth. Neither is there information about the divine judgment of these believers. There will probably be a judgment of them since God judges everyone else who has ever lived at one time or another. He may judge them at the end of the Millennium. A resurrection of believers who died during the Millennium is also probable (cf. Isa. 65:17-20). In verse 13 is a fuller description of the resurrection and judgment of the unrighteous. In logical sequence this verse fits in the middle of the preceding one. This resurrection results in death (Rev. 20: 6) whereas the previous one (Rev. 20:4) resulted in life. God will resurrect the bodies of all unbelievers and unite them with their spirits, even those bodies decomposed in the sea and in every other way. The special mention of death by drowning and burial at sea may be due to the fact that the people of John's day regarded this way of dying as especially abhorrent. "Hades" is the New Testament word for this place, and "Sheol" is the Old Testament word. "Hades" is the temporary abode of unbelievers' spirits (and intermediate bodies – Luke 16:19-31) until the great white throne judgment. Hades today is the unseen place where all unbelievers who die reside until their resurrection (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8). It includes Gehenna (Luke 12:5), the place of conscious torment and anguish (Luke 16:22-28). This verse's reference to judgment on the basis of works again stresses individual, personal responsibility and accountability (cf. v. 12; 2:23; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Pet. 1:17). The Great White Throne Judgment will be nothing like our modern court cases. At the White Throne, there will be a Judge but no jury; a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. No one will be able to defend himself or accuse God of unrighteousness. As noted, it appears that there will be degrees of punishment issued by the Judge as a person is sentenced to an eternal death. From this point on there will be no more death (v.14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28). God will cast Death and Hades into the Lake of Fire. Death and Hades are an inseparable pair representing the two aspects of Death; the physical fact and its spiritual consequence. Once Death (the state of death) and Hades (the place of death) are cast into the Lake of Fire – there will be no more death because they have been sent permanently into the Lake of Fire never to appear again. The "second death" is separation from God in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20; 21:8). The condemned unbeliever will receive a resurrection body that is different from their former mortal bodies. They will be eternal, indestructible and will continue in sin forever. Just as there is an eternal and second life for the believer, so there is also an eternal and second death for the unbeliever; just as there is no death in eternal life, there is no life in eternal death. The names of the unbeliever will be absent from the "book of life (v.15)". This will confirm their eternal fate (Rev. 14:11). When taken seriously, this final revelation destroys all theories of universalism or restoration – theories that state a belief that all men will be in heaven one day. Eternal punishment is a doctrine that is becoming increasingly unpopular in our day. Notice that Jesus Christ, the Judge, spoke very plainly when He affirmed it (Rev. 20:14-15; 20:10/ 19:20; 14:10; Matt. 18:8; 23:15, 33; 25:41, 46; Mark 9:46). A commentator wrote that "if we

once saw sin as God sees it, we would understand why a place such as hell exists". As far as biblical revelation is concerned, there are only two destinies for human souls – one to be with the Lord Jesus Christ forever and the other is to be forever separated from the Lord Jesus Christ in the Lake of Fire. Something we should understand and take very seriously.

Rev. 21:1-7. John now sees a new scene that refers back to the passing away of the present earth and heaven in Rev. 20:11 (v.1). The new earth and heaven will come into existence after the Millennium and the great white throne judgment. Chronologically, all the sinners of all the ages, both fallen angels and men (including Satan, the beast, and the false prophet) are in the Lake of Fire forever, with no chance of escape. The whole universe has been destroyed and God creates a new universe to be the dwelling place of the believers (and good angels and other created beings). The reason God will destroy the present heaven and earth is that He originally made them as the habitat for humanity. However, sin so thoroughly corrupted not only the human race but the created environment that He will destroy it and create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. The current universe is destroyed (II Pet. 3:10-13) and it will be replaced with a new creation that will last forever (Ps. 102: 25-26; Isa. 65:17, 66:22; Luke 21:33; Heb. 1:10-12). This is the final stage in His plan to deliver humanity into the blessing He originally intended people to enjoy. NOTE: Is the new heaven and earth that John saw the same new heaven and earth that Isaiah predicted (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; cf. Ps. 102:25-26; Isa. 51:6)? Although the terms that describe them are almost identical, the descriptions of these places vary. Isaiah wrote that people will die in the new earth (Isa. 65:17-20), but John said there will be no more death there (Rev. 21:4). Isaiah predicted that the moon will shine in the new heavens (Isa. 66:22-23), but John implied that there will be no moon there (Rev. 21:23). Apparently, Isaiah spoke of both the Millennium and the eternal state generally as new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17—66:24), which is accurate since even in the Millennium the world will experience renovation. John, in the progress of revelation, distinguished these two aspects of the final times and applied the name "new heaven and earth" only to the eternal state, which is appropriate since God will eventually destroy the present world and create a new world (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10). John next sees a city descending out of heaven from God (v. 2, 10; Heb. 11:13-16). It was holy in contrast to the former Jerusalem (Rev. 11:8; Isa. 52:1; Matt. 4:5; 27:53). John sees it coming down, which may indicate that it already existed before the current earth and heavens are destroyed. As the old Jerusalem will be Jesus Christ's capital during the Millennium, so the New Jerusalem will be His capital from then on for eternity. In the bride-husband simile, the city is the bride, and Christ is the husband (Rev. 21: 9-10; cf. 3:12). One commentator stated: "Just as the four actual kingdoms of Daniel 2, 7 do not literally correspond to the imagery that portrays them, so the New Jerusalem does not literally correspond to the imagery of Revelation 21—22. Though it is an actual literal city, its glory will far surpass the language that John uses to portray it. John's language is an attempt to describe what is in one sense indescribable." The use of the bride figure to describe the New Jerusalem should not lead us to conclude that the New Jerusalem is identical with the church. Some interpreters have equated the two. The bride figure elsewhere describes the church (Rev. 19:7; 2 Cor. 11:2), but here the city is the bride. The bride figure describes different entities in intimate relationship to Christ. The Old Testament also used the bride as a figure to describe Israel's relationship to God (Isa. 62:5; Jer. 2:2; 3:20; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:19-20). John's imagery here extends from the third part of the Jewish wedding, the ceremony. All believers (from Adam to the final believer written in the book of life) are in the New Jerusalem, so all believers are included in the bride imagery and stated blessing. God has now brought home all believers to Christ as His bride. This bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, now encompasses two previous brides of Christ: Israel and the church; the New Jerusalem is both the bride and the place where she dwells. The city is the corporate identity of those who reside in it. Like Babylon, it is a real city, but it also represents the people who live there, which in this case include old covenant and new covenant believers. It is the place that Jesus Christ went to the Cross to prepare for His

disciples (John 14:2). John now hears a loud voice (the last of 20 times in Revelation) signifying the importance of the proclamation that followed (v.3). "Behold" further stressed its importance. This voice is probably an angel's voice that announces that God's tabernacle, the New Jerusalem, is now among men. Finally, the relationship between God and humankind that God has always desired people to enjoy will be a reality (cf. 7:15; Gen. 3:8; 17:7; Exod. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:11-12; Num. 15:41; Deut. 29:13; 2 Sam. 7:24; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech. 2:10; 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16). God will dwell among His chosen people, and they will experience intimate fellowship with Him. This is the supreme blessing of the New Jerusalem. The angel continues the proclamation – God will wipe away all tears (v.4). The new order will be without pain or sorrow. In eternity all believers will enjoy a new intimacy with God, which is now impossible because sin and death are ever present. God will wipe away all tears at the inception of the eternal state. These are tears caused by life in the old creation, not tears of repentance. This reference to wiping away tears highlights God's compassion for His people. Sorrow, death, and pain will all end along with the tears, mourning, and crying that result from them. This is a final reversal of the curse (Gen. 3). All the evils present in the old creation will have been removed with the destruction of the old earth and heaven (Rev. 21:1). When that occurs, all the former experiences will be gone forever as well. However, note that the removal of tears will take place after the final judgments (Rev. 20:11-15), where believers may experience sorrow as people they know are cast into the Lake of Fire; this may also include the judgment seat of Christ when some Christians will suffer the loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:15; cf. 1 John 2:28). The former things are things associated with the old creation that have passed away. They are no longer in existence. Heaven will have none of the features that characterize this present earth John now writes down what God Himself says (v.5). "Behold" introduces a special pronouncement, namely, that God will bring a new creation into existence. This is the first clear instance of God speaking directly to John since Rev. 1:8; and He is speaking of the completion – the climax – "I am making everything new". God instructed John to write down what He had said because His words were faithful and true, not incredible. Perhaps the revelation John had just experienced so enthralled him that he stopped recording it. God, in the person of Jesus the Christ, is sitting on the throne and He continued speaking (v.6). The judgments of the Tribulation (Rev. 16:17) and of the whole old creation stood accomplished (Rev. 21:5). He referred to Himself as the eternal, sovereign God (Rev. 1:8; cf. 22:13), the originator and terminator of all things (cf. Isa. 44:6). His promise of abundant satisfaction for the thirsty is metaphorical, symbolizing His ability to meet the deepest needs of His people (Rev. 7:17; cf. Isa. 55:1; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39). Christ continues to speak and states that the overcomer (i.e., every believer who overcomes the world by faith in Christ – 1 John 5:4-5) will inherit these things (i.e., the blessings of the new creation mentioned) (v.7). This promise completes and summarizes the other seven promises to overcomers given in Rev. 2 and 3. Inheriting emphasizes the privilege of obtaining something because of the work of another in contrast to one's own work. The phrase 'I will be his God and he will be My son' is defined elsewhere as a statement of special honor, not of regeneration. The Davidic Covenant promised to David's son, Solomon, 'I will be a Father to him and he will be a son to Me' (II Sam. 7:14). The intent of the phrase is to signify a special, intimate relationship.

Rev. 22:8-11. In Rev. 22:8, John resumes by addressing the reader, which he had not done since Rev. 1:1, 4, and 9. He affirms the angel's words that the prophecy was genuine. He himself had heard and had seen the things that he had recorded (cf. Dan. 8:15; 12:5). He was an eyewitness of these things (cf. John 1:14; 19:35; 21:14; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:14). John confessed that when he had heard and seen these things, he reacted by worshipping the angel who revealed them to him (cf. Rev. 19:10). It was the revelation of the new creation that evidently moved John to respond this way a second time. John's strong reaction further attests the genuineness of the amazing revelations that he had received. This angel rebukes John for worshipping him (v.9; cf. Rev. 19:10). This may have been the same angel whom

John tried to worship earlier (Rev. 19:10). People should worship God, not His servants. The angel presented himself as a fellow servant of John's; they both served God. He said he also served the other prophets besides John as well as all believers who pay attention to what God has revealed in this book. The specific mention of the prophets as a special group of believers here heightens respect for all prophecy and this prophecy in particular. The ultimate goal of Revelation is that it would inspire believers to worship of God. John receives instruction from the angel to leave his book of prophecy open (v.10). He was not to close it because the fulfillment of the events predicted was near, and people needed to be aware of them (cf. Rev. 1:11). In contrast, God had told Daniel to seal his prophecy, evidently because there was more prophecy to come (Dan. 8:26; 12:4, 9-10; cf. Rev. 10:4). Again, this contrast emphasizes that the prophecies of Revelation, through its plain statements and symbolic language, is written to reveal facts and events related to the future. These prophecies were recorded so they could be understood so they would produce obedience and worship. The angel gives John this warning to pass along because the time of Christ's second coming is near (v.11). This is a strong warning not to put off becoming a believer in Jesus Christ. It presents the hopelessness of the final state of unbelievers. When Christ comes, people will not be able to change their destiny. What they are then they will remain forever. People should not expect some second chance in the future but should make the decision about worshipping God now in the light of what they have read in this book (cf. Matt. 25:10; Luke 13:25; Heb. 9:27). All four parts of Rev. 22:11 indicate with a tone of irony the permanence in which the good and the evil find themselves at a time when no further opportunity for repentance remains. The lesson is, 'Change while there is time.' The point here is not to condone what is evil, but to point out that if people do not heed this prophecy, they will continue in their wickedness. While on the other hand, those who do heed this prophecy will continue to do right. Those who reject these warnings fix their eternal destiny in hell. Those who respond to these warnings fix their eternal destiny in heaven. It is a guarantee of personal responsibility for one's decisions (cf. Ezek. 3:27; Matt. 11:15; Rev. 2:7; 13:9; et al.).

Resources:

3 Signs that You're Bitter – Pastor Mike Moore

4 Sure Ways To Spot A Bitter Root In Your Heart – Crosswalk

5 Habits of Bitter People – Power of Positivity

5 Ways Christians Should Judge Others – Julie Roys – Moody Radio Network

6 Signs You Are Bitter – Ilianna Luna

7 Deadliest Signs You are a Hypocrite – Joshua Infantado

7 Powerful Ways To Keep The Unity Of The Church – Joshua Infantado

7 Subtle Symptoms of Pride from Jonathon Edwards – Church Leaders - Fabienne Harford

8 Ways to Promote Unity in Your Church – Ephesians 4 – David Worcester

10 Characteristics of a Bitter Person - Karen Clark

56 Questions About Forgiveness and Their Answers – Katharina Steiner

Beware of Hypocrisy – John MacArthur

Does God Really Forget Sins – J.I Packer

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Supplement: The Dangers of Living in the Comparative

“Comparison is the thief of joy.” – Theodore Roosevelt

“To love is to stop comparing.” – Bernard Grasset

Today many Christians live in the “comparative.” “Comparative living” is when a person examines the life of another person for the purpose of constructing similarities or dissimilarities between themselves and others by comparing what a person is doing as compared to themselves. This often occurs within a church, within a family and between acquaintances; and when this occurs it kills relationships. Scripture is very clear that living in the comparative is not wise (II Cor. 10:12). Why? Because “comparative living” is evidence that the focus of your life is yourself and the temporal world we live in. It is the indication that you spend very little time examining and living your life according to the Word of God and His Will in preparation of your future eternal life (I Pet. 1:3-9).

Scripture provides us with clear examples of individuals who lived in the “comparative” and the “fruit” of “comparative” living.

Cain and Able - Gen. 4:1-16.

- Comparison: Cain’s offering of fruit was not a sacrifice. It was the fruit of his labor but it was easily harvested and replaced; therefore, Cain’s offering was based on convenience and duty, which was in disobedience to the LORD’s command. Abel’s offering of an animal was a sacrifice. It was the sacrifice of an asset that required hard work and the shedding of blood; therefore, Abel’s offering was based on obedience and faith. God respected Abel’s offering but not Cain’s.
- Fruit: Cain’s envy and anger resulted in the murdering of Abel.

Saul and David – I Sam. 15-31

- Comparison: Saul was selected by God and anointed by Samuel to be the King of Israel. Saul was given commands from the LORD that he did not obey. David was selected by God and anointed by Samuel to replace Saul as the King of Israel. Saul, in his pride, disobeyed the commands of the LORD. David, in his humility, obeyed the commands of the LORD. God respected obedience and punished disobedience.
- Fruit: Saul’s envy and anger resulted in his attempts to murder David and God’s rejection of him as the King of Israel. David’s humility resulted in his coronation as the King of Israel.

Prodigal son and older brother – Luke 15:11-32

- Comparison: A father had two sons. The younger son asked for his inheritance (1/3), left his home and spent all of his inheritance on self-centered living and the pleasures of the world. The older son stayed home and worked hard for his father; his inheritance was 2/3 of his father’s estate. When the prodigal son came to himself (humility) he returned home, where he was received by his father warmly and with celebration (grace). The son who stayed home became angry (pride/hypocrisy) because and he was the current owner of his father’s estate (15:12) ...he had worked as a servant/slave to build upon his father’s estate (15:29) ...and now his father was using his possessions to celebrate the return of his brother (15:22-24).

- Fruit: The older son's self-centeredness, envy and anger resulted in his rejection of his father's grace. The older son thought his brother's leaving home should result in his banishment from the family but his father's compassion resulted in his brother's reinstatement into the family.

Pharisee and publican – Luke 18:9-14

- Comparison: The Pharisee followed all the rules of the Oral Torah (man's rules) and considered himself to be righteous and superior to others who did not follow the rules of the Oral Torah. He trusted in his own righteousness; his pride caused him to declare all of his self-righteous deeds. The publican considered himself to be a sinner and unworthy of God's grace. He plead for God's mercy to be shown to him.
- Fruit: The Pharisee's pride in his self-righteousness resulted in God's rejection of him. The publican's humility resulted in God's mercy whereby God's righteousness is imputed to him.

Pride is the source and the foundation of "comparative" living. There are only two categories of "comparing," 'upward' and 'downward.' *Downward* comparison involves comparing yourself to someone you perceive as worse off than yourself (pride is exhibited when comparing *down*), and *upward* comparison involves comparing yourself to someone you perceive as better off (envy is exhibited when comparing *up*). In each instance, 'you' become the center of the comparison; 'you' become the sole umpire and judge of the comparison; 'you' become the standard from which 'you' compare others; meaning that 'your pride' is in control of your life. Following are the fruits of comparative living:

1. Living in the "comparative" creates a safe harbor for pride and hypocrisy. It allows you to justify your behavior by comparing your life to others – either *upward* or *downward*. It allows you to ignore and reject the standards of behavior as established by the Word of God (Eph. 4:25-31). Living in the "comparative" can also lead one to blame God for their circumstances, evidenced by their view that they are always "the victim."
2. Living in the "comparative" allows others to drive your behavior. Living in the comparison always results in unhappiness, dissatisfaction and discontentment. When we compare ourselves to others (ii Cor. 10:12), we end up focusing our energy on tearing others down by being critically judgmental instead of focusing our energy on following the example of Christ (Rom. 15:1-6).
3. Living in the comparative always results in a critical, judgmental attitude, which always kills relationships and creates isolation. This is clearly seen when professing believers in Christ do not seek fellowship with other believers as outlined in Heb. 10:24-25. Living in the comparative creates an endless cycle of resentment, criticism, discouragement and unhappiness; it never leads to happiness, reconciliation, peace and unity.

The sure-fire recipe for unhappiness is to live life comparing your life to others. Living life in the comparative always results in resentment and criticism of others to whom you are comparing yourself to.

Here are some questions for you to consider:

1. Why is it so important that you must compare your life to the lives of others?
2. Why is it important to you to compare your life to others?
3. What do you expect to gain by comparing your life to others?
 - a. Are you looking to justify your actions?
 - b. Are you looking to create a diversion so others cannot see the real issues in your life?
4. Can you control the actions of others? If not, why are you comparing their life actions to yours?
5. Is it important that you critically examine everyone else's business?
6. What value does 'living in the comparative' bring to your life?

When you live in the comparative, you establish man as the standard for behavior – and reject Christ as the standard for behavior. When you engage in comparing your life to others, it is for the purpose of providing you with the excuse to do what you do and feel justified in doing it. That is the only purpose that comparative living has, it creates justification for your own attitudes and actions.

If you are going to live in a state of comparison, compare yourself today to who you were yesterday. Have you grown in Christ? Be aware of who you are before the LORD – you will answer to Him for your life, you will not answer to another man. He is not going to put any weight or merit on how you lived your life in comparison to others. Make your standard of comparison Christ Himself. Measure against that standard, not other “Christians” or other men.

1. Fix your eyes on God, not on others or self (Heb. 12:2)
2. Recognize God's grace and intentionally move away from an 'entitlement' mentality (Matt. 20:1-16)
3. Be grateful for what you have and what God has given you (I Thess. 5:18)
4. Rejoice when God blesses others (Rom. 12:15)
5. See other people's needs and serve them (bless them) (Phil. 2:3-4)
6. Don't worship yourself, which comes from pride (II Cor. 10:12-18)
7. Find your identity in Christ, not in what you do, not in who you are, not in the comparison of yourself to others (Phil. 2:5-9)

We must acknowledge that all of us compare ourselves to others at times. When that occurs, we should intentionally and willfully change our focus of thought – with the LORD's help. Take the matter to the LORD in prayer. Be aware of God's standard – and your accountability to Him and His standard. Compare your life to the “true standard” of behavior, our Savior Jesus Christ. Focus on your walk with the Lord, according to the Word of God and the example of Christ. Scripture indicates that we should take care when we examine the imperfections of others (Matthew 5:1 – 7:27). We need to have Godly wisdom when we examine the imperfections and shortcomings of other believers. We are all imperfect and will

be until we see Christ. Remember, other believers do not have to answer to us, nor do we have to answer to them, but we must all answer to Christ for the life we have lived.

Remember this: Pride creates a critical judgmental attitude. A critical judgmental attitude creates bitterness. Bitterness creates hypocrisy. Pride and its fruit create a life that lives in the “comparative,” full of resentment, criticism, discouragement and unhappiness. Pride leads to eternal death (Rom. 6:23).

In contrast: Humility creates right judgment. Right judgment creates forgiveness. Forgiveness creates reconciliation and unity. Humility and its fruit create a life that lives in “abundance” and peace (John 10:10). Humility leads to eternal life (Matt. 18:3-4).

Practice gratitude. Appreciate others. Do not envy. Count your blessings. Be grateful for what you have and who you are. Use your strengths to serve others. Learn to love others as Christ loved us. Do not live in the “comparative.”